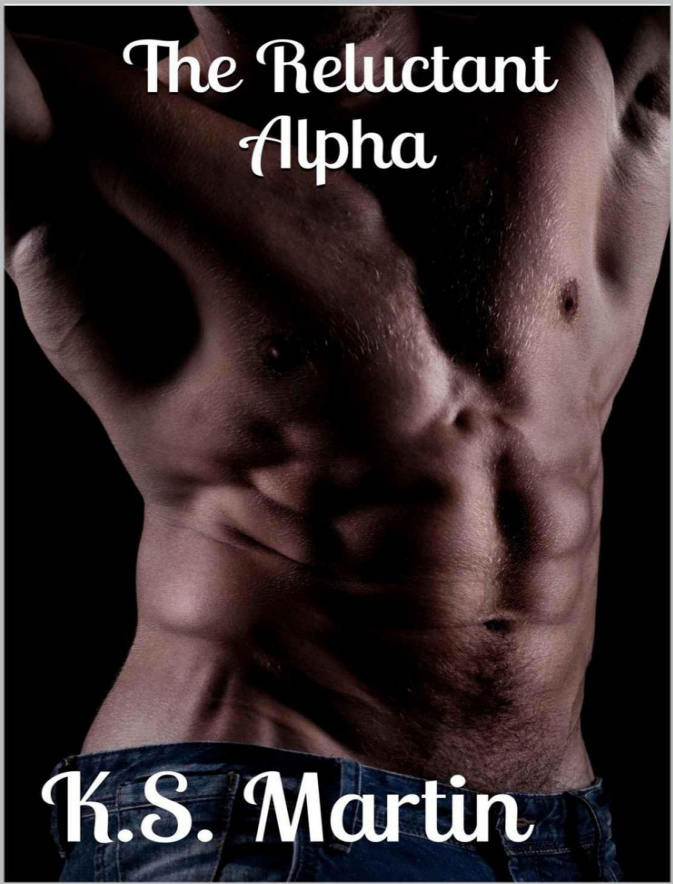




The Reluctant Alpha

K.S. Martin

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By

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Chapter 1

“God all mighty my ass hurts.”

Dylan muttered to the empty cab of his old truck. He shifted in the worn out seat for the hundredth time today. Only thirty miles to go and he would finally be home. He'd just finished a four month hunting trip that turned up nothing. Again. Six more states now stricken from the list of possible places

Henry Junior, the alpha's son, could be hiding. Damned pup. He picked one hell of a time to get over sensitive about something Henry said in the heat of an argument. Sure, Henry was a gruff son of a bitch, but what alpha wasn't? Dylan was one of the current pack betas and Henry was dying. Dylan wanted to find Henry junior to take over as pack alpha. It was the kid's right and his responsibility. The kid was alpha and

next in line. Dylan sure as hell didn't want that much responsibility. An ice cold beer at Frankie's bar was first on the agenda. A willing female would follow a very large rare steak if he was lucky. Then a hot shower and his new king sized bed were in order. "Yeah, that's the plan." He tugged at the back of his shirt. It was sticking to him due to vinyl seats and no air conditioning. This

old truck needed work and he didn't have the time to do it. Maybe Turner would cut him some slack and fix the damn thing. Sure, he could do it himself but he was no mechanic and it would take forever then it would probably blow up. He and Turner did not get along, not since elementary school, but he owned the only garage around. Ten miles to go. He pressed the gas pedal to the floor. He could not get there fast

enough. Dylan stretched in the seat trying to ease the sore muscles in his legs. Scratching at his beard and running his hand through his black shaggy hair under the baseball cap he scratched his head. Maybe he would shower first. He was itchy all over, nope, beer would cure that. He grinned. Enough beers would cure damn near anything that ailed him, maybe a depth charge too. A nice

shot of Jack would certainly do him well right now. Getting shitfaced would do him equally as well. God this trip had been disappointing. He'd hoped so much to find that kid before Henry passed, he was so sick. Four months on duty twenty four seven sucked, especially when it got you no damn where. Finally. His tires crunched through the grey stone parking lot. It was music to his ears. Frankie's Bar, an

angelic choir filled Dylan's head as he stopped the truck and eased out of the driver's seat then stretched popping his joints. He felt better already pushing through the heavy wooden door scarred with graffiti. It added character in his mind. If they ever closed this place, he was taking the door. He ran his finger over the heart that a drunken female scratched in it when he'd taken her home

for a very enjoyable weekend on his twenty-first birthday. The smells hit him hard, steak grilling, beer, sweat, smoke, and wolves. Home. The noise level was high enough with conversations and the TV's mounted over the bar in the corner, that Dylan could let his mind go numb. Henry was propped in the far corner booth. May as well get it over with first thing, he looked his alpha in the eye and shook his head. Henry

nodded then got up and shuffled through the back door. Henry looked older and gaunter every time he saw him lately.

The cancer was extremely aggressive and the doctors could not determine why Henry was still breathing. His skin was so pale and seemed paper thin. He wasn't the huge tough alpha that raised Dylan, not anymore. Now, he was a shadow of his former self. If they

weren't careful, another wolf may try to challenge Henry. Over Dylan's dead body! Nobody screwed with his pack because he would tear them to pieces. They'd given Henry six months two years ago. Determination was a curious thing. Henry was determined to say he was sorry and goodbye to his son. He'd found out about the cancer a week after Henry junior ran off. No one had seen him since and no one had a clue where

he went. The whole thing sucked.

Dylan had been broadening his search and lengthening the time he spent looking for him ever since. Junior was afraid of planes so they were sure that he didn't fly to Hawaii or somewhere and he didn't hold a U.S. passport either so he was contained to North America. Dylan hoped against hope the damn kid hadn't ventured into Canada.

“Steak, baked potato, draft beer?” Frankie was at his table now, Dylan nodded.

“Make the first one a depth charge with Jack.” Frankie nodded.

“Didn’t find him huh?” Dylan shook his head. Frankie nodded and went back behind the bar. Frankie owned and ran this bar, he was in Dylan’s graduating class, and the two

used to be close. Frankie's bar was full of werewolves, but Frankie was human and stayed on the defensive since he'd found out about them because the idea of them freaked him out. Dylan nodded when different wolves around the room acknowledged him with a nod or a wave. Eventually they all would. It was the way of the pack and most of them were trying to gain the favor of the probable next alpha. They it know it but

Dylan would not slide easily into that role. He would fight it kicking and screaming. He and the other two betas wanted nothing to do with that much responsibility. They were all young men and there were still plenty of females around that had not had the pleasure of Dylan's company. Propped in his favorite corner booth Dylan quickly finished three beers before his food

came. It was perfect as usual. The steak melted in his mouth. He'd eaten out of vending machines more often than not this trip and he was sick of chips and sugar. His nose twitched just as he was about to shove more of the delectable meat in his mouth. Dylan lifted his head and saw her.

“What do we have here?” He said to no one in particular. She was petite

for a wolf, she-wolves usually stood at an average of just under six feet, generally that is. This one was no more than five feet seven and had lovely long bare legs that would wrap around his middle perfectly tonight. Sure, there were other females in this bar but not one of them interested his southern friend that just now twitched and stretched up to peek at this interesting morsel. She had a nice shape, curvy

with a lovely heart shaped ass. Long
sable hair was up in a high pony tail that
hung halfway to that lovely ass. Finally
a clear view of the front of her, beautiful
full breasts that beckoned his now
tingling fingers and that face! She had
the face of an angel. Exquisitely clear
smooth skin, big mossy green eyes, and
rosy lush lips. Her nipples would be
that color when he teased them with his

tongue later. He shifted in his seat and put his fork down to watch her. She was beautiful and if he wasn't mistaken, which he wasn't, she was his mate.

“What is your name mate?” He said more to himself because no one was listening. His beer was half full but when she slipped behind the bar, he figured that she was the new waitress that Frankie was advertising for when he'd left four months ago. Dylan

motioned to Frankie for another beer and a shot. Frankie nodded and said something to the girl who looked at him and nodded. She hurried around behind the bar and got his drinks, god the way that pony tail bounced made his hands itch to grab it. She brought the drinks to him on a round plastic tray. “You’re the hottest bitch in this bar.” Dylan said with a broad panty dropping smile. She

would definitely be his later tonight.

“Excuse me? What did you just say to me? You did not just call me a B!” She shouted and spun on one heel marching back to the bar where she gestured at Dylan and talked animatedly to Frankie. God she was gorgeous all hot and bothered like that, he couldn’t wait for angry sex with her. Or make up sex. Or casual sex. And he could not to

leave out his favorite, outdoor sex.

“Shit.” He muttered when Frankie started his way. That was a compliment, didn’t she know one when she heard it? He stabbed his fork into a bite of steak that was now getting cold. “Sorry Frankie. I didn’t mean to hurt her feelings it was a compliment even though she didn’t think so.” Frankie nodded. “It won’t happen again. Ask

her to come back and I'll apologize.

And I promise that I will behave from now on.” Dylan put his silverware down, he'd barely touched the potato, but he guzzled the beer with the shot in the bottom of the glass before she got there.

“You have something that you want to say to me?” She drawled. Was that Georgia he heard? Maybe it was

Virginia. “Hey, you? I think you’ve had enough of those too.” She snapped her fingers in front of his face. He grabbed her hand and she tensed. He dropped it immediately because he did not want Frankie to kick him out of here before he had the chance to take her home. His aim was not to scare her either, just to get her alone, to claim her.

“I wanted to apologize for earlier.

I am very sorry if I insulted you, I didn't mean to, I meant it as a compliment.

Please forgive me?" Her face softened a little but her pulse still pounded at the base of her throat, he wanted to lick her there. He shifted again trying for a charming façade.

"Okay, but don't call me that again. It's not cute and it's not acceptable." He studied her deep green

eyes and knew he would be able to stare into them for hours.

“I’d really like to take you out sometime and make it up to you.” She chuckled at that, at him. *What was funny?*

“Boy! Are you barking up the wrong tree!” Something caught her attention and he turned to see what. Her head spun around watching Chris,

another wolf, cross the bar. Chris was a nice kid, but he was just a pup and she needed a wolf, one that could protect her and satisfy her. “Do you need another beer?” She murmured absently as she watched Chris.

“I want to know why I am barking up the wrong tree.” Dylan asked.

“You just are. Let me know if you need anything,” She drifted away toward

Chris.

“Hey Cami, how’re you doing?”

The stupid pup finally asked when he noticed her. Jackass! A fine woman like ‘Cami’ is way more important than your useless little friends there. “Cami” he rolled it over his tongue liking the way it tasted. Chris was just out of high school, maybe a year out. He had no pack position, no education, and no job.

He was not a catch. Dylan on the other had been educated, a beta soon to be alpha if he didn't find that damned elusive pup, and he could protect her. He could satisfy her, take care of her, and make her quite comfortable.

Besides that, she was his damned mate not Chris' mate. She was laughing at something he said and he was ignoring her. Stupid pup. What did she see in him? He downed his beer.

“Cami.” Dylan barked startling her. “Beer.” She nodded and hurried across the dining room to the bar. He had to keep her away from that pup.

“Chris.” He barked again. Chris hurried over. “Go check on Henry, he didn’t look good when he left. Make sure that he made it home okay then stay at the house tonight. Get him anything he needs.”

“Yes sir.” Chris hurried out of the front door to do Dylan’s bidding. Cami searched the bar, she hadn’t seen him leave. Good. She’d think he stiffed her on the tab. She brought his beer still looking for the pup.

“Are you driving tonight, you’ve had a lot to drink, I’m going to have to ask for your keys if I bring you any more of these.” He dug in his pocket and gave

her the truck keys. There was another set in his wallet and a hide a key in the wheel well, but if it made her feel better, what was the harm?

“Okay, you can drive me home.”

He slurred for her. She chuckled hollowly.

“Uh, no. I don’t drive strange men home and you are definitely strange. You can call a cab. So. Another beer?”

He smiled wolfishly at her. “Coming right up.” He downed the one she’d just brought, they went too fast. Frankie needed to invest in bigger mugs.

Alcohol had very little effect on a werewolf. His natural healing abilities were sometimes a pain in the ass, especially if he wanted to get a buzz.

Right now, drinking them as fast as he could, he was feeling pleasantly relaxed.

Cami moved across the bar, grace in

motion. The long ponytail swayed calling to him, it fell into one big curl at the end that swirled around. He was going to wrap that silken length around his arm and pull her head back then bury his tongue in her mouth. Yep, that's what he would do as soon as he could convince her to take him home and spend the night. She was bringing the beer now, time to turn on the charm.

“So tell me what Cami is short for, Cameron?” She set his beer down.

“Anything else?” She ignored his question.

“Yeah, I asked you a question. What is Cami short for?” He lowered his voice to the commanding tone that any wolf would submit to. Damn she could rile him, really can’t wait for the angry sex. He thought.

“You asked Chris to leave didn’t you?” She was furious. Her eyes were full of fire and her chest was heaving.

Beautiful. “I heard his friends say that Dylan sent him on an errand and Frankie says that you’re Dylan. So why did you send him away? Do you think if he’s not here that I am going to forget him and give you my attention?” Her eyebrows shot up in challenge. “Well, I won’t.”

“Go out with me. Let me feed you.” Another ineffective panty dropping smile. She huffed and ground her teeth.

“I told you before, you’re barking up the wrong tree, in other words, no. No, I don’t want to go out with you. No, I don’t want to drive you home, no I don’t want to have sex with you and no, I don’t want you to feed me.” That pulse at the base of her neck was distracting

but not nearly, as much as the heaving breasts or turgid nipples that called to him. “Up here asshole.” She snapped her fingers in front of his nose again and gestured to her eyes. He couldn’t help it they were pointing at him and his mouth was watering to latch on. How could she say those things? Her body couldn’t lie, it wanted him as much as his stone staff was aching for her.

“Oh you can call me asshole but you’re offended at the word ‘bitch’?”

He shook his head. “Never mind. Call me whatever you like, just tell me why I am barking up the wrong tree.” He scratched his hairy chin. He needed a bath and a shave.

“That.” She pointed to his face.

“Have you looked in a mirror? Ever? I would never date anyone who looks like

it's the first time he came down from the cave on the mountain. You're a mess. I like men that are groomed, dressed neat, clean cut, shaved, and bathed." She spat the last word.

"So, if I had short hair and a clean shaven face like Chris, you would let me take you out?" She huffed again.

"No. Maybe. You'd have a better chance, that's for sure. Bar closes in ten

minutes, do you want another one?”

Nearly everyone was gone or leaving now. No one gave Frankie any trouble because this was the only bar in town and because they knew that Henry or himself would not tolerate it.

“Nope. I’ve had enough. Are you sure, you don’t want to take me home? I’d be really appreciative.” His voice was low and sexy now but still held the

tone that should have her complete attention. It should have her ready to turn her ass up to him and submit. She should be dropping her eyes, licking her lips and purring for him to give her release but nope. She just stared at him with that damned annoyed looking eyebrow raised up over her left eye. What the hell was wrong with her? Was he losing his touch? He had been on the road a long time but his smile and tone

worked on the she wolf he'd had a week ago. That had been wild, she'd nearly come just from his voice in her ear. He eased out of the booth and pulled his favorite ball cap low over his eyes.

Dylan was a large wolf and towered over her. He stretched, his arms out wide after straightening the cap and let her feel how big and dominant he truly was. She inhaled sharply as her eyes

dilated, her pulse frantic again, shaking her head and skittered away. Dylan left a hundred on the table and walked out with her eyes burning holes in his back. She'd finally noticed him. Hell, he should've stood up hours ago.

Dumbass. He scolded himself. She puts up a good front but she wants to be submissive even if she doesn't know it yet. Let's see the pup pull that off, he was afraid of his own shadow. Dylan

went to the truck and grabbed the key from the box mounted in the wheel well then got in and started it. Cami saw the headlights through the window and hurried over to it to look outside. He saw her mouth gape open and laughed loudly in the cab of the truck. Silly girl. Dylan gunned the truck backwards spinning the wheels and throwing gravel across the parking lot. She opened the

door and looked out just as he tore out
onto Main Street and headed home.

Chapter 2

Dylan showered, shaved, and clipped his hair when he got home. If this was what it took to get her to go out with him, then hell, he'd cut it off. He would shave his legs if she asked. That girl was some kind of sweet and he'd sported long hair and a beard since high school but if this was what it took, not a problem. It had been longer and more

scraggily than usual but hell, he'd been gone for four months. He wanted her, and he would do whatever it took to get her. Cami was his mate and he intended to carry that through as soon as he could. It was good to feel clean and normal again anyway. He stretched lazily in the king sized bed that dominated his bedroom once he'd showered. He sprawled across it having spent too many nights in cheap hotels

and sleeping on the vinyl bench seat in the truck when there wasn't anywhere else to crash. He slept like the dead.

Waking with the mid morning sun peeking through the spaces between the blinds, Dylan stretched and roared mightily. This bed felt like a little piece of heaven, the only thing that would make it better would be a certain female curled up against him. He needed to run

and relax, clear his head of all the B.S. that went with life. Then he was heading to town to find his mate. He was not going to put up with this non submission crap long, she would not ignore him and chase some pup around town like a bitch in heat, she belonged to him. Dylan swallowed some coffee and a granola bar. He needed a break, some relaxation, he was exhausted, and the old beater needed fixed, so a few days

hanging around here was in order. Once the back door was open, he shifted into his wolf form and bolted out across the field. It felt amazing to stretch it to the limits when he could, where he was safe to run. He owned the fifty acres surrounding the house. Dylan did his best thinking out here while he sprinted and loped, sniffed and scented. He was going to need groceries, his stomach

growled reminding him. He needed to get in touch with the other two betas.

They should be done with the Carolinas and Georgia, so Florida and Alabama would be next for them. Dylan would take Texas again, it was as big as two states, and Junior could have doubled back on them. First things first though, Junior. Junior was getting the shit knocked out of him as soon as Dylan found him. Not really, but he enjoyed

the daydream. Dylan respected Henry too much to give the kid what he deserved. Next was Cami. How to get past that icy exterior and into her heart? He'd cleaned up so that improved his chances according to her. That girl was really something. Beautiful, smart, quick, and hot tempered. Dylan loved a fiery woman. He trotted up the side of the road heading for home calculating it

to be about two miles and suddenly took off at a sprint. He'd been loping and thinking for awhile now. Usually he would visit the pond but not today. One day he may take her there. They would have sex outdoors, skinny dip, and picnic then have more sex, maybe on the shore, maybe in the water. Oh hell yes. Turner needed convincing and he needed to find Cami. Frankie's would open in an hour or so for lunch, he would check

there first. Maybe she had the lunch shift.

“Hey Frankie. I left a set of keys with your waitress last night. Are they here?” Frankie reached under the bar and pulled out a bowl full of keys, funny there were no vehicles in the parking lot. Dylan grabbed his set. “Where is she anyway? Is she here?” He looked

around Frankie's wide frame and slick black hair into the kitchen where Hector stood reading a magazine and waiting to work.

“Stay away from her Dylan.”

Frankie was a man of few words so that was unexpected. “She's a good girl.”

“I like good girls.” Dylan grinned like a predator.

“I mean it, stay away.” Frankie

leaned forward on his hands making his impressive human biceps bulge. Frankie had been working out. Dylan wondered if Cami was the cause of that, Frankie had never worked out before. It was another reminder for Dylan that he needed to get back into shape. He'd been riding around in the truck for too long.

“You’re not her father Frankie. I

just want to talk to her about something.” Frankie rolled his eyes, really. Frankie was turning into a teenage girl.

“She could be at the library, or Betty’s, or Turner’s garage. I don’t keep up with her work schedule. She’ll be back here tonight, you should wait till then. Her shift starts at seven.” Dylan nodded and turned to leave. “I mean it

Dylan. Don't corrupt her with your bullshit. She is a good girl, not one of your whores, leave her be."

"What can you do to stop me Frankie?" Dylan growled threateningly

"Not a thing but appeal to your intelligence and hopefully some deeply buried sense of morality." Frankie picked up a rag and started wiping the bar.

“She’s my mate Frankie.” Frankie dragged in a long deep breath. “Yeah, and I mean to have her sooner rather than later.”

“She doesn’t know.” Dylan cocked an eyebrow at Frankie’s admission. “She has no clue that she’s wolf or she’s one hell of an actress.”

“How could she not know? The first time she shifted when she went into

puberty it should've been damned obvious." Frankie shook his head.

"I'm telling you she doesn't know. She's oblivious, no idea about werewolves, or shifters and no idea that she's one of you."

"Not possible."

"Henry has been studying her. He thinks that she's some kind of purebred or royal or some shit he called it. Go

see him before you see her. Please?”

Dylan nodded. He wasn't always a hard ass, just most of the time.

“Henry!” Dylan called mounting the steps to the alpha's house. He found him inside propped up watching TV.

“Hey old man.” Dylan said gently.

“How do you feel?” Henry shrugged in his stained white tee shirt and red

flannel robe.

“Worn out, old and useless. You didn’t find him. You’re going to have to take over Dylan, I can’t defend this pack anymore, and I can’t think straight either, the cancer is eating my brain. Give up the search and take the position. I won’t be here in a few days and you won’t have a choice. Avoid the challenges and accept before Peter and Michael return

from their searches.”

“Damn it Henry. I don’t want this, it’s Junior’s job not mine. Give me a couple more weeks, I’ll find him. Besides maybe Pete or Mike are better choices anyway.” Henry was shaking his head. Dylan sighed. “Shit. You really can’t hold on?” Henry’s eyes misted and Dylan was finding it hard to look at his sunken eyes and sharp

cheekbones. “Okay friend, I’ll take care of it. If I find him once I’m alpha can I hand it over and go back to being beta?”

“No, I can’t hold on and you’re it, they won’t do it as well as you will.

Besides you won’t take orders from either of them anyway.” Henry

chuckled. “And once you’re the alpha that’s it. The only way to get out of it is to lose a challenge and you know the

consequences of that.” He knew.

Death. Shit. Fucking Junior. That damn kid had always been a major pain in his ass. Dylan nodded.

“Tell me about the waitress Cami. Frankie says you think she’s purebred or something?”

“Something is up with her. She doesn’t respond to anything I do, not a whimper, a snarl, or a growl but she’s

wolf. All that I can come up with is that she's either a freak of nature or some damned thing. Maybe her wolf has recessed since she's only lived with humans, I thought that at first, but it never surfaced. If that was the case it would've by now." Henry gasped and started coughing. His face went bright red and his eyes filled with tears. There was blood in the tissue waded up in his fist. Dylan hurried to bring him water

and he sipped. The coughing fit subsided finally and Henry almost drifted off.

“So, what does it mean? That she’s royal or purebred?” Dylan shifted on the end of the ratty brown couch.

“I’m not sure but I can smell wolf on her. I’ve been researching it and there are stories in the legend books about a race of purebreds, they can do

all sorts of things, magical things. Some can levitate, some can influence pack decisions with a glance and some don't shift but can force others to shift against their will. They don't shift unless they want to because they don't feel any compulsion. If that's so then it's possible that she is one of them and just never changed. I thought all that was legend or at the very least that maybe it was true once and they were all gone by

now. It's a damned puzzle is what it is and another time I would've studied her relentlessly, now I'm just hanging out till I die." Dylan closed his eyes and swallowed hard. Henry had given up, he was done fighting.

"But wouldn't her pack or her parents at the least, tell her?" He was rubbing his temples.

"From what I've gathered, she

grew up in foster care, shuffled from human house to human house, so no parents, and no direction.” Dylan nodded. This could get difficult.

“She’s my mate Henry, my destiny. I knew it the minute I scented her and she hates my guts.” Henry started laughing, a deep and joyous sound that filled the house with spirit.

Dylan grinned at his friend and mentor,

glad that he could still make him laugh.

“Now that’s irony. You, ‘mister I’ll tap anything that twitches its tail’ and she hates you, the one that you’re finally meant to be with? Funny.” Henry sobered. “Congratulations Dylan. Here’s the advice that I would give you when the time came. Make her a priority. Her needs, her wants, her desires and her safety, make them all

your highest priority. An alpha is always stronger when he's grounded and settled. Make her your queen because I have a feeling that she may be one. I haven't known of one in my life time but that doesn't make it impossible." Dylan nodded at his alpha accepting the advice. "Go find her and convince her that you aren't an ass son, settle down, make pups, lots of them so you never have the problem that I have right now."

Dylan grimaced.

“Thanks Henry.” Dylan left him as he drifted off to sleep.

“Turner, I finished the bike, what else do you have?” Cami asked her boss. He sucked his teeth. He liked to keep her in suspense since she hated it. Turner liked to play with her, she was

fun to annoy and he had to tease someone, his wife wouldn't put up with it. "Come on, just tell me."

"Nope, got nothing. We may both starve this month. Hey, maybe we can sneak out at night and break people's cars, pull their spark plugs then we would have stuff to do. What do you think?" She was shaking her head.

"Your wife would be plenty

pissed if you were running around with me all night and Frankie would kick my ass for ditching my shifts.

“Yeah you’re right.” He leaned his skinny frame back in the beat up office chair and propped his booted feet on the counter then pulled the Redman ball hat low on his brow preparing for his nap. He scratched his fiery red beard and Cami went to clean her tools

while he slept. She heard the bell tinkle over the door in the store as she picked up the first wrench.

“Turner.” Turner pushed the bill of his hat up with his middle finger and looked up at Dylan but didn’t move otherwise. Turner nodded.

“I need my truck fixed. What do you say? Oil change, lube, rotate the tires, alignment, air conditioner, and

whatever else is wrong under the hood.” Dylan leaned a hip on the counter. “Your garage is empty. I know that you need the work.” Turner wasn’t pack but his wife was and he’d had to get Henry’s permission to marry her. Why any wolf would want to marry a human male was beyond him. There was no way that this skinny little man could dominate her the way she needed, maybe she dominated him, and that was

her turn on. Dylan shook the thought from his head, the idea of Turner and Beatrix having sex would probably give him nightmares.

“I don’t need...anything. The garage may be empty but I’m still selling plenty of gas, lottery tickets, and cigarettes.” Dylan’s hackles rose. “My assistant though does need the work so yeah give me the keys and we’ll work on

it.” Dylan let out a sigh of relief. The truck deserved a mechanic that knew how to treat it.

“Thanks Turner.” He handed him the keys. “Who is your assistant?”

“Don’t matter who she is, she’s a fine mechanic.” Turner tossed the keys up and caught them with a grin guessing that the idea of a girl mechanic would screw with Dylan’s head.

“Cami?” Turner nodded and got up from his chair coming around the counter.

“Yep.” Turner pushed through the glass door and hopped into Dylan’s truck then pulled it around to the back of the station and into the bay.

“Cami, I need you to change the oil, rotate the tires, give her a lube job and alignment. Fix the air conditioner

and if you find anything else wrong with it, fix it, and put it on the ticket. Okay?”

Turner hopped out and went back outside through the open bay door.

“Sure thing Turner.” Cami threw the wrench down that she was cleaning and grabbed a smaller one. She popped the hood and climbed up on the tire to look inside.

Dylan nearly fainted when he

walked out into the hot shop. She was under the hood with her perfect ass perched just right for him to bury his face between her thighs and get lost in her. She was turning the wrench then hopping off of the bumper not noticing him at all. She put the mechanics creeper down on the floor and slid underneath of his truck. Sliding an oil catch pan across the floor, she dropped the oil filter in it and slid out. Her hair

was knotted at the base of her neck and her face was smudged with black grease. She was beautiful. He loved watching her work because she was efficient and quick at what she was doing. She lubed the engine now then checked the oil pan and slid back underneath of the truck. He hung back in the doorway watching. Cami climbed back up onto the passenger fender again

and he couldn't resist. Her denim covered heart shaped rear end called to him and he went. His fingers brushed over her hip about to caress the rounded buttock when her small booted footed jack knifed back and hit him hard and square in the chest. The breath whooshed out of him and he stumbled backward. He bent at the waist planting his hands on his knees until he caught his breath. She kicked like a mule,

definitely wolf, and a damned strong one. How could a little thing like that knock the air out of him? He was a large and strong male. There may be a boot shaped bruise in the middle of his chest later and for some reason it made him grin. A love tap.

“Just what do you think you’re doing?” She was in front of him now with a very large crescent wrench in her

hand. The damned thing was as long as her forearm and it was going to hurt when she hit him with it. “And just who in the hell are you?”

“Dylan. I’m Dylan.” His chest was beginning function normally again now. He stood up and looked down at her. She inhaled sharply. He gave her his best predatory smile. “Remember me from last night? At the bar?”

“You shaved.” She worried her bottom lip with straight white teeth.

“Yeah, I bathed and cut my hair too as requested ma’am.” He saluted her. “Now will you let me take you out?” He advanced on her trying for the domination thing again that she reacted to last night, but she wasn’t having it today.

“Get out of my garage, you aren’t

supposed to be in here and don't touch me again. Next time I'll leave a mark.” She shook the wrench at him and turned on her heel to begin the process of aligning the truck's wheels.

“Hey Dylan, you shouldn't be in here man, you'll screw up my insurance. Get out. I'll call you when it's done.” Dylan followed him back into the store.

“I'll be at Betty's.” Dylan pushed

through the glass door of the shop and headed across the hot asphalt to Betty's diner.

“Well Dylan, how was the trip? Did you find him?” Betty asked as he pushed through the door. She filled a cup with coffee and brought it to him. Her wrinkled vein covered hands were as steady as ever and her brown eyes

still sharp and clear. “What are you hungry for today?” Betty talked fast for an older lady and popped her gum like a champion. He supposed that she had to talk so fast because she only had a few seconds before she would move onto the next customer. The diner was usually busy.

“The trip was unsuccessful so how about a ‘Big and Sloppy.’ It’s been a

long time since I had a decent meal.”

She winked at him and started on her special super thick chocolate milkshake.

Betty bent and picked at something on her pink nylon waitress's dress. She'd been wearing the horrid things with black loafers and beige support hose since he could remember. Once he'd seen her on her day off wearing jeans and hadn't recognized her.

“One ‘Big and Sloppy,’ Earl.”

Betty called through the window.

“Medium rare.” Earl popped his head through the window. Earl looked like the cartoon Mr. Clean on TV, had a deep clear voice and white bushy eyebrows.

You could see the white stubble of a full head of hair but he’d always shaved it clean. Dylan wasn’t sure if that was because of hygiene in the kitchen or

because it was hot in there.

“Did you find him?” Earl waved his greasy spatula at Dylan who shook his head. Earl grimaced then disappeared back into the kitchen and started Dylan’s cheeseburger. Betty moved onto other customers after pouring the milkshake and setting it down in front of him. Nobody made a chocolate shake like Betty. He’d been

all over the country so he had expert knowledge of the milkshake making population and Betty was the best hands down. He stared out the window at Turner's garage hoping but not expecting to see her since she was busy with his truck. Betty placed the cheeseburger in front of him. "Enjoy." The Big and Sloppy was his creation. It had cheese of course, three kinds that oozed out of the bun, jalapenos, A.1. Steak sauce,

fried onions, peppers and mushrooms, lettuce, tomato, mustard, mayo, ketchup, dill pickle and was on a toasted onion roll. It must be medium rare as far as he was concerned because medium rare was the only way to eat beef. It was served with Earl's famous fries with vinegar never ketchup and a large chocolate shake. It was a big sloppy mess Betty told him the first time he

ordered it and it became the most popular burger on the menu within a few months. The door opened and shut behind him, he scented her.

“Is my truck done?” He asked taking a huge bite of his burger and not looking up.

“Nope, it’s lunch time. Turner said that I needed to eat and you needed to wait. He said to tell you that if you

didn't like it you could take it anywhere else that you wanted." She snickered.

"And I agree with him."

"Hey there Cami, the usual?"

Betty came over right away

"Please." Cami looked over at him from her stool two spots away.

"What did you do to piss Turner off anyway? He doesn't ever get mad but you've got him pretty ticked if he's

making you wait. Betty was making another milkshake and a giggle escaped her, Dylan's eyebrow quirked. Was this tiny she-wolf going to eat a big and sloppy? My heart be still, he thought and what was Betty laughing about. The old fool may have finally lost it and that fresh permanent that she had tinted nearly purple did not help her sanity case any.

“A ‘Big and Sloppy,’ Earl. Betty called through the window again.

“Medium.” The milkshake machine stopped whirring and Betty poured it then put it in on the counter in front of Cami.

“Medium? How can you eat it medium? Medium is ruined. You have to eat it medium rare. Have you ever tried it that way?” Cami looked

confused. “Your big and sloppy, tell her you want it medium rare.”

“No. I want it medium.” She turned away from him giving him her profile.

“Just try it.” He coaxed softly.

“No.” She sipped her milkshake and closed her eyes then moaned.

Instant hard on. Dylan shifted uncomfortably which made Betty laugh

loudly. *Old fool.*

“Come on, for me?” He moved to a stool closer using his ineffective alpha voice on her. Maybe it would work better if he was the actual alpha and not just a beta.

“Especially not for you.” She opened her mossy green eyes and studied him. He is gorgeous but way too arrogant she thought. Too bad, he did

shave for me though.

‘If you hate it, I’ll buy it.’ He gave her his best panty dropping smile, which should be a lot more effective without all of the facial hair hiding it.

“I don’t need you to buy it. Some jackass left me a forty-six dollar tip last night. I’m loaded.” He grinned at that.

“Thanks by the way. I’m hoping for an equally big tip when I finish the truck in

my bay.” She smiled at him and he sighed. Actually sighed, god she was lovely and had beautiful canines. He wouldn’t last as long as a virgin pup the first time she was under him. She snapped her fingers in his face. Again. She was going to think he was mentally challenged the way he drifted away whenever she was around.

“Sweetheart I’ll give you anything

you want if you'll let me take you out later.” His voice dropped, low and seductive like warm caramel it soothed over her nerves and her breath grew shallow while the pulse in her throat was light and frantically pulsing. There it was, that was the voice he needed to use on her, she would be his. “You need money? I’m your man. You need a place to stay? I’ll take care of it. You need satisfaction? Anytime, any...

where.” She trembled. He had her. The burger came and snapped her out of the trance he’d had her in.

“No.” Cami picked up her plate and milkshake. “Betty, I’ll bring the dishes back later, it’s too crowded in here for me.” Betty’s eyes widened but she nodded.

“Don’t ever interrupt us again.”

Dylan said quietly when Cami was

gone.

“Yes sir.” Betty hurried away.

Dylan slid back over onto his stool and finished his cooling burger. That she-wolf had ruined two perfectly good meals for him.

Cami sat down on one end of the mechanic's creeper and put her food down on the board in front of her. “How

do you eat all of that and not gain weight?” Turner asked from the doorway. “All my wife eats is lettuce and lemon juice and she’s as big as a house.” She took a bite of the burger, heaven on a bun.

“Good metabolism.” She said with her mouth full. “And it’s all I’m going to eat until tomorrow. Turner shook his head. He’d had one of those

burgers once because they were all the rage in town. He thought it was gross, but Cami sure did like them. He went back to the counter and pulled his ham and cheese out of the brown paper sack the wife packed for him. There were cucumbers and carrot sticks too with salad dressing. He pitched them in the trash and got a bag of chips from the rack at the end of the counter and a soda from the cooler. He watched Dylan

through the big windows at Betty's diner. He was sitting at the counter watching the station and drinking a milkshake. Maybe he wasn't a bad guy but Turner never wanted that guy near his wife again. Beatrix had a huge crush on Dylan since high school. But hell, what woman around here didn't? Something about Dylan made females want to turn their tails up for him.

“What are you looking at? You’ve been staring out of that window for a long time.” She craned her neck to see.

“Dylan and I are having a staring contest.”

“Urgh, not that guy again. He’s an asshole, don’t pay him any mind.”

Turner sat up in his chair.

“You don’t like him?” She scrunched her face up.

“He won’t leave me alone.” She took another huge bite.

“You don’t like him?” He asked again.

“Uh no. Didn’t I just say that? I thought when I called him an asshole the part about me not liking him was implied. Where did he come from anyway? I’ve been here for like three

months and he just showed up at Frankie's last night now he's in my business every time I turn around."

"He's been hunting for Henry's son. He just got back, he's been gone four or five months now. It's sad really. That was just one of a dozen trips searching for that kid. Poor old Henry is dying and wants is to see his kid once more but nobody can find him. Henry

won't last much longer. The cancer has nearly eaten him alive. You would think that three betas would've found him by now, especially Dylan, he's a natural tracker." Turner shook his head. "I feel bad for them. The wife says the pack is pretty torn up." He suddenly noticed Cami's face. Surprise? Curiosity? Confusion? Shit. Was he wrong? Was she not wolf? His wife was wolf and he was sure that Cami was. She had every

sign that he could think of. He'd seen her scent the air like his wife, she had super long canines, too long for a human, and she could hear a gnat cough at fifty yards. She had to be wolf, didn't she? Somehow though, he got the distinct impression he'd just screwed the pooch, royally. Shit. Shit. Shit. What should he do? *Play dumb.*

“Why did you call Dylan? A

beta? What does that mean? And what is the pack?”

“Oh shoot girl, I’m sorry. Beta is slang for a really bad word that your pretty ears don’t need to hear and the pack is the bunch of idiots that he hangs around with, they’re just rednecks is all.”

“You’re lying.” Her left eyebrow crept up her forehead. “I can tell

Turner, your eye always twitches when you lie and it's twitching like crazy right now.”

“It is not. Get back to work, he'll be back soon.” Turner looked away trying to hide the telling twitch.

“You said he could wait.” She planted her fists on her hips.

“Yeah for awhile, but not all day, finish the truck.” She made a face and

went back out into the bay. There was nothing worse and nothing that she hated more than a liar. She climbed into the cab to start it and was struck by the scents in the cab. Her lungs and senses filled with *him*. She breathed deep and her eyes drifted closed as she inhaled. It was the sexiest and most arousing smell. Her core clenched and wept for him. She turned her head and rested her

cheek on the head rest where his scent was the strongest. Her heart pounded with desire. Oh God not that. Not for him, not for the asshole. She curled against the seat with her face turned into the backrest. Her tongue wet her lips. She wanted him. So much. Cami had to snap herself out of it. This could be embarrassing if anyone saw her like this. Why did this happen? Her reaction to men was sometimes not...normal.

Her friends had never reacted this way. Oh sure they would gush and say a guy was sooo cute but it never seemed like their entire bodies reacted like Cami's did. Every cell in her body was...alive, hungry, and wanting, or at least it seemed that way. It only happened once in her life time before and it ended badly. This was so much more intense, this was like before amplified ten times

over, it was mind shattering. She had to control herself, this guy was bad news. He was too well practiced on women for her and too big. When he stood up in the bar last night so closely to her, her insides quaked and trembled. She'd nearly melted at the sight of him, hairy monster or not. Today, when he'd finally stood up after she kicked him, her gut reaction was to wrap her arms around him and nuzzle his chest. That

was not a normal reaction. Normal women did not hug and nuzzle strangers, but Cami always knew that she was not exactly normal. If she had been, there wouldn't have been so many foster homes. She also wouldn't have let Tommy Matthews take her virginity in the Lorraine's basement in eleventh grade. Between her reaction to him and her curiosity about sex, no one could've

stopped her. Mid way through the two minute ordeal, she knew she'd made a horrible mistake. Reluctantly she opened the door and crawled out of the cab of his truck to walk outside for fresh air. She took in deep gulping lung full's of clean air that didn't smell like Dylan. Jeez. If she'd been in there much longer, she would've had an orgasm. That was powerful stuff. What did Turner mean by beta? What was a beta? She'd never

heard that slang before. Later on when she worked the evening shift shelving books at the library, she was going to look that up. Once his truck was finished, she left it in the bay. There was no way she was moving it, she may be overcome in there again and may end up rolling around naked on the bench seat. Somehow, she didn't think he would mind if she did. She giggled and

wiped her hands and face on a rag.

“All done Turner, I’m heading to the library, see you Friday.” He waved as she ducked out of the front door and jogged down the sidewalk.

Dylan was watching from Betty’s as he downed his second milkshake. Why was his mechanic jogging away from the garage where she was supposed to be fixing his truck? He left money on

the counter and crossed the street to Turner's and pushed through the glass door. "Is my truck finished? I just saw Cami leaving."

"Yeah it's done." Turner pecked away on the cash register. "Look Dylan, I may have really screwed up a little while ago. I thought that she was wolf and I told her that you were the beta and I think I mentioned pack." He grimaced

knowing that Dylan could discipline him severely for breaking pack trust. Pack trust was one of the things that he had to agree to when he got married to a wolf, pack safety came first.

“Oh yeah?” Dylan studied his face and thought it through. “It’ll be okay.” Turned exhaled heavily. “She’s wolf, Henry has been trying to research her and even though he hasn’t come up

with anything, we're sure that she's wolf."

"I don't think she shifts, I've never seen her eyes flash, but I've seen her scent the air. She works evenings at Frankie's and Betty's depending on the night but as far as I know, she hasn't missed a night in the three months that she's been in Fern Valley. It's a small town. It would've gotten around if a

new wolf showed up for a run.

“I know. We don’t know why she doesn’t shift or why she doesn’t know. Henry says she was a foster kid but he’s still looking into it. Where does she live?”

“At Frankie’s.” Dylan growled deep in his chest. That would not do. “Not with Frankie, but in the apartment over the bar.” Dylan nodded and looked

down at the total on the cash register.

He handed the money to Turner.

“Give the rest to Cami. She said that she wanted a tip. She’s at the library now?” Turner nodded. “How long will she be there? Until her shift starts at Frankie’s?” Turner shrugged. “Thanks Turner. I’ll grab the truck out of the bay.” Turner sank back down into the chair where he spent most days.

That was a close one, Dylan could've killed him for what he'd done and it would've been justified, but he didn't use the perfectly good excuse to take out an old enemy. Maybe Turner had misjudged him, he certainly felt like he owed him now. Damn it.

He scented her. She was all over the cab of his truck. He blew out a hiss of air. Their scents mixed on the seats

and in the air. *Heaven. His mate.* His chest rumbled and his wolf stirred deep within him. He felt the beast's desires, the urge to mate, and to claim her. The truck started and he headed back to Frankie's bar. He pulled around the back and parked. An old red pickup was parked deep in the bushes by the dumpster like someone tried to throw it away but it wouldn't fit inside the big green container. It had Virginia plates.

It was Cami's truck, he was sure. There were steep narrow steps leading upstairs to a door. Dylan always assumed that Frankie used it for storage. It never occurred to him that there was an apartment up there. Dylan took the steps two at a time and knocked just in case. No answer. He jiggled the doorknob, locked. Dylan tried the window beside it, it lifted easily, and he ducked inside.

The scent of his mate overwhelmed him. He took a deep breath filling his lungs with her then sighed, again. He was turning into such a woman but this was so much better than the truck cab. Dylan flopped down on her bed and sniffed her pillow. Okay, bordering on creepy but he couldn't help it. She was more exciting than any drug could ever be. Not that he did that shit, but if she were a drug, he would be high all of the time.

He grinned and buried his face in it.

“God she smells good.” There were neatly folded clothes in a laundry basket, more thrown in haphazardly in another.

She was organized. There were no personal items, no knickknacks, no papers, and no mementos lying around. She’d come with one suitcase it seemed and that was all that she had to show for herself. There was one lonely dresser

under a window at the other end of the room. It only contained a few pairs of socks and lovely lacy panties when he got up to look around. “Oh there will be dozens of pairs of these for you my love. There is nothing more lovely than a woman in lacy under things.” He held up a very plain cotton bra. “And no more of these ever, it’s going to be all silk and lace for you my sweet.” The room was the shape of the roof over the

rectangular building beneath, long and straight from one end to the other. He wondered if she'd heard a thunderstorm under the red metal roof, he loved that sound and could listen to them for hours. Soon there would be plenty of summer storms to lie awake listening to. He could comfortably walk down the center of the room but that was all, anywhere else he had to duck. A small

kitchenette with a small square table and two chairs were shoved against one wall, the bathroom door across from it. A tiny closet, if you could call it that was beside the bathroom, some jeans, shirts and a couple of old sweatshirts. Dylan was disappointed in the life his mate had and wanted to make it better. He opened her fridge. Orange juice, milk, a box of cereal, some fruit, a loaf of bread, bottle of mustard and a

package of bologna. “That’s sad. This whole apartment is sad.” He thought of his own kitchen, he needed groceries, his fridge was sadder than this one if that was possible. It should be though. He hadn’t been home for four months.

There was nothing here. No clues about her at all. He plucked a tee shirt out of the laundry basket and held it to his nose. It smelled like Frankie’s bar and

Cami. He tossed it back onto the pile and let himself out the way he'd come in. Gathering information about her would have to done the old fashioned way. He would hack into her records as soon as he knew where she came from. Maybe Henry already knew that.

“Henry!” Dylan called coming in the front door. He was eating, that was a

good sign. “Did you find out where she came from?”

“A place called Cedar Side Virginia, near North Carolina, why?”

“Recon.” Henry nodded. He hated computers and never used them but Dylan was very good with them. Henry always appreciated Dylan’s knack for keeping the pack’s coffers full with his day trading. They’d struggled until

Dylan finished college and took over pack finances. He'd received two degrees, computer science, and finance. Henry was very proud of his protégé, and was prouder only of Junior's Master's degree in political science. It would've been helpful leading the pack. Henry shook his head. Dylan told him he would see him later and left. Henry went back to watching Judge Judy, he loved feisty women.

Chapter 3

Dylan unloaded groceries and put them away. Real food and not a bag of chips in sight, he grabbed a beer and headed to his office. This was his favorite room, his den. Eggplant colored walls, thick heavy drapes over the one window to block out the hot setting sun, highly polished furniture, oak floors, and a long desk that dominated

the corner. There were four computers here, all internet connected, all top of the line, all set up to dance through servers all over the world so he didn't get caught. Hacking was illegal. He had a feeling though that infiltrating the child protective services of Cedar Side, Virginia was not only going to be easy but effortless. Dylan started tapping keys once they'd all booted up. He watched the screens. One was watching

the stock market in Japan, one in China, one in New York. The last was searching the Cedar Side Department of Children's services for Cami and was coming up blank. He tried every variation of her name and still nothing. He needed more information on her before he would make any progress. Once he'd bought, traded, and sold stocks for a few hours he shut it all

down. He'd made a nice profit for the day. His bank account was better for his efforts and so was the pack's. Dylan stripped his clothes off and walked through the house naked. He tossed his beer bottle into the trash, his clothes into the laundry basket and padded to the bathroom to clean up. Recon at Frankie's may be more effective than hacking Hicksville USA after all.

Dylan looked good in his pink polo shirt. Women love men in pink, this shirt always got ladies into his bed. His hair now combed neatly, he was fresh shaven, bathed, and wore musky cologne that drove women crazy. He sat in his corner half round booth that gave him a good view of the back door, the bar area and the kitchen. Anywhere she went tonight, she would be in his field of

vision. Recon was information gathering and tonight his target was a very alluring female. Frankie said she started at seven, two minutes to go. She came in the back door and focused on him immediately. He smiled at her, she stomped straight for him, and her eyes flashed. Her wolf? Uh-oh. This wasn't good. She was angry. She climbed into the booth beside him up on her knees looking down at him, furious and trying

to dominate him. Shit, she knew. “Why were you in my apartment? I don’t have anything for you to steal so why were you in there?”

“What makes you think that I would steal from you?”

“You obviously don’t work but you can tip me huge amounts of money, thanks by the way, Turner dropped it by the library. So you must do something

illegal or steal.”

“I don’t steal.” Who the hell was she to accuse him of shit?

“Then you do something illegal. Turner said that you just got back from a four month trip, what were you doing buying drugs or selling them?”

“Drugs? I don’t buy or sell drugs honey. I don’t have to and I wouldn’t anyway. I’m a stand up guy. I told you

that I wanted to take you out but you turn me down every chance you get, I was just looking for a clue as to how to break through that ice queen exterior.” She gasped and her eyes flashed again.

Dylan smirked igniting her anger further.

“I am not an ice queen!” Her chest was heaving and her pulse was dancing wildly. His head cocked and the corner of his mouth lifted. “I am not!” She

grabbed his head with her nimble hands burying her fingers in his hair and holding on. Tipping his head, she planted her lips on his and kissed him passionately, her body leaned into his, her chest crushing against his. Dylan pulled her down into his lap and shifted so he was kissing her now. His tongue explored her and she moaned into his mouth. He tilted his head in another direction and crushed her lips beneath

his. Dylan's hand wrapped the ponytail around itself and tipped her head the way he wanted and buried his tongue deeply in the heaven of her mouth. His skilled tongue danced over hers and she sighed.

“Cami, it's time to work.”

Frankie commanded loudly interrupting them. Her eyes were still closed when Dylan pulled away. The other wolves

scattered around the bar hooted and wolf whistled at them. Dylan gave them his thousand watt smile and the cheers got louder.

“You don’t have to work. I can take care of you, protect you, and make you feel real good.” He murmured against her mouth in that smooth caramel tone he knew she loved. She gasped and scurried out of his lap. Her tongue

darted out to taste him on her lips before she gave him a nasty look. He smiled at her, undaunted. Cami rushed away to the lady's room and Dylan chuckled to himself. Nope, no woman could resist the pink shirt or his extra smooth panty dropper voice.

“Leave her alone Dylan. I’m begging you man.” Frankie looked like he’d just bitten into a lemon.

“I know that you’re in love with her Frankie but I told you, she’s my mate. You know what that means. Go find yourself a nice human. Cami is wolf and she’s not for you. Nature made her for me and brought her to me. She’s mine and she’s starting to realize it.”

Frankie shook his head sharply.

“Get out of my bar Dylan. You are no longer welcome here, your

privileges are cut off, and you will not be served anymore.” Frankie played the only card he had left because Dylan had been right about one thing. Frankie was in love with Cami. Frankie knew that Dylan would take her away from him the same way he’d lured Sheila away in high school. All of the women fell for him and Frankie did not want to lose a second female to the big arrogant wolf. If Dylan had left Sheila alone, she and

Frankie would be married. They would be raising children and Sheila wouldn't have swallowed that bottle of damned pills. It drove her over the edge when Dylan dumped her for Linda in the middle of lunch senior year.

“Frankie, if I go, I take the pack with me. Without us, there is no bar. I suggest that you reconsider my privileges.” Dylan said as calmly as if

he was discussing the weather. Frankie shook his head.

“Get out.” Frankie’s fists clenched at his sides. Dylan nodded. The bar was full of wolves, thirty of them easily. Dylan stood and looked around.

“Gentlemen, we are no longer welcome here. Our rights and privileges have been revoked. Pay your tabs.”

Dylan waited. Money was left on tables and pack members filed out with their heads high, each nodded to their beta.

“Just his rights and privileges are revoked. Everyone else can stay.”

Frankie said desperately to the men leaving, his voice high and frightened.

Most shook their heads. They were pack and pack stuck together.

“I told you Frankie, if I go, they go

and without us you have no business.

When you are ready to discuss it, you know where to find me.”

“Where did everyone go?” Cami said when she came out of the ladies room into the quiet empty bar, only Frankie and Dylan remained.

“Frankie kicked me out. Everyone else left out of protest. You aren’t going to make any money tonight sweetheart.”

Dylan tucked a twenty into her front pocket. “See you around.” Dylan eased passed her and out of the front door.

“When you’re ready to close it down for good Frankie, I’d love to have this door. Like I said before, you know where to find me.” Dylan let the door close and went to his truck. The parking lot was empty now. If Frankie didn’t man up in a few days, he would open a pack bar. The single men needed

somewhere to blow off steam. They could take turns working it and that may work out for the better.

“Wait.” Cami came outside.

“What happened? I was in the bathroom. Frankie won’t tell me.”

“Let me take you out and I promise to explain it.” She stood there with her forehead wrinkling and her perfect white teeth working her lip. “Tell Frankie that

you are taking the night off.”

“He told me to take the night off already.” She shoved her hands into her pockets. Dylan ran a hand through his hair.

“Are you coming? You’ve got the night off anyway, let me take you out.” She still stood there. He started the truck and she hurried around to climb into the passenger side. Dylan pulled

out his phone and texted someone then reached across her and pulled her seatbelt into place. “I don’t want anything to happen to you.” He smiled at her. Cami rolled the window down and breathed the air from outside before his scent overwhelmed her again and she embarrassed herself.

“Now what happened? What happened in the bar? Where did

everyone go?” She was nibbling her lip again. God he wanted to taste her again. His midsection was stiff and uncomfortable.

“Frankie asked me to leave.” He pulled out onto Main Street and headed south. She had no idea where they were going and didn’t care right now. Right now, her curiosity was piqued.

“But you didn’t, everyone else

did.” She was watching him.

“Everyone in there was a friend of mine, when he asked that I leave, they all felt... obligated to leave as well. They won’t feel welcome to return until Frankie apologizes to me.”

“You’re a bully. You’re bullying Frankie into letting you come back. Why did he ask you to leave?” She was a lot calmer than he expected. Her voice was

soft and controlled so he kept his the same, soft and controlled. He had the feeling that this discussion would end with him telling the pack to go back to Frankie's and he would, for her.

“Because he wants you for himself and you're mine.” Dylan glanced at her to gauge her reaction to that. *Uh-Oh.*

“I'm not anyone's. You say that like I'm property.” Cami was getting

pissed.

“I don’t mean it that way. Please don’t take it that way.” He reached across the seat and squeezed her hand. They were leaving town she noticed. They’d just passed the library which was the last building on Main Street.

“Where are we going?” She was already unfamiliar with the area.

“To Lupo’s Restaurant, they have

the best Italian around. I could've made you spaghetti with a little warning but we'll have to settle for theirs tonight."

He smiled at her. "It's not far."

"I'm not dressed for that." She pouted.

"Its fine, I promise."

"Mister Ellis, it is so nice to have

you again sir. Who is this lovely young lady?”

“This is Cami, my date.” Mario, Dylan suspected that wasn’t his real name but had never heard any different, walked around her, sniffing.

“Cami what?” Mario inspected her head to toe. Cami watched him watching her.

“Montgomery.” She said and

Mario nodded.

“Not your real name though is it?

A mother doesn't name her child Cami.”

Mario walked around her again. Dylan was getting curious now because he'd never seen the old wolf act this way.

His graying hair was as bushy as ever and so were his eyebrows. His tuxedo was old and slightly wrinkled. Where else could you get a waiter that was

wearing a tuxedo in Fern Valley though?

“My name is Cambridge,
Cambridge Montgomery. Isn’t that
awful?” She tittered nervously. Mario
smiled. Cambridge? Cambridge was a
variation he did not try with child
services earlier. Who named a kid after
a city? It was nice. He rolled it around
in his head and smiled softly.

“I think that it’s lovely

Principessa, how long will you grace us with your presence?” She giggled and obviously knew that he’d called her Princess. Mario offered her his elbow and led her to the small private table that Dylan reserved by text a few moments earlier. It was a private dining room surrounded by heavy velvet drapes to ensure their privacy from other diners. There weren’t many people in Lupo’s tonight but he didn’t want curious eyes

on his mate. Mario knew something that Dylan didn't and Dylan never liked that. He and Mario were going to have a conversation very soon. Mario came here from Italy, maybe he could scent her or something, and he was from a long line of old wolves so it was possible. He followed them and slipped through the drapes behind them. Dylan refused the menu.

“Cantaloupe and prosciutto, calamari,” Cami made a face and shook her head, he grinned. “Salad?” She nodded. “Steak Pizzaiola with a side of spaghetti.”

“And bread?” Cami asked.

“Very good, Principessa, Mister Ellis. Right away.” Mario studied her a few more seconds then left their dining room.

“So, Cambridge Montgomery, what brings you to Fern Valley?” Now he was going to get as much information out of her as he could.

“I met a man when I was waiting tables near Atlanta. Business was slow and we spent the evening talking. He told me all about this place, about how lovely the people were, how safe it was, and how beautiful it was. He said it

wasn't anything like Atlanta. I headed out the next day and here I am.”

“You’re from Atlanta?” Dylan watched her, she shook her head.

“I’m from Cedar Side, Virginia. As soon as I could, I left.”

“Why?” He took her hand and brushed his thumb over the pulse point in her wrist. “Why leave the only home that you ever knew?”

“I didn’t have any family, I was a foster kid. The last couple that I lived with was old. The lady, Miss Grace, she died and Luther was nearly blind and had cancer. He gave me the keys to his truck and told me to go find myself, I was sixteen. I took the keys and bolted. I hated it there, I never fit in. I couldn’t stay in Cedar Side, they would’ve just put me with another family, and I wanted

out of the foster care system.” Mario brought them a bottle of red wine and filled their glasses then slipped back through the curtains discreetly. Dylan saw his nose twitch before he left.

“How long have you been on your own now?” He wanted so much to take her home and keep her safe from the world.

“Since I was sixteen.” Cami

nibbled her lip.

“How old are you now?” Dylan squeezed her hand. Her pulse was off the charts and he decided it would be best if he gave some space.

“Oh,” she chuckled. “I’m going to be twenty four next week. How old are you? You don’t look much older than me but you seem old.” He smirked.

“I’m twenty seven and I feel old

sometimes.” The corners of his mouth drew up seductively and she trembled. She would be his with just the slightest amount of convincing.

“What Turner said earlier, you never explained. What is a beta? I looked it up at the library and it’s not slang for anything like he said. The only thing about beta that I could find was in wolf hierarchy, the Greek alphabet and

fish species.” Dylan watched her knowing his eyes flashed amber. She gasped, it finally dawned on her.

“They aren’t real.” She whispered. “Are they?” He flashed his eyes at her again and nodded. “You’re eyes, they...”

“Are like a wolf’s?” Her brows knitted and her chin quivered. He took her hand again. “Are you okay

Princess?”

“Why did he call me that?” Cami was getting scared.

“I suspect because you are werewolf royalty.” The laughter bubbled out of her. “Henry has been studying it but we aren’t coming up with much. We realize that you are not aware of your abilities and that you have probably never turned in your life

because either you don't know how, or you don't want to, but I think that you can. I saw your eyes flash, it probably wasn't intentional like when I did it, but they flashed just the same. We don't know what else you are capable of and we aren't sure how you ended up here without protection or guidance. I can protect you and I can take care of you. You won't be safe on your own for long especially if it gets out that you are a

Princess or something.”

“You keep saying that you’ll protect me but what does it mean? Why would you want to protect me or anything else? We just met, you don’t know me.” Her face was a pale mask of confusion.

“Because you are my mate, I knew the second you walked into the bar the other night. I scented you and every cell

in my body jolted awake. When you kissed me earlier I knew that I was home.” Her eyes widened. Mario was suddenly there with the fruit. “Mario.” Dylan said without looking at him. “You called her Principessa, why?” Dylan’s gaze never left her face.

“Oh Mister Ellis, because she is a Principessa, she is the picture of her mother.” He tsked. “The Queen

Francesca Ilaria Giordano, it is a shame how they were hunted down like common animals, the Queen and King Alajandro. A bigger shame that it was all covered up. I am not so sure of the details but I think the way the story goes is that some of the King and Queen's loyal subjects stole their newborn daughter away and hid her from the world. I never knew what happened to her but you do look exactly like Queen

Francesca except your hair. Her highness had golden blonde hair.”

Cami’s eyes were filling with tears. “I apologize, I thought that you knew. It would be best if we kept this quiet, just us need to know. She may not be safe.

If you need help protecting her Mister Ellis, you let Mario know. Eh?” He gave her a deep bow and slipped out of the small private room. Cami wiped her

cheek.

“Come here sweetheart.” He pulled her into his lap. “Oh baby that was not the way to get that news was it?” He stroked her hair smoothing the stress away. Dylan kissed her temple and held her close letting her get it out.

“It’s stupid.” She sniffled.

“People I’ve never heard of and I am crying like a kid. I didn’t know them. I

don't know if he's right either. I may not be the Principessa. But if it is true, I won't ever meet my parents and I hoped all of these years that I got separated from them by accident and that they would come back for me. I may not even be a werewolf. Jeez, that sounds so stupid. An hour ago, they didn't exist." Dylan squeezed her.

“We've existed for as long as

time. We stay hidden and we stay safe. We stick together and we stay safe. I don't know if you are who he says, you may not be. I'll have Henry look into it, but Princess or not, you are wolf, and you are my mate. That much I am positive about.” He offered her a slice of cantaloupe and she nibbled. “Is it good?” She nodded and Dylan kissed the top of her head. He wanted nothing more than to hold her and feed her,

protect her. She eased off of his lap leaving him bereft. Perching on her seat, she sipped her wine and had another piece of fruit. He tried a piece and realized just how hungry he was. They ate in comfortable silence. Cami had never had steak this way and found it to be very good, but you couldn't beat Frankie's steak off the grill. "You're very beautiful." Dylan said, sipping his

wine. Cami made a face and he laughed. “You aren’t used to compliments?” She shook her head and took another bite. She was stuffed but she was not letting steak go to waste, she could rarely afford to have it and only had it when Frankie took pity on her. “Do you want a box for that? You can take it home.” She looked over at his plate, he’d finished his. Cami leaned back and held her belly.

“I think maybe I should. I am going to bust. I can’t believe that I ate as much as I did and a ‘Big and Sloppy’ earlier. I’ll need new pants if I don’t stop eating this way.”

“But you’ll be hungry again in a couple of hours, won’t you?” She blushed and he smiled at her. “Wolf.” He murmured. “Will you do something for me?” Her big green eyes were

leery. “Will you try to shift?”

“I wouldn’t know how.” She kept her eyes down.

“I’ll help you. I want you safe and part of being a werewolf is being able to call your inner wolf out to protect yourself.” She nibbled her lip. “No one will see, I don’t mean for you to do it here, I have a safe place for you to try.” Cami took a deep breath and looked up

at him, her face serious.

“Only if you tell your friends to come back to Frankie’s bar, please don’t put him out of business. He’s looked out for me and took care of me when nobody else cared.” He paid the bill and had her food boxed.

“It’s a deal. Come on.” He took her hand and led her out to his truck.

With her seat belt secure, he pulled out

onto the road and followed it home.

“What is this place?” Cami looked out over the front yard at the impressive house sitting behind a circular drive. The circle and yard surrounding the large grey stone one level house was full of huge trees that would shade it during the day. “It’s beautiful.” Her face was leaned out of the window, her breath fogging a small

cloud on the passenger side.

“This is my home, I live here.”

She looked over at him, doubt filling her eyes. “Really.” He parked at the front door and got out. “Come on.” He said when he came around and opened her door.

“I don’t think I should.” He sensed her anxiety.

“Have I ever made you feel

unsafe?” Cami smirked. “Ok, have I ever lied to you?” He reached for her hand. “Come on. If you want to leave, I will take you home. I promise. Come inside, let’s see what you are.” She had to admit, even she was curious about that. Cami took his hand and followed him to the door. He pushed numbers into keypad and the door swung open. He turned the lights on. The polished wood

foyer was softly lit by recessed lighting high above her head.

“It’s beautiful. Whose house is this? Really?” He laughed and wrapped his arm around her shoulders.

“Come.” They followed the hall to an intersection. The kitchen was to the right. He put her food in his refrigerator.

“That’s mine.” She said, suddenly

defensive.

“Yes ma’am.” He smiled wolfishly for her. “Come.” He held out his hand to her and she took it letting him lead her. “This is the living room,” he pulled her further, “dining room,” She gasped at how nice it all was, so not the mountain man who came into her bar. This was...elegant. Much too elegant for Dylan. “Recreation room.” She ran

her fingers over the Italian leather back of the sofa and looked up at the huge TV on his wall. She couldn't afford one, not that she had time to watch anyway with working four jobs. There was a pool table beyond the sofa group and a bar.

“Wow.” Her brows were up high with surprise.

“Want to see the rest?” He murmured in her ear making her tremble

again.

“I don’t want to get caught in here. We could get into trouble.”

“I promise you it’s mine.” He walked over to the book case and took a framed certificate from one of the shelves. “Here, see. It’s the deed to the house, see here is my name.” He pointed to it. “I own the house and the surrounding fifty acres. The house was

old and beat up when I bought it but the pack and I fixed it up.” She held the frame and read the document. “The pack are the other werewolves in the area by the way.”

“This really is all yours? But you’re so young and you own it outright? How did you afford all this? Are you sure that you aren’t doing anything illegal?” Her small white teeth

were worrying her bottom lip again and she studied him.

“This is really all mine. I have a knack at the stocks, but yeah sometimes I do some light hacking and that’s illegal but, I earned all of my money legally, I promise. The feds aren’t going to rush in here and take it from me. You have nothing to fear, you are safe here with me.” The corner of his mouth curled up.

“Well, mostly.” He held back a snicker but straightened up when she studied him. He could see the wheels turning in her pretty head so he dropped the innuendoes. “So, let’s see the rest. You should know your way around. I expect to see a lot of you here in the future.” Her eyes snapped up to his.

“Why would you expect that?”

She looked confused, which confused

Dylan.

“I told you that you’re my mate.

That means we live together, have a life together, children, etc...” Cami burst into laughter and he was even more confused.

“Uh, no. I don’t think so. I’m not anyone’s mate. One day I may accept a proposal from a suitable young man but no, no mate.” Dylan took a deep breath

and exhaled. “I’m not.” She insisted setting her jaw. He let it drop for now.

“Fine. Let’s see what you can do then.” He took her hand and led her to his workout room. The thick workout mats covered the floor in the large room. There was a heavy bag, a speed bag and a weight bench against the wall. He had no need for a treadmill. He would rather run outside, rain or shine.

Dylan closed the door and shifted into his wolf. Cami screamed and covered her eyes. He shifted back and laughed. “You didn’t believe me did you?” Her head shook but she wouldn’t look. He pulled her hands from her eyes. “Cami, this is real. It is not a dream.” Her chin quivered. “It’s okay, you’re safe.” He pulled her into a hug and held her there for a long moment. She melted against him and all he wanted was to carry her

into his bedroom and claim her but instead he said. “Now, please don’t be afraid. I’m going to shift into wolf. I want you to feel my fur, run your fingers through it, and look into my eyes. Okay?” She nodded and he slipped into wolf. He was very large and muscular, much like he was as a man. His fur was dark brown just a shade lighter than his hair. He had lighter fur around his

muzzle and in his ears. He was quite beautiful as a wolf, she thought. She petted his head like she would if he were a dog. He stood up with his paws heavy on her shoulders. He was taller than her and bent his neck to peer into her eyes. His eyes flashed and she gasped then grabbed his head burying her fingers into the thick dark fur beneath his ears. She scratched and he licked her. Cami made a face. She hated dogs

that tried to bathe you.

“Ugh. Stop Dylan.” Cami tried to push him away but she couldn’t budge him, he was easily two hundred pounds. His breath was hot and damp on her face. His huge furry head nuzzled her cheek then he hopped down and shifted back.

“Now. You try.” Her lip lifted into almost a snarl. “Come on.” She

threw up her hands.

“Try what? I don’t understand what you want me to do.”

“I want you to shift. You felt my fur, imagine yourself covered with it. Imagine yourself with eyes that flash, what it must feel like to walk on four feet. Close your eyes and concentrate.” Cami’s face twisted in disbelief but she closed her eyes and thought about what it

would be like to be a wolf. Nothing happened. Dylan spent the next two hours coaxing, shifting, ordering, cajoling, begging, and explaining.

“This is useless. I told you I am not a wolf person. In fact, I’m not entirely sure that I’m not dreaming all of this because I can’t believe that I got into your truck and left Frankie’s with you. Let alone came here to try and turn into a

wolf.

“It’s not useless and you are a wolf. We can all smell it on you. Even Turner knew that you were wolf. He thought you knew then begged me not to discipline him when he figured out that you really didn’t know. Frankie has figured it out and Henry has been studying you since you rolled into town. He can’t figure out why you don’t shift

and why you aren't aware of your abilities. You have us all stumped because the rest of us starting shifting during puberty. At first it just happens but eventually you learn to control it.”

Dylan took a breath. “Do you want something to drink sweetheart? Beer? Soda? Bottle of water?” She was nodding.

“Bottle of water, please. All of

this concentrating has made me thirsty.”

She smiled sweetly at him.

“I’ll be right back.” Cami waited in the center of the room with her hands clasped behind her back, the picture of innocence. As soon as Dylan was out of sight, she followed the hall to another hall and managed to find her way to the front door. She really needed to get out of this nut house. Insisting that she was a

werewolf, really, and he must be crazy if he thought that she was going to mate him just because his cells or whatever came to life. She would never tell him how her body and senses reacted to just the smell of him let alone how he made her feel when he got too close. Maybe he was right about the mate thing because there was definitely chemistry between them. Just thinking about him now, her core was moist and her heart

pounding. But he just wasn't a suitable possibility after all he'd only just bathed for the first time yesterday. She grinned at that knowing it wasn't true but Mister Cocky deserved the insult. Cami slipped out into the dewy night and took off at a jog across the circular drive. She heard the growls and snarls before she saw them. Two sets of amber flashing eyes. Neither of them could be

Dylan, she'd heard him in the kitchen before she slipped outside. Were they real wolves or werewolves? God that sounded stupid and what did it matter which they were, they were going to attack either way. She still doubted that they were real, didn't she? They were huge, one was black and one was silver, he looked more like the wolves you saw on the nature shows on cable. They were advancing on her. She stood

frozen to the spot where she'd stopped when she heard them. Time to move, feet! Cami thought. Their hackles were up and they were dividing and flanking her. Oh God. They may just eat her. Cami stepped backward but didn't give either of them her back or the opportunity to get the better of her. She could hear Dylan inside calling her name. Shoot. She really should've

stayed inside. She'd gone from the frying pan into the very hot fire. Two more steps backward. Where the hell was that front door? She didn't remember running that far. The growls were deepening and getting louder, and more aggressive. Shoot, shoot, shoot. Two more steps, did someone move the damned house? Finally, she backed into something hard and reached behind her for the doorknob. Damn it! A locked

truck. What now. Cami was really getting scared and they were only mere feet away and advancing. “No!” She held out her hands at them palms out in a ‘stop’ gesture. “Down.” She waved her hands toward the ground and both wolves went down flat and shifted into men. “Wow.” Cami watched them surprised and looked at her hands. Did she do that? Or more likely, they were

friends of Dylan's and they were messing with her.

“I'll say.” Dylan was beside her now she could feel his body heat.

“What are you?” The dark haired one asked. He was heavily muscled, mid twenties and kind of cute. He had big blue eyes and a five o'clock shadow that was semi-sexy. He wore a blue denim shirt that was several shades

lighter than his jeans but she could see the muscles shift under his shirt as he climbed to his feet.

“I’m not sure what she is Pete but I can tell you who she is, she is my mate. Can you get up any slower?” Pete groaned and slowly lifted himself off the ground, Mike did the same.

“Holy Jesus Dylan, I feel like I got hit by a damn truck.” Mike muttered.

The blonde one was thinner but still looked strong. She considered his abs under the blue tee shirt he was wearing. His sandy hair was long and he wore a scruffy goatee. He was not as good looking as Mike or Dylan but he had a ready smile and an agreeable demeanor like Chris.

“Do it again sweetheart. Can you?” Cami shook her head.

“I don’t know.” Cami held her hands up and swatted them down again but nothing happened. “You guys are playing with me. Very cute.” She crossed her arms across her chest. “And I told you that I am not your mate.” Pete and Mike both laughed and shoved Dylan.

“I can’t believe it but it sounded like a she-wolf just turned down Dylan.

Did you hear that Mike?”

“Think we have a shot?” Mike asked.

“No, you don’t. Any luck finding Junior boys?” Dylan asserted his dominance with the degrading title of boys. Both shook their heads. “Come in and have a beer. I was trying to teach Cami how to shift into a wolf. She thinks that I’m crazy.” Dylan turned and

stepped toward the house. “Are you coming Cami-love or are you going to take your chances on nature not attacking you out there in the dark again?” She hurried to his side and walked with him to the house. Cami had never met Mike or Pete and decided that they must’ve been out looking for the same fellow that Dylan was looking for like Turner said. These must be the other betas. They were walking behind her. Dylan

stepped inside first. “Go to the gym guys, I’ll bring you beers. Cami, your water is already in there.” Cami led the way down the hall. Mike stalked up very close behind her and snarled then growled loudly. Cami shrieked and ran. “What the hell man?” Dylan was suddenly there at her side.

“I thought maybe I could scare her into shifting, by the way why can’t she

shift?” Mike chuckled.

“We don’t know but cut it out.”

Dylan headed back to the kitchen. Cami gave them both sideways glances while she sipped her water.

“So, you’re Dylan’s mate huh?”

Pete asked sitting down on the weight bench. “It’s good for him to settle down. He’ll take good care of you.”

She was already shaking her head. “No

he won't or no you're not?"

“She said she's not already. I'd love to take you out sometime Cami. What do you like to do?” Mike grinned at her giving her his sexiest smile.

“What are you doing asking her out? I got first dibs.” Pete stood up and towered over Mike.

“Bullshit, since when?” Mike stood chest to chest with him. They both

started growling and snarling. Mike's eyes flashed first, his wolf was near.

Pete shifted and pounced on Mike mid-shift, his teeth snapping. Cami put her hands in front of her when the ball of vicious fur and teeth rolled near her and shouted 'Stop!' They did. Both lay on their bellies panting and watching her, both wolves changed back into men.

“Son of a bitch. Stop doing that, it

hurts girl. Dylan came into the gym laughing and tossed beers at both of them.

“Figured out how to do it then?”

Dylan tipped a beer back while Cami shook her head. “No? You’ve done it twice though.

“I told you I don’t know how.”

She was getting cranky because she was tired and because she was suddenly not

in charge of her own body. What was wrong with her? How could she make them change and how could she make them stop? They were both twice her size and both more powerful than her. This was all so disturbing. “I don’t know how to make them shift either, it just happened or they’re screwing with me.” Dylan decided to take a different tack. He put his beer down and turned to look at both of the betas. It made Cami

nervous. What was he going to do? He kept saying that he would protect her and that he was her mate but she got the distinct impression that his mood had changed. She felt like she was in danger now.

“Quit whining Cami.” Dylan flashed his eyes at her. She made a face and set her jaw. “I mean it. You’re supposed to be special, act like it.” His

eyes flashed again. The other two betas backed away from him recognizing the tone.

“Screw you Dylan!” She turned to walk away and he shifted then pounced. His feet hit her shoulder blades just hard enough to knock her down. Cami screamed and turned back to defend herself. The two betas were wolves again and flanking Dylan. They were

coming at her like she was prey. Cami put her hands up. “Back off!” The two betas were thrown back across the mat groaning and Cami knew they couldn’t fake that. Not the way they flew through the air or the awkward tumble at the end.

Dylan though kept coming, snarling and showing her long white canines. Cami whimpered when she felt her body change. Her bones repositioned, tendons stretched, joints popped,

muscles seized and elongated. It hurt, not like she'd broken bones, but more like her whole body was over worked and exhausted even more than before.

Cami was lower now. Everything in the room seemed bigger except Dylan who was now huge and standing over her. A strangled cry escaped her when she felt his warm humid breath. She looked away and down, submitting. Dylan's

head nuzzled her head and he licked her ear. She felt so...safe, so peaceful. He was hers. He wouldn't hurt her. He would take care of her. For the first time in her life, she felt...calm. *Home*. She understood what he meant now, how he felt when he scented her. His scent was so reassuring. She wasn't sure what was happening, she couldn't speak, and it felt like there was a presence inside her skin with her, something

ancient and wise. The beta's shifted again and stood staring stupidly at her. They were talking and glancing at her. They were so tall, so far away. Cami watched them over Dylan's shoulder. It was then that she realized that she was on all fours. She was wolf.

Chapter 4

Cami growled and backed up. She was frightened and confused now.

Dylan recognized the uncontrollable fear in her eyes and quickly dominated her, his teeth sinking gently into her neck until she sank to the mat. With her exposed throat in his mouth, she submitted and rolled onto her back baring her belly. Dylan shifted and sat

beside her. “Its okay sweetness, you’re okay. I promise. I’ll take care of you.” He turned to look at the other two betas, “you guys grab a room, and I’ll see you in the morning.” They filed passed her.

“Goodnight Miss Cami. It was real nice to finally meet you.” Mike reached down and shook her paw. Pete did the same and nodded as he passed by closing the door behind him.

“Sweetness, now that you’ve shifted into your wolf, you need to learn how to shift back. That should be easier since you know what you feel like as yourself. Don’t you? How you look, how your hair feels slipping between your fingers, what your skin feels like?”

She was Cami again. “There’s my girl.” He said softly. Cami’s hand was sharp and stinging across his cheek.

Dylan blinked rapidly trying to figure out what happened. Cami put her hands up at him like she had earlier to the betas.

“Shift!” He cocked an eyebrow at her.

“All you have to do is ask sweetness, your wish is my command.” Dylan gave her his sexy smile and she did her best to ignore it issuing the command again. Nothing. Not fair. “I

don't think it works on me sweetness.

Remember you pointed these at me before and the betas flew across the room but nothing happened to me. I think that it is ineffective on your mate and your alpha.” He kissed her palms one at a time sending shivers through her.

“I'm ready to go home now.” She said looking up at him through her

lashes.

“Stay.” Her head was shaking. “I have a guest room, a really nice one, it’s girly, and everything. My sister uses it when she’s here. Please?” She was thinking about the lumpy creaky bed in her apartment. “There’s a huge bathtub with jets. I think she left bubble bath and bath salts, your choice.” He coaxed her. “She’s left clothes in there that

should just about fit you, you're more than welcome to them. I'm pretty sure she even left some pajamas." He was standing over her now murmuring in her ear. With his caramel smooth voice soothing over her nerves, and his fingertips caressing her jaw Cami couldn't refuse him. She nodded just slightly, and he gave a silent cheer but just smiled at her then took her hand to lead her to the guest room. The betas

had a permanent room that they used when they stayed over complete with bunk beds and a mini fridge full of beer which was one of the conditions when they helped him rebuild the place. Her guest room was on the other side of the house from theirs, but was next door to Dylan's room. "Here it is, my room is there if you need anything just ask. The bathroom is through there." He pointed

to a door across the room. “There are clothes in the dresser and in the closet, help yourself. I think there is a new toothbrush in the medicine cabinet too. Okay?”

“Okay.” She said softly and reached up on her tiptoes to kiss him on the cheek. “Thank you.” Dylan wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her tightly against him. His hand

wrapped itself in her pony tail pulling her head back, she gasped, and he took full advantage of her parted lips. His tongue slipped inside the sweet cavern of her mouth and explored her. He tasted and nibbled her until she kissed him back. Dylan pushed her against the wall trapping her. He wanted her. Her lithe body felt so nice pressed against him but he knew better than to rush her. Dylan's mouth left hers but his eyes

stayed closed, his forehead against hers. His heart pounded, his pulse throbbing in his cock.

“Goodnight sweetness.” He murmured and struggled within himself to leave her against the wall. Dylan’s door closed softly with a click. Cami’s eyes were still unfocused when she finally drifted into her room and closed her door as quietly.

“Oh. My. God.” She whispered and let out a breath as she sat on the edge of the bed for a moment. Cami undressed slowly thinking of Dylan, wishing his fingers were unfastening her buttons. Could he be her mate? Whether he was or not, she really wanted him to kiss her again. Cami tasted her lips, tasted him again, a shiver raced up her spine and every muscle south of her belly button clenched sweetly. She

filled the tub and squeezed in the bubble bath. It smelled like vanilla. Cami eased into the hot water and soothed her sore muscles and her overworked brain. Today had been too much. First, she'd had that episode in his truck then dinner and the realization that she may be a freak of nature or a Princess, then the confirmation that she was a freak when she made wolves change into men. And

the grand finale when she herself changed into a wolf? Yes, she had. She had changed into a wolf, and this was not a damned dream. Crap. She should ask Dylan what she looked like as a wolf, he was beautiful, and what had he said? That he was her alpha. Was he? She remembered rolling over when he put his mouth on her. It didn't even seem like it was something that she wanted to do, and more like something that her

body did of its own volition. Cami washed her hair and rinsed it in the vanilla water then scrubbed her skin with the bath gel that smelled like springtime. She liked the gel a lot. She would have to indulge in some of her own as soon as she had money to burn on frivolities. She climbed out and dried her skin with the huge fluffy emerald green towel. The bathroom had

lavender flowers with emerald green stems on the wallpaper and green granite counters and shower walls. The beige floor tiles were rough so that you didn't lose your footing and fall. It was pretty and she wondered if Dylan's sister decorated it or if he had for her. Cami looked in the medicine cabinet for a toothbrush and found several. She chose the yellow one and a small tube of minty paste. There was comb in there that she

borrowed as well and pulled it through her long hair then borrowed the blow dryer. She padded back into the bedroom with the towel wrapped tightly around her. She could hear thunder rolling in the distance and squeezed her eyes shut. Cami was petrified of thunderstorms. She hurried to the dresser and found a pair of flannel pajamas covered in daisies on a sky blue

background. She pulled them on quickly and looked under the bed for cover.

Lightning lit the windows and she bit her lip hard enough to draw blood. What was she going to do? If she'd been at home, in her apartment, she would've hidden under the bed but there were boxes under this one. He used the space as storage. The lightning struck again. It was so close that it looked pink and hissed then boomed loudly as soon as it

hit. She squealed in terror. He was there in her door way almost immediately. His hair was ruffled and he looked like he'd already been asleep. The lightning struck again and cracked loudly at the same time. Cami launched herself at him and wrapped herself around him. She buried her face in his neck. Her ankles locked in the small of his back and her arms wound

around his neck tightly in a near choke hold. Dylan held her trembling body there for a moment then carried her back to his bedroom.

“Come on now. I’m right here and I’ll keep you safe.” He murmured in her ear. Cami nuzzled his neck, her lips brushed over his pulse point. “Oh darlin’ don’t do that, I may not be able to stop myself.” Cami kissed his neck, his

cheek, and then his mouth. A growl rumbled through his chest as his erection grew against her. Cami rubbed herself against him. “Oh shit sweetness, do you know what you’re asking?” Dylan lowered her to the bed still wedged between her thighs. Softness rubbed hardness. His mouth found hers. Dylan kissed her deeply. His tongue explored her minty mouth. Her ankles unlocked, Cami lifted her hips against him, and he

growled again. Dylan unbuttoned her pajama top then lowered his head to her breasts. “Are you sure?” She nodded reaching for him. His fingers worked quickly until she was bare to the waist. He pressed kisses to her warm vanilla scented skin, his tongue traced the rim of her navel, and she lifted her hips again. “Easy girl.” The lightning flashed outside again but the storm was moving

away and it wasn't nearly as bright as it had been a moment ago. Cami tensed and grabbed at him frantically but he caught her hands easily, kissing each one in turn, she calmed. The thunder rolled quietly, the storm was moving away fast.

“Dylan, I need...” She reached for him. He shushed her and pulled the pajama bottoms off of her. “Please...”

She whimpered. Cami wanted him, she'd started out afraid of the storm but when she'd jumped into his arms it became so much more. The scent of him so close aroused her beyond belief. His pulse had pounded against her lips and called to something buried deep within her. She wanted him, to stay with him, she'd known this man two days but felt a connection to him, one so deep down that she couldn't ignore it. It didn't

matter that she'd only known him for a minute, her soul cried out for him and she needed him, craved his touch, his warmth.

“I know sweetness.” He shucked his briefs and settled in the cradle of her thighs again. Cami's fingers wrapped tightly around his penis and placed him at her entrance.

“Now Dylan.” She pulled him

closer with her heels against his backside. She was trying to kill him. That must be it. She kept saying that she wasn't his mate and that she didn't want to be his mate but then she did this. She wasn't giving him a choice. He was only going to ease her fears when he brought her in here, sex was not his intention. As much control as he had, and as strong as he was, even Dylan couldn't stop this now. No man could

have.

“Oh sweet Jesus Cami.” Dylan buried himself to the hilt, she cried out. He stroked against her. He couldn’t stop, he couldn’t think, he wanted her, to claim her, he want to stay buried inside of her for the rest of his life. God, she was so hot and so wet, it was heaven. His body rejoiced, ached for her, for her pleasure, her satisfaction, her heat, and

her submission. “Look at me.” He barked at her. Cami’s eyes flew open and focused deep emerald green pools on his amber ones. She smiled up at him and caressed his face with her fingertips. His head lowered for a kiss and when his lips met hers, she climaxed crying his name. Dylan couldn’t last, he wanted to, for her. He wanted to bring her to another climax screaming his name over and over but just as he’d

thought in the bar, he was as out of control as a first time pup. The tingling heat started at the base of his spine and raced through his veins. It streaked over his nerves until his sack tightened and he poured his soul into her. His woman, his mate. His body was alive and rejoicing at having found her. He would never let her go, she would always be his. His heart pounded with need for

her, with love for her.

Cami heard birds chirping outside but the room was not flooded with morning sun. She stretched. Where? Oh yeah. Dylan's house and *his bed*. Cami opened her eyes. Amber eyes were studying her. He smiled and she nibbled her lip. "Good morning sweetness." His lips brushed hers

softly. “So you’re scared of thunderstorms huh?” Cami nodded. “It must be hell at Frankie’s then under that tin roof.” She nodded again. “It won’t be a problem anymore. You’ll move in here.” He kissed her nose.

“I couldn’t. It wouldn’t be right.”

She gripped the sheet covering her still nude body in her fist.

“It is right. You’re my mate.” Her

head shook vigorously, he was gorgeous all sleep rumped. “Cami, listen to me. You are my mate, whether you like it or not, nature says that we are perfect for each other. It seemed right last night, it felt right, hell it felt...perfect. Just listen,” he said when she started to protest. “If you feel that strongly about not being my mate all you have to say is ‘I don’t want to be your mate Dylan, I reject you as a mate,’ and it’s over.

We're both free, but if you want to give us a chance, just say, 'I accept you as my mate.' But sweetness, you should know one thing first, it's getting more difficult to ignore the mating urges that I am getting. I would appreciate an answer, a real one, soon. Also, I do not intend to reject you, as far as I'm concerned it's a done deal. We just have to sign on the dotted line as it were. Meanwhile, get

dressed, I'm going to make breakfast, then I will take you home so you can get to which ever job you have today.

Where do you work on Saturday's?"

"I have a shift at the diner from ten to six then Frankie's from seven to closing." Dylan's lips pursed and he nodded. He did not like the idea of her being on her feet waiting tables for the next sixteen hours. Not one damned bit.

His mate did not need to work unless she wanted to but he'd be damned if it would be for sixteen hours straight and he'd be double damned if she would work four jobs. No one should have four damned jobs and live on bologna and cereal. It was time for her to face facts and accept him, now how to convince her of that would be a whole other ordeal.

“Fine. Get dressed.” His eyes flashed.

“Why are you mad? What did I say?” Cami asked sitting up holding the sheet against her naked chest.

“You don’t need to work. Obviously, I can provide for you,” he gestured at the ceiling, “anytime that you want to quit that nonsense, you just say.” Her brows furrowed. He got up and

padded out of the room in a pair of striped boxer briefs.

“Wow.” Her eyes widened and her jaw went slack. He really was gorgeous. His back was defined with muscles, his legs long, muscled, and powerful and that ass! There should be a sculpture of that ass in a museum somewhere, never was there a more perfect mound of muscle created. She

blushed at how she'd wantonly dug her heels into it. Cami went back to her guest room to find her clothes. They were missing. "Cute Dylan." She went into the closet and found jeans that were too long, but she did find a dress that fit and put it on. She borrowed underclothes. That was kind of icky, but what choice did she have? She went barefoot into the kitchen after brushing her teeth. The betas were relaxed at the

huge rectangular glass table that dominated the room drinking coffee and reading a newspaper. Dylan was at the large stainless steel stove with bacon frying, and flipping pancakes. “Good morning guys.” Mike smiled at her with a look that she couldn’t decipher. Pete only nodded and sipped his coffee.

“Can I help?” She asked Dylan. He shook his head and said nothing. He

was still mad at her. Well, too bad. She met him what? Five seconds ago? Sure, they'd been intimate but she wouldn't be the first girl to sleep with a man without marrying him the next damn day. Cami poured herself a cup of coffee and perched on a stool across the counter from where Dylan was working.

“Did you see him?” Dylan asked without turning around. Mike turned a

page in the newspaper. Cami had obviously walked into the middle of their conversation.

“Yep but he gave us the slip. We know that he was in Georgia for awhile, but we never could catch up with him again and then well, we just needed a break when we hit a two week dry spell. You know how it is, four months is a long damned time to be away.”

“We all leave for Georgia at noon then. I want to know if he’s still there or if he’s moved on. We take two vehicles this time. I want that damned pup back here ASAP before I have to fill Henry’s damned shoes.”

“You should just take the position Dyl, hell we’ll follow you. You know that.” Pete said folding his paper and sipping the coffee noisily. “You’ll be

great at it and it will be a huge relief to Henry, we stopped by there yesterday before coming here, he looks like death on a cracker man.” Dylan nodded and piled four more pancakes on the platter then dumped an egg mixture in another frying pan. “You know you’re perfect for the job, Mike and I aren’t going to challenge you, let Henry go in peace.”

“Let’s give it one more shot if

that's what Dylan wants Pete.” Mike gave him a look. “Dylan has always been prepared to take Henry's place but I think he feels its Junior's responsibility besides the fact that Henry wants to say goodbye. At this point it's more about that, about Henry getting to tell him goodbye and for Henry to apologize for whatever he feels sorry about.” Dylan nodded. “We heard he's using an alias too Dyl, he's going by Hank, Hank

Summer...”

“Summerfield.” Cami finished for him. They all stared at her now.

“What? I know Hank Summerfield.

He’s the man that I told you about in

Atlanta Dylan. He’s the one who told

me how great this place was.” She

finished softly when Dylan came to stand

in front of her, his biceps standing out as

he braced his hands on the counter

separating them.

“Where is he Cami?” Dylan was dominating her again.

“That’s who you’re looking for?”

Dylan waited. “I don’t know. We aren’t BFF’s. He used to come into my bar, I told you, and he was there most nights. It was on the outskirts of Atlanta and come to think of it, I think a lot of the guys were wolves.” Dylan grabbed his

phone from the charger and dialed.

“Betty. It’s Dylan. Cami won’t be in for the next few days, pack business. Thanks.” He gave her a look when she started to protest and her mouth snapped shut. He called Turner, Frankie, and the Constance the librarian, all pack members and all knew better than to question the soon to be alpha. He stirred the eggs while he spoke and by the time

he finished his phone calls, the eggs were ready and the bacon draining on a paper towel. Dylan filled a plate and put it in front of her then filled his own. Pete and Mike hurried over when Dylan sat down beside her on a stool. He leaned over and kissed her cheek. “Eat up. Then pack.”

“Pack what? I don’t have anything here and the pants in there are too big for

me.” He nodded. Cami’s brow furrowed. “Dylan, I need to work, I can’t go with you. Just drop me off at Betty’s when you leave.”

“You’re going. If you need money, I’ll pay you to be our guide. You’ll get five hundred a day plus expenses. You won’t make that here and your time off has already been cleared, you can call it freelance work. You’ll

stay with me, end of subject.” Cami’s eyes went wide and her mouth opened then closed then opened again. “No arguments Cami you have a direct order from your alpha.”

“He’s not the alpha yet.” Pete said softly.

“He is her alpha, you heard them last night.” Cami gasped and hid her face in her hands. The men chuckled at

her rosy cheeks. “Don’t be embarrassed
hon, ain’t nothing wrong with making
love.” Mike grinned at Dylan’s scowl.
“Hey it’s not like I was listening at the
door Dyl. You guys were loud.”

Chapter 5

“I said that you’re going and you’re going. We won’t be gone long especially if you take us straight to him, a couple of days max. The pack needs your help, I need your help. So, would you please stop taking the damn clothes out of the suitcase as soon as I put them in there?” Dylan snatched a pair of jeans from her and folded them for the

third time. When she reached into the case again, he slapped her hand.

“Damn it Dylan! I said no!” Cami yelled and reached again. Dylan grabbed her hands and pinned her against the dresser. He stood over her snarling into her upturned face. She whimpered and dropped her gaze. “Okay...okay.” She whispered. “I’ll go. I’m sorry.” He nodded and went

back to packing her clothes. Dylan shoved every article of clothing she owned into the case. Cami watched knowing that she was not ever going to sleep here again. He wasn't packing for their trip. He was packing for her move to his house and surprisingly, she didn't mind that one bit. He was her mate, he belonged to her, and she did not intend to reject him either. A smile curled her lips as she watched him fold her clothes

neatly and place them into the beat up white suit case with care.

“You need new luggage.” He folded the top over and snapped the buckles on either side of the handle. “I’ll take care of it.” He lifted it and looked around the room, not seeing anything else that she needed. He held a hand out to her. “Come.” She took it and followed him to the truck parked at

the bottom of the steps.

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph, Dylan.

What the hell took you so long? All you got is one suitcase and you were up there for more than a half an hour?” Mike complained. “Oh maybe you were...”

Dylan snarled and Mike dropped his gaze.

“It’s hard to fill a bucket that someone keeps dumping out.” He

looked back at Cami who dropped her gaze as well. Mike and Pete snickered as Mike started his truck. “She’s decided though that it’s in her best interest to go with me and to behave. Haven’t you?” Cami sighed but nodded. Pete turned his head to hide his smile thinking that Cami was exactly what Dylan needed. Sassy, bossy, challenging, and fiery, they were perfect for each other. Dylan started his truck

and fastened his seat belt. Mike backed out of the way letting Dylan take the lead in their trip. Cami crossed her legs drawing Dylan's attention. He was not going to last thirty minutes let alone the five hours that it would take them with her bare legs calling to him like they were. He shifted the truck back into park and got out. Everyone watched as Dylan dug through her suitcase and came

back with a pair of sweatpants. “Put them on.”

“I’m not cold.” She crossed her arms over her chest.

“I didn’t ask you if you were. I said put the sweatpants on. If you don’t, I’m going to have to pull over before we get out of town and fuck you. Put the sweats on.” Cami gasped and struggled into the pants quickly.

“Really Dylan! There is no need to be crude.” Cami refastened her belt and stared out the passenger side window. He grinned and shifted it into drive again. Mike and Pete were laughing so hard in his rearview that he flipped them the bird out of his open window. They only laughed harder. Cami’s reflection was smirking in the window that she was pretending to stare

out of. Dylan couldn't help but grin as he drove out of town. God she was sexy. They didn't speak for the first four hours but Cami had to break the silence finally when her bladder would no longer let her remain silent. "I need to pee."

"Hold it." His eyes never left the highway.

"I said I need to pee. If I could

hold it, I wouldn't have told you. Please find a restroom.” Dylan nodded and held up his first finger in the window. Mike nodded behind him. He pulled into a gas station and refueled while she went, as it turned out, everyone needed to go but Dylan.

They pulled into Beau Ridge just after six. Mike got two hotel rooms facing the street across from Junior's

favorite bar. They hid the trucks behind the hotel so that they didn't tip him off.

“All this is not necessary guys. Just wait until seven and he'll be there if he hasn't left town.” Dylan carried her suitcase and his duffle up the stairs and opened a door with the key that Mike gave him.

Pete and Mike would be in the room next door. “Where is my room?” She asked from the doorway.

“You’re looking at it.” Cami stared at the queen sized bed in the middle of the room. She chewed on her lip. “It’s not like we haven’t slept together before.” He didn’t turn to look at her. Digging through the duffle he came up with new clothes. “Do you want the shower first?” Cami’s brows knitted. “Cami?”

“I want my own room.” Her hands

went to her hips in defiance.

“No. Do you want the shower first or second?” Her chin quivered.

Dylan came over and tugged her into the room then closed the door quietly.

“Sweetness, I can’t keep you safe if I’m not with you. If you don’t want to have sex, we don’t have to. Believe it or not, I can control myself.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

That I can't?" She couldn't believe that he was implying that she couldn't control herself just because of what happened last night. What an ass! She watched the muscles ripple under his shirt. Okay so maybe she might not be able to control herself, but she wouldn't admit that to him.

“I didn't say that. I said if you don't want to, we won't. Now do you

want a shower or not?” She shook her head. “I do.” He pulled his tee shirt over his head and shucked his jeans then put them all neatly folded on the floor in a pile. Dylan texted someone then went into the bathroom and closed the door. “If you want join me, you’re more than welcome.” He called to her. Cami flopped on the bed and picked up the remote to push the channel button as fast as she could. She was hungry. They

never stopped for lunch or dinner and her stomach growled loudly. Fishing in her purse, she found some quarters, grabbed the key, and went out onto the walkway heading for the vending machines.

“Oh no you don’t.” Pete had her by the waist and carried her back to her room. “You’re not running off on my watch.”

“What?! Put me down!” Cami kicked and struggled. Mike stuck his head out of their room laughing.

“Dylan that unappetizing? I told you before, I’d love to show you a good time.” Mike grinned at her. Pete stuck her back inside the room and pulled the door closed.

Cami screamed a few choice words at the door and threw her handful

of change at the door. She went back to the bed and sat against the headboard with her knees drawn up to her chest.

“What the hell is going on out here?”

Dylan came out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his waist.

“Cami? Are you okay?” Her chin quivered.

“No.” She turned her head away from him. Dylan saw the change lying

all over the carpet and figured out what had occurred. Her stomach growled angrily. “I’m hungry and they won’t let me have anything.” She sniffled.

“We’ll go for dinner as soon as I’m dressed. Okay?” He eased down on the bed next to her. “Cami.” She sniffled again. “I’m sorry. I should’ve stopped. I’m not used to thinking of others when I’m on the hunt.” She

nodded, her stomach growled again and he laughed. “I’ll hurry. You can take these sweats off now if you want to.”

He patted her leg and went back to the bathroom. He smelled so good. How was she supposed to control herself if he was going to smell that nice? Cami wet her lips and turned her head to watch him in the vanity mirror. The muscles bunched and flexed in his back and across his belly as he combed his hair.

She knew what those muscles felt like jumping around under his warm smooth skin. How silky that skin was under her fingertips. How the muscles hardened and softened as she traced them and squeezed them. He folded the towel now and hung it on the rack. She watched him then saw him watching her in the mirror. She blushed and turned her face away. “You can look if you

like Cami, I don't mind. If it were you in the towel, I would watch you because I think you're beautiful." Her belly growled on cue. "Okay," he chuckled. "I'll hurry." He picked up his phone and texted the boys then hurried into his fresh clothes. "Come on. Let's eat." He held his hand out to her. Cami hurried off of the bed to follow him. Mike and Pete were waiting on the walkway outside. "Cami, where is the best place to eat in

town?” She pointed at the bar. “Do they have steak?” She nodded then gave Pete a nasty look.

“Oh come on Cami. Don’t be angry at me, I was following orders.”

“I don’t care what you were doing. I don’t like being manhandled and I don’t appreciate being convicted of a crime without being asked for an explanation first. So I am still mad at

you and I'm staying that way." She huffed and looked away.

"You're right. I could've handled it better. I'm sorry. I should've asked you where you were going."

"You didn't even ask her?" Dylan turned to look at him. Pete shook his head.

"No he didn't. He just picked me up like a sack of potatoes and threw me

in our room.” Cami marched ahead ignoring them until she heard the fight behind her. When she looked back, Dylan had Pete in a choke hold and was hitting him. “Stop it.” Cami grabbed for his hand. “Dylan, please?” Her voice was soft and cajoling. He stopped mid punch. “He didn’t hurt anything but my pride. “Please don’t hurt him.” Dylan let him go and faced her. “It’s okay.

Really.” Dylan nodded. Pete was flexing his jaw but couldn’t keep the grin off of his face.

“What the hell is so funny?”

Dylan asked. Pete pointed to Junior’s truck. They hurried across the road to the bar. Pete and Mike took the back door entrance, Cami went in the front.

“Cami, damn girl is that you?”

She stepped up beside Hank and let him

wrap his arm around her shoulders.

“Where have you been?”

“Fern Valley of course. Hank it was everything that you said it would be. It’s lovely. I got a job at Frankie’s, Turner’s, Betty’s and at the library.” He gave her a squeeze and ordered her a soda. Melanie brought her soda and gave her a hug.

“There’s a last check for you hon,

let me get it. Are you ready to come back to work?" Cami shook her head. "That's too bad, we could use the help."

"I'm only here for the night, I wanted to pick up my check and speak to you Hank." He sipped his beer.

"Oh, why me?" He turned on the stool and patted the one beside him for her to climb onto.

"I wanted to thank you. I found out

a few things in your hometown and I wanted to share.” Melanie moved down the bar to fill glasses. Cami looked up into the toffee flecked hazel eyes. Hank was a wolf. It was easy to recognize now that she knew things. “I met a man, a wonderful man. He’s...” She grinned.

“Who has lit your face up like that darling?” Hank grinned back at her.

“His name is Dylan. He says that

I'm his mate.” Hank nodded. “I just met him a few days ago but...well, you know.” He nodded again. “Anyway, as it turns out, he's looking for you, he and his two friends have been scouring the country for you, and when I mentioned that I knew you well they...”

“We hurried right over to see you Junior.” Dylan drawled from behind her. He towered over her with his

commanding dominant tone that made her tingle. Hank didn't flinch though. Several large men in the room suddenly stood and Dylan recognized them for what they were. "Sit them down Junior." He turned and nodded at his pack. They sat but all eyes watched Dylan closely. "I know that you've been avoiding us but I've got to say, thank god we found you when we did." Dylan sat on a stool behind Cami with his legs

stretched out on each side of her possessively, one hand rested lightly on her hip. “Henry wants to talk to you pup. He found out that he has an aggressive cancer right after you left and we’ve been looking for you ever since. We want you to come back to Fern Valley and take your place as alpha. Before we go though, I want you to talk to Henry. It’s bad and I’m not sure that

he'll make it until you get there. There are things that he needs to say to you before he dies." Dylan handed Junior his cell phone.

"I can't go back Dyl. I can't take over as your alpha." He pushed send on the cell and spoke to his father for quite some time. Dylan ordered dinner for their group after sitting Cami in a corner booth and calling the boys inside. Junior

joined them at their table and another very large wolf walked over to stand at his side. Cami didn't know him but he was huge and unfriendly looking. Funny, he looked a lot like Dylan that first night, all broad and mountainously big with bushy hair and a bushy beard. Did these guys think it was a good look? It was not sexy and it was not frightening to Cami. She gulped anyway because he was still gigantic and scary.

“Is everything okay sir?” The big dark wolf grumbled looking Cami over. She would swear that he had to be as wide as he was tall. Dylan growled low in his throat when the wolf’s eyes appraised his mate.

“Fine, if I need you, I’ll call.” Junior dismissed him not looking up. “Look, I’m the alpha here now. I have been for the past eighteen months. When

I rolled into town, the alpha was old. I know the rules, I challenged him, and well, here I am. I sent Cami to you guys so that you would protect her. She was drawing a lot of attention here so I took her under my wing but there was a lot of interest in claiming her whether she knew she was wolf or not. This pack is still a little backwoods and they were not going to give her a choice in the matter. Cami's a nice girl and I didn't

want to see her raped and dominated like that, it wasn't how Pop raised us.” He was talking to Dylan who was nodding. His thumb stroked her hand under the table. “He’s always preached putting your mate on a pedestal.” Hank chuckled. “He was always real sweet to my mama. I knew that Cami would be safer at home. I knew that Pop would protect her.” He finished his beer and

held the empty glass up to Melanie.

“Shit.” Dylan finished his beer.

“That means that I have to tell Henry...”

“It means that you need to challenge your alpha and take over Dylan.” Hank’s eyes flashed amber and his tone was full of authority like Dylan’s was sometimes. Cami nibbled her lip wondering if this was going to turn into a fight. There were a lot of

wolves in here that would be on Hank's side.

“I won't challenge Henry. He's dying for shit's sake.” Dylan's hand tightened on hers for a moment. Did he need reassurance that she was still there? Cami squeezed his back and rested her other hand on his too.

“Let him go out with some pride. If you challenge him, he will be seen as

a strong alpha that needed to be challenged but you as a stronger one. It's not like he's handing down the place in the pack to me. It's not the same, it doesn't matter that you grew up in the same house. You aren't blood so he can't just hand it over. You have to challenge him Dylan, besides, just think how great it will make him feel if a strong beta like you bothers to challenge him instead of just hovering like a

vulture. He can die a proud wolf.”

Melanie brought a round of beers and told them that their food would be right out. She handed Cami a check. “I can’t go back tonight, I have some matters to attend to, but I will set out first thing tomorrow. Me and Pop have said our peace. We have worked it out if he can’t hold on until I get there. I told him that I forgave him and that I never

stopped loving him. He sounded pretty weak guys so we can't take too long."

Junior leaned over and hugged Dylan then shook Pete and Mike's hands. "I'll hurry, you guys do the same." He got up and left the bar. Cami wiped her tears and sniffled. Dylan put his arm around her shoulder and hugged her to him.

"Eat your dinner. I don't want to hear your belly growling all night." He

kissed her temple. They ate in somber silence. Cami cleared her plate while Dylan watched amused. She really was starving. He would keep in mind that she needed a decent sized meal at least once a day, she was not a grazer. He liked that, there was nothing worse than a woman who always said she wasn't hungry and picked at a salad while her gut rumbled.

The boys clinked glasses again.

They were done chasing Junior all over the countryside. Finally, they could get back to their lives. Mike was thinking that he'd start looking for his mate while Pete was pretty convinced that the she-wolf he was dancing with was his.

Dylan wondered for a moment if the betas would share her later, they'd done it before. He didn't care what the hell

they did. His belly was full and he had a lush female cuddled into his side.

“Dylan, I’m kind of tired. Would you mind if I went back to the room?” He gave her a squeeze.

“My thoughts exactly, it’s been a long day.” He finished his beer and leveled a look at Mike. “Cami and I are going to turn in, be ready to go at five.” Mike nodded and turned his mug up as

well. It was after eleven. He stifled a yawn and motioned to Pete that they were leaving. Cami followed Dylan out of the booth and took his hand when he offered it. She hugged Melanie good bye then followed Dylan across the street to the hotel.

Chapter 6

She was biting her lip and staring at the bed when he came out of the bathroom. “Get in bed Cami, five comes early, and we have a long ride tomorrow.” He was laying his clothes out for tomorrow, his watch, and wallet were placed on top of the pile of neatly stacked clothes. He went to her suitcase and did the same with her clothes.

“Since you aren’t in bed, were you going to shower first?” Her head shook.

“Then get in bed.” There was that tone that made her muscles clench low in her belly, the tone that made her want to obey, the one that made her want to do all kinds of things to him. God he was sexy. Would they have sex? Would they have sex every night from now on? Was this going to be her life now? Not that she was complaining about having sex

with Dylan but it just seemed like it was all so sudden. This mate business, and now that he'd found Junior, all of his concentration would be on her wouldn't it? They needed to figure some things out, set some rules and talk. Cami squealed as he lifted her from the floor and put her on the bed. He pulled the covers over her and turned her bedside light off. She watched his shadow form

walk around the bed in the dark, his eyes flashed and her breath hitched. “I assume all that thinking that you were doing was about what was going to happen next. I told you that if you didn’t want to have sex, we won’t. It’s up to you. If you want to, I’m over here, if not, goodnight Darlin’.” Cami inhaled sharply. Darlin’. Every muscle in her core went hot and wet all at once. God that was arousing, the way he said that

word all low and smooth. The way that he drew it out and left off the ‘g’, wow! Dylan chuckled. Did he know? How could he? He must be thinking about something, she decided. He had her hand now and pressed a warm kiss to the center of her palm and her traitorous muscles clenched again sweetly. Oh god, she was going to lose control of herself if this kept up. His teeth pressed

into her thumb pad and the pleasure shot straight into her core. How could those two points be connected, warm lips pressed to her wrist and fire raced through her veins zinging into her core. Her breath hitched and her heart beat frantically. “It’s up to you Darlin’.” Smooth warm caramel oozed over her nerves bringing heat with it. He knew exactly what he was doing to her and right now, she didn’t care to get angry

about it. She wanted him and there was no sense in denying it or repressing it. She wanted Dylan and she was going to have him. Cami threw herself across the small space separating them, and onto him. He chuckled low in his throat whipping her clothes off of her while she kissed him anywhere she found skin. Her frantic hands pulled his briefs off of him and she straddled him. “Easy

Darlin’.” Her wetness rubbed along his hardness coating him in her juices and Cami was no longer in control of what she was doing. “Someday soon I’m going to take my time at this and make love to you properly if I can get you to behave.”

“Sometimes a girl needs to be in charge.” Cami shifted and placed his flesh inside of her, she rolled her hips

sinking onto him a satisfied moan escaped her lips.

“You feel so good.” Dylan grunted when she thrust herself down onto him again. He moved to roll her onto her back and she stopped him with a word.

“No. Sit up.” He chuckled but did as she asked. Since when was he not in charge in bed? It didn’t matter he

decided, there would be plenty of time for that later, as long as it felt like this, he didn't care who took the lead. His eager fingers kneaded her haunches helping her keep her rhythm, the rhythm that felt so damned incredible right now. He was inside of her so deep and he didn't ever want out. Cami kissed his chest and neck while her fingernails dug into his shoulders. He felt her teeth on his skin, her tongue on the pulse point at

the base of his throat then teeth again on the claiming muscle that ran from his neck to shoulder. Oh, that's interesting, he thought then she bit him, growling, and Dylan came with a roar. She'd claimed him! Cami just left her mark on his neck, was still biting him, and licking the wound. Dylan flipped her onto her belly and mounted her from behind, impaling her viciously. Cami moaned

thrusting back onto him further, opening herself up to him, wanting him to take her, to claim her. His body covered hers, dominated hers, and filled hers.

His canines extended and he growled sinking them into her neck gently. His objective was not to hurt her but to mark her as his. She snarled and thrust back onto him again, the orgasm hitting her hard making her body shake and tremble. She moaned and whimpered

sinking into the mattress with Dylan still inside of her. White lights exploded behind her eyes and her body continued to convulse with it. Dylan nursed her wound as he rolled her onto her side still buried in her, he held her tightly against him, her back to his front. His arms wrapped around her trembling body like steel bands possessively. His lips left warm kisses on the back of her

neck and shoulders, soothing her, caring for her. This must be what heaven feels like, she thought.

“*Mine.*” He murmured into her neck and they both drifted off to sleep, she was smiling as she went.

Dylan woke to banging on the door. “Come on Dylan, you said five, it’s nearly six. Get the hell up!” Pete

was shouting through the door.

“Yeah, yeah. Give me ten minutes. Go get us breakfast, coffee for both of us.”

“And bacon.” Cami said sleepily.

“Bacon, eggs, you know the drill.” Dylan was pulling his jeans up while Cami watched. “Don’t look at me like that, we won’t ever get home.” She blushed and searched for her clothes.

He tossed her pile of clean ones onto the bed. Cami shimmied into her jeans and pulled a tee shirt over her head. When she popped her head through the hole he was there kissing her. “Good morning beautiful.” Cami blushed but said good morning. He bent to kiss his mark and she trembled. “Go brush your teeth and hopefully Pete will be back with breakfast by then. There was a knock on

the door and Dylan opened it. Mike came in and tossed his and Pete's duffle bags to the floor then sat on one of the yellow vinyl chairs at the small table by the window.

“He's bringing coffee right?”

Mike's head was back and his eyes were closed.

“Yeah. Why is he so full of energy this morning anyway?” Dylan

was zipping his duffle. He found Cami's pajamas and folded them into the white suitcase.

“He's met his mate. She's going back with us. I guess I need to find a someplace else to live.”

“You can stay at my apartment over the bar. I don't think that I'll be allowed to use it anymore.” Cami said as Dylan growled. “See. So the rent is

paid through the end of the month and it's month to month so just let Frankie know.”

“I don't know that Frankie would be too hip on my staying over his bar.”

“You can stay in your room at the house, you know that you're welcome. Or you can use the cabin, whatever you want to do man.”

“Thanks Dyl.” Dylan nodded and

snapped the buckles on Cami's suitcase. When the door opened, the she-wolf that Pete danced with last night strode in and held the door for Pete while balancing the tray of coffees.

“Here, they're all the same, bacon, eggs, toast, and grits.” He set the bag on the table and took the coffee from his mate kissing her cheek. “Everyone, this is Shari. Shari, that's Dylan, you met

Mike, and that's Cami, she's Dylan's mate. Nice mark there Dylan, looks like she meant it." Dylan gave him a sly smile and Cami's cheeks flushed bright red."

"She didn't want me to get away, I'm quite the catch." Pete nudged his shoulder.

"Look at mine." He pulled his shirt collar away from the bite on his

neck. “I’m a catch too.” Dylan shoved him back and took two of the boxes then handed one with plastic utensils to Cami. He sat beside her on the bed while Shari sat on Pete’s knee in the yellow chair across from Mike. Mike was watching Shari closely and Dylan got the impression that he didn’t care for her.

When breakfast was gone, they

carried their bags to the trucks parked downstairs. “Hey Mike, ride with me and Cami, let Pete have some time with his new mate.” Mike hurried over and let Cami climb in to sit in between the two big wolves. “So what’s up? You don’t seem to like Pete’s mate. What fire am I going to have to put out?”

“She’s nice. Something doesn’t sit right with me though. I can’t put my

finger on it. She's already marked but she says her mate was killed. I don't get that feeling though, you know what I mean? The mark is still warning me off. Pete isn't getting that though. I don't think she's on the up and up, something is weird with that wolf. Did you get anything Dyl?"

“Yeah.” Cami waited, but he didn't elaborate. Finally, she turned to

look at him.

“Well what was it?” She asked exasperated. He grinned.

“All I got was that you didn’t like her and she doesn’t care for you. Which is why you’re in my truck and not yours.

I didn’t get much more since I was watching Cami eat her breakfast.” He patted her knee and she hid her face in her hands. “It’s alright sweetheart, he

knows that I want you.”

“Everybody within ten miles of you two knows that.” Mike leaned his head back and pulled his ball cap low over his eyes. “Wake me if you want me to drive.”

“Why are you so tired?” Dylan asked.

“Slept in the truck, didn’t feel like sharing last night.” Cami cringed.

“Eww, you guys do that? That’s gross.” Mike and Dylan both chuckled.

“You don’t expect me to do that do you?” She looked scared to death and Dylan squeezed her knee.

“Don’t worry about that sweetheart, I won’t share you, you’re all mine and I don’t share what’s all mine.” She let a breath out. Good because that would send her running faster than

anything else.

“Have you ever...?” Dylan shook his head. “Oh, so just them then.”

“Not just them, but no, I never have. I don’t need any help satisfying a woman.”

“Fucker.” Mike said from under his hat, both Cami and Dylan laughed. Cami cuddled closer to Dylan and closed her eyes when he wrapped his

arm around her. There hadn't been as much sleep last night as she would've wanted but that was okay since she'd had amazing sex with Dylan. Soon when they were home, there would be more. She snuggled in tight wrapping her arm around his waist and slept. His truck ate the miles up while he kept an eye on the truck following him. If Mike suspected something was up with this Shari girl,

Dylan would help him figure it out before Pete got hurt. Pete and Mike were tight and had been since elementary school. They shared everything including women occasionally. If Mike didn't like her, that friendship could end because of her. Dylan did not want to see that. If he were to challenge Henry and take the job as Alpha he would need two strong betas to back him up. She was sitting on

her side of the truck talking to Pete who was nodding. Dylan would love to know what that conversation was about. If she was so in love with Pete, why was she sitting so far away? You would think if they met and were instantly driven to mate and mark that she would want to be closer to him. It had been different with Cami so he had nothing to compare it to but you would think. Mike

said that she was already marked and that he felt warned off by the bite. Dylan pulled out his cell phone and called Junior.

“Dylan.” Junior sounded perturbed.

“Do you know a Shari? She’s coming home with Pete but she’s marked.” Mike straightened in the seat and adjusted his hat on his head. Dylan

glanced at him giving him a knowing look. “Really.” Dylan was listening and Mike was watching but unable to hear what Junior said. “Huh.” Dylan shook his head. “Okay, thanks pup.” He disconnected the call. “She’s mated, he’s not dead, but he has rejected her. She screws around on him and it’s not okay. She was getting kicked out of Junior’s pack because of it, kept turning her tail up at anyone interested.”

“I knew something was up with that chick. So, now she’s our problem.”

“Junior says she’s real conniving and manipulative. He said to keep our eye on her and that he’s glad she’s gone. His pack was about to start a civil war. The females are unhappy and the males are warring.” Mike nodded.

“Let’s hope our males are a

stronger lot.” Dylan nodded and hugged Cami’s shoulders.

“I better not catch you anywhere near the bitch.” Cami murmured. Dylan laughed at Cami’s warning and pulled her tight to him. She peered up at him through her lashes. “How much longer until we’re home?” Her hand traveled slowly across his abs and he sucked in a breath.

“Another twenty minutes.” She nuzzled her head into the hollow of his shoulder and closed her eyes again.

“I’ll hurry.” His voice was all smooth caramel for her. “Mike, you’re sleeping in the cabin tonight.”

“Yeah, not a problem.” He pulled his hat low again grinning.

Chapter 7

“Hungry?” Dylan asked reaching into the fridge for a bottle of water. He tossed one to her. “We didn’t have lunch, what would you like?” Cami came over to stand with him peering into the loaded refrigerator. She was freshly bathed and wearing her daisy pajamas. Dylan’s nose twitched and she grinned.

“Does Mike have something to eat

out there?” Her brows knitted.

“Mike’s a big boy and he can take care of himself. What do you want to eat?” She shrugged. Dylan pulled chicken breast and some vegetables out of the fridge. Cami was looking out of the window toward the cabin. “Is it bothering you that much?” She nodded.

“It’s like he’s all alone now. You and Pete both have mates and he’s left

high and dry. I feel bad.” Dylan pulled his phone out of his pocket and sent a text. It chimed back immediately and he showed it to Cami, she smiled. Dylan pulled more chicken from the fridge and more vegetables.

“Cut those up.” He pointed to the vegetables handing her a knife and cutting board. She carried them to the sink to wash then started taking them

apart. Dylan was cutting the chicken into small pieces and putting them in a wok. Cami grinned. She never figured him for a guy who could cook especially with a wok. Most guys can make breakfast but he was really going to cook! He'd said before that he could make spaghetti, but how hard was that? You boiled water and emptied a jar. He tossed her vegetables in as soon as she got them cut up, it was becoming a race,

and Cami giggled. Mike came in and perched on one of the bar stools. Dylan threw him a beer. “Cami was worried about you. I wasn’t.” Mike took a long pull on the bottle.

“Thanks Cami. I wasn’t looking forward to soup and Pete has my truck.” Dylan went to a cabinet and pulled out a set of keys then tossed them to the Mike.

“Oh come on, the Buick? Give me

the Camero.” Dylan shook his head.

“You have a Camero?” Cami asked. Dylan grinned wolfishly.

“Yeah I think there’s one in the garage.” He stirred their supper.

“Cami, make him show you the garage. It’s worth it.” Mike finished his beer and got up to get another. “I guess I should be thankful that he’s letting me borrow one of his babies at all, huh?”

“You should. I don’t let just anyone drive my cars. That reminds me, Cami, does the truck behind Frankie’s belong to you?” She nodded. “We’ll bring it here.”

“It’s broken. I couldn’t afford the parts yet. I need to put it up on a rack.” Dylan nodded and served the stir fry.

“You can use the one in the

garage. I have tools and a lift for you to use. We get it fixed. It looks like your foster dad took care of it.” Cami nodded and went back to her work.

Cami loaded the dishes into the dishwasher when they’d finished and wiped the counters. Dylan promised at dinner that he would show her his cars if she did the dishes and Mike kept teasing

her about what was out there. What she couldn't understand was if he had a garage full of hot cars why drive the crappy old pick up? He said it had sentimental value and the seat was molded to his butt. That had made her laugh. "I'm done, can we go?" Cami was giddy and bouncing on her toes. Dylan chuckled. Mike said goodnight and went out of the patio door to head back to the cabin. A small cabin was on

the land when Dylan bought the place. He thought that maybe the owner used it for taxidermy, he'd found black button eyes and some mounting blocks on a table in there. They'd fixed it up, put a kitchen in, a bathroom, and blocked off a small bedroom. It was good enough if you didn't plan on living there forever. He kept non perishables in the cabinets if anyone needed a place to crash for the

night. Some of the guys brought women there but they all knew to clean up after themselves. It had a TV with cable but it was extremely small. Two people would get tangled up in there if they weren't careful.

“This is my garage. The keys are in the cabinet in the kitchen and you are welcome to drive anything you like.”

His arm draped casually over her

shoulders. Dylan flipped the light switches on the wall.

“Whoa.” Cami’s mouth was open and her eyes wide. It was a warehouse full of cars, she estimated thirty at least. All of them perfect and showroom clean. Dylan prodded her forward. “Is that a...Oh. My. God... you have a... no way.” He laughed as she nearly floated to the GTO. Dylan followed

her. “This is a Ram Air V. Did you know that this car has five hundred horsepower? How did you get this? They weren’t even for sale to the general public.” Cami opened the hood carefully. “That’s beautiful.”

“Do you want to drive her?”

Dylan was behind her, his body pressed close as he looked over her shoulder into the motor. She shook her head as

her insides trembled. “No?” She shook it again.

“I couldn’t. What if something happened and I hurt her? I couldn’t take that chance.” Cami bent closer to look at the engine. “Wow.” She lowered the hood carefully letting it close. “Wow.” Cami walked on through the garage looking at his treasures stopping next at the Camero that Mike mentioned. She

could see why he wanted it. This one was new and looked like the car from the space alien robot movie that was out not long ago. It was bright yellow and made her smile. She refused to drive any of them but looked under a lot of hoods. “Dylan, you should take these out for a ride and let them stretch their legs instead of sitting here bored all the time.” He shrugged.

“I’d rather take you out.” Her cheeks flushed because he was leaning over her again and she could feel how hard he was for her. “Come on, let’s go back inside Darlin’.” His smooth caramel voice went straight to her clit and she shivered. Cami took his hand and followed him inside to the bedroom. Dylan pulled his clothes off without taking his eyes from hers. Cami

mimicked his movements removing her own. When he was naked and proudly standing before her he took her hand and led her to the side of the enormous bed.

“I love you Cami. Not just because nature says that you’re my mate but because I feel something very deeply for you.” Her eyes misted and he bent to kiss her. Slowly he nibbled at her lips while his hands roved her body. Her arms snaked around his neck and pulled

him closer, closer to her, and closer to the bed. It was happening again. She was losing control. An undeniable urge filled her, clawed at her for release, for fulfillment, for what Dylan had to offer her. “Not this time sweetness.” He pushed her gently back on the bed covering her body with his. Cami tried to pull him under her but he wasn’t having it. “No Cami. This time I’m in

charge. This time I am going to take it slow and I am going to make love to you. I am going to explore and memorize every inch of you.” He was trailing kisses across her breasts and down her sternum. Cami’s breath hitched with excitement and a thrilling fear. She tried to push him again. “I said no.” There was the voice that she could not help but obey. God he was sexy, too sexy for his own good. She

shoved her hands into his hair and tried to pull him up to her face, she wanted to kiss him again. He wasn't having it.

Dylan removed her hands and trapped them at her sides to continue on his slow torturous exploration. His tongue had just filled her belly button and made her belly tremble. God it was torture! Her core was wet and clenching, her clit was throbbing, and her pulse pounded

frantically in her ears. “Don’t move.”

He commanded as he let go of her hands to spread her legs further. She couldn’t move if she wanted to. It was like her body needed to obey him even though her mind fought it. Damn him anyway ...*oh! Ooooooh*....His mouth was exactly on the spot that was going to make her implode. He buried two fingers inside of her now and his tongue circled her swollen clit. Cami’s hips

came off the bed and he chuckled. He was laughing at her? *Seriously?* “I told you not to move.” Dylan’s fingers curled inside of her as he sucked her clit into his mouth rubbing it with his tongue. Lightning raced through her veins and electricity crackled across her skin. Her nerves zinged with it and every muscle seized then convulsed.

“Oh God!” She roared as the

orgasm claimed her very soul. Her fingers dug into the mattress. Dylan was kissing his way up the front of her now. She needed him, needed to be filled. She ached to feel him inside of her. Cami grabbed for him and he captured her hands again trapping them over her head.

“I said don’t move but you keep doing it. Why are you disobeying your

alpha?” He growled. She laughed nervously but tried to wiggle her hands free as she wrapped her legs around him hoping to assist his entrance like she did the first time. Dylan growled low in his throat and flipped her over onto her belly. He smacked her ass twice.

“Dylan!?” Twice more when she tried to turn around. “Oh!” Cami tried to escape but he was on her and she was

not going to get away. “Dylan stop it.”

She squirmed trying to get loose giggling. He pulled her hips back and across his lap. With his forearm planted firmly in the small of her back, Dylan spanked her. Cami was so wet she was embarrassed. How could that make her feel like this? She was so aroused right now, that she didn't know what to do about it. His hand met with her backside for the tenth time and she moaned. So

help her god, she moaned. Cami grimaced. He was going to think that she liked this when she didn't, did she? Okay, maybe a little. Maybe it was the whole forced submission thing. Her inner wolf girl liked it.

“You will remember from now on that I am in charge in this room.” She nodded. He was behind her now lifting her hips and spreading her knees. Now

he was going to fill her? Why couldn't he just do that before and there wouldn't have been a problem. Instead, he kissed her tender stinging fiery flesh. Cami's cheeks blushed as red as her rear. He'd just kissed her butt? She almost giggled again but stifled it. His fingers slipped through her folds and she moaned again. "I thought you liked it, you did, didn't you?" Cami nodded, it was the slightest of movements, and if all of his

concentration wasn't focused only on her, he would've missed it. Dylan thrust inside of her now. "So wet for me." He filled her completely and her arms buckled. Cami laid her cheek against the cool sheet and let him thrust into her. It felt so good, she was so full, all of her muscles fluttering around him, grabbing for him. She moaned again and closed her eyes, pushing back against him,

wanting more of it, of him. He was over her now, dominating her, his front on her back, his mouth on her neck. She felt him shift and nearly came off of the bed. It was coming again. The implosion. Millions of white lights burst behind her eyes, her core tightened and clamped down on him, milking him, and her world rocked off its axis. Dylan filled her with his seed, his orgasm just as intense and he roared over her. They

collapsed in a heap.

Chapter 8

“Sweetness.” Dylan murmured against her ear, tickling her. She smiled before opening her eyes. “How are you feeling this morning?” His lips trailed kisses down her neck, across her collar bone and over her shoulder.

“Did I sleep all night? What time is it?” Cami mumbled and opened her eyes to find him watching her. “Hi.”

“Hi. Yeah you passed out almost before we finished.” Her face scrunched up. “Not a cuddler?” His brow quirked up?. “Come on, get up, and go shower, breakfast in twenty. I’ll call Mike because I don’t think I could stand your sympathy for another male this early in the morning.” Cami grinned. “And next time, I want you to stay awake at least until I’m out of you.” Dylan laughed at her expression and left

the room. Had she really passed out that quickly? He had worn her out so it was his own fault.

Cami dressed in jeans and a tee shirt then went to the kitchen once she'd finished showering. Mike was sipping coffee and reading the newspaper.

Dylan was frying ham steaks and flipping eggs over easy. She sat at the counter to watch her man. He was so

gorgeous to watch, with the big muscle groups moving in harmony under that delectable skin that she wanted to lick. He turned quickly and looked into her eyes. His eyes were amber with his wolf rousing. Cami wondered why. She turned to look at Mike who was still reading. “What’s wrong?” She asked.

“I just had a really strong feeling that you were...what were you thinking

just then?" Cami cheeks flushed crimson. "About licking me weren't you?" Mike chuckled and raised the paper so they couldn't see his face but Dylan knew he was laughing just like he knew what she'd been thinking.

"Weird. I could almost feel your mouth on me." Cami waggled her eyebrows and smiled broadly. "Think something else and let's see if I can feel that too." He turned back to his eggs and Cami

concentrated squeezing her eyes closed. She drew a deep breath and exhaled slowly then thought about putting her mouth on his nipples. “Oh shit!” He jumped back from the stove shaking his hand. “Damn it that burned. Think about something less pornographic.” The paper was shaking in Mike’s hands and he could no longer contain the guffaws that burst out of him. “Shut it.” Dylan

growled at him but grinned. Cami squeezed her eyes shut again and thought about Dylan's wolf, about his soft fur, his massive frame and how good it felt to be dominated in her wolf form by him. When she opened her eyes, she was in her wolf and he was standing over her. "What the hell Cami?" Dylan was still a man and she was on the floor? She was never going to understand or get how to make things

happen, when she wanted them to.

“Shift back.” Dylan commanded her in the alpha tone that always made her obey. Cami was upright again.

“What do I look like?” He gave her a blank look. “When I’m a wolf, what do I look like?”

“You’re a pretty little tawny and silver wolf with green eyes sweetness. I’ll take your picture sometime, I think

you're gorgeous. Let's eat. We'll try again later." Cami sat back on her stool and sipped her coffee while he got her plate ready. "Can you cook?" She shrugged.

"I wouldn't starve but I'm no chef, that's for sure." In truth, she loved to tinker around in the kitchen almost as much as she liked to tinker under a hood. Cami soaked up cooking shows

when she had the chance and memorized recipes she thought would be good. “Do you like Mexican food?” He nodded.

“Okay, I’ll make you something later.” He nodded shoving eggs in his face.

“Are we going to see Henry this morning?” Mike asked not looking up but obviously waiting for an answer.

“Yeah.” Dylan grunted. He was not looking forward to this. He never

wanted to be alpha, and the last thing he ever wanted was to challenge Henry.

Henry was his father if not by blood. He watched over Dylan when he was young. He taught him, fed him, trained him, and protected him. Dylan's only hope had always been to serve his alpha the way he deserved. Now, according to Junior, he would have to challenge Henry and challenge meant that one of them would have to die. He didn't want

to take Henry's life because he loved him. His cell vibrated on the counter and he reached for it. "Damn." Dylan swiped the face of the phone. "Yeah...I will...yeah shortly. Fifteen minutes." He clicked off. "We've got to go." Dylan put his unfinished breakfast in the trash and grabbed his keys. Mike and Cami followed him to the garage and piled into the SUV.

“What’s happening?” Cami asked from the passenger seat while she fastened her belt.

“I have to challenge Henry. He’s dying and if I don’t he’ll die without a successor.” Dylan complained.

“So?” Cami didn’t understand.

“It will be a huge fucking mess. Every werewolf for hundreds of miles will head for our pack and try to take it

over. Sometimes they don't live by the same rules, sometimes they can round up all females in the pack for themselves."

She gasped. "We don't want that do we?" Her head shook. "Didn't think so." Dylan pulled into Henry's yard a few minutes later. Junior's truck was there and he was on the porch waiting.

"What the hell Dylan? You should've done this last night as soon as

you got into town. Do you want to be alpha or not?" Junior stormed. Dylan brushed passed him with a snarl.

"Not." Mike threw his hands up in surrender to Junior.

"Don't look at me. I'm a beta through and through." He grinned and loped after Dylan who had just slammed inside the house.

"Henry! Alpha of Fern Valley. I

call you out and challenge you. You will accept your fate like the alpha you are and you will surrender your pack to me, Dylan Ellis, current beta, and next alpha.” Henry grinned up at him from the couch stifling a cough.

“Damn boy, it took you long enough. Now help me up and let’s get this shit over with. I got things to do.” Dylan’s chin quivered and he took a

deep breath looking past Henry to the plaid wall paper in the kitchen that he'd help hang when he was seventeen.

“None of that crap boy. You know that I love you and you know that Junior and I both want this. I couldn't ask for a better replacement. You've been training for this ever since I've known you.” Henry coughed up blood into his fist and wiped it on his pants. He was wearing the navy blue work pants that he

always wore. “You know we have to do this and it’s about time that you stood up like a man and put me out of my misery. You take care of that little she-wolf too. Make her your world Dylan.” Dylan nodded and wiped his eyes then hugged Henry trying not to squeeze the breath out of him. “Go on out in the yard boy and I’ll be there in a second.” Dylan nodded and turned to push passed

Junior. He passed Mike outside on the porch. There were more than a few pack members gathering, a lot of them lived pretty close by and could sense that something was about to happen.

Cami watched them all, she knew a lot of the guys that hung out in the bar but not most of the women who were eyeing her suspiciously. Wolves were territorial and Cami was a new female which meant competition for the males

to the unmated females. Cami was mated though so they didn't have a lot to worry about she thought. Besides, from the way she heard it, most of them had already had their chance with Dylan. So it was her that should be pissed not them. Dylan stepped up to her and kissed her.

“This will be over soon and if you don't want to watch, you don't have to. I

love you.” He murmured the last part against her ear. Cami hugged him to her. “Be right back sweetness.” He drew every ounce of bravery that he had and turned to wait for Henry. The porch screen door swung open and Henry stepped outside.

“Who challenges the alpha of Fern Valley?” Dylan was about to answer when Pete pushed through the crowd.

“I do.” Pete snarled and looked around, his eyes nearly glowed. “I challenge you.”

“What the hell Pete?” Mike shoved him hard. Pete stumbled sideways. “What the fuck do you think you’re doing? This is Dylan’s job not yours.” Mike snarled and growled. Cami bit her bottom lip. This was awful, and getting scary. She looked up

at Dylan. He would never take orders from Pete, would he? Cami wasn't sure how she felt about this. Dylan was going to be the alpha, wasn't he? Or was she mated to a man who would always take orders? No. Dylan didn't take orders. She didn't think he would take orders from anyone besides Henry. Pete sucker punched Mike in the back of the head when Mike looked to Dylan for direction. Mike crumpled to the grass.

His head would need ice later, quick healer or not, that was going to hurt when he woke up. Cami saw Shari smiling maliciously at the crowd and then saw Junior watching Shari from his place by the porch rail. He did not look pleased. He'd said that she was trouble. It looked like she'd talked Pete into doing something stupid. Shari was getting closer to the crowd and closer to

Dylan. If she tried to interfere and hurt Dylan, Cami was going to rip her head from her shoulders. The crowd was growing larger and nervous. She looked around at the anxious faces. These wolves did not want Pete in charge either. Cami could hear the tense growls. Pete was shifting to wolf and snarling at Henry who looked to Dylan in confusion. Dylan shrugged. It was a challenge and there was nothing any of

them could do about it.

“As his beta, I accept your challenge.” Dylan boomed and shifted. Pete whirled on Dylan and the crowd backed up.

“What’s happening?” Cami said to no one in particular. Betty appeared by her side and grabbed her hand then squeezed.

“Oh Betty, thank goodness. Please tell me what this is?” Betty put her arm around Cami.

“Pete has challenged the alpha, Dylan as Henry’s beta is obligated to protect his alpha since the challenge wasn’t yet accepted by the alpha. Dylan is Henry’s right hand man and he doesn’t think that such a pesky wolf should bother his alpha when Dylan can handle

him, no problem. Pete isn't worth the alpha's time, only the most difficult jobs are handled by the alpha, his time is important. Small problems are handled by other pack members when they can be." She smiled at Henry. "Henry is a very busy wolf, and highly regarded by the pack. Pete is the lowest of the betas. Now tell me who that nasty looking she-wolf is over there?" Betty pointed at Shari. Cami explained how

she and Pete mated the night they met and Pete brought her here. Dylan's larger wolf was still circling Pete, his hackles were up, and he looked ferocious. Cami shivered. Pete was smaller but his huge teeth were gleaming in the sun shine. He dove suddenly for Dylan who caught his throat easily and ripped a patch of skin away. Pete yelped. Dylan snarled and Cami

chewed on her thumbnail with her brows knitted tightly over her nose. Pete was bleeding but circling again. White foamy spittle was gathering at the corners of his mouth and his chest heaved with exertion. Dylan still looked perfect which made Cami feel a little better. He started toward Dylan again and Dylan nipped his ear, Pete yelped in pain when part of it tore away. Dylan rolled it out of his mouth and snarled

viciously at Pete. It was a warning to give up or die. Cami understood it perfectly even though she'd only shifted twice. Betty was squeezing her waist again. Pete charged going for Dylan's throat. Dylan twisted in the air and took Pete down to the grass hard. The air whooshed out of him then gurgled from Pete's lungs. Dylan's jaws sank into his soft throat and blood pooled there. Pete

whimpered and closed his eyes. Dylan closed his eyes in remorse at having to kill Pete and in that instant, Shari charged forward. Her large red wolf intent was on killing Dylan. Cami broke free from Betty's grasp and put her hands up.

“No!” Cami wailed. Shari was thrown back onto her butt in her human form. The crowd gasped and backed

away from Cami, some turned and ran.

Pete shifted back to his human form, his dead human form. Dylan howled at the loss of his friend and was joined by his pack brothers and sisters that hadn't run away. After a moment Dylan shifted back to himself, still kneeling, eyes still closed. His breath huffed out.

“I’m sorry Pete. I loved you like a brother.” Mike was beside him

suddenly helping him to his feet. Cami stood on his other side.

“She was going to interfere.”

Dylan nodded.

“Good job.” He pressed a kiss to her lips. “Go stand with Betty, sweetness.” Dylan heard the murmurs around him. “Her name is Cami Montgomery Ellis, she’s my mate, and yes she has some powers that we aren’t

sure of yet but she won't hurt you.”

Dylan spoke soothingly to the crowd.

Cami could feel the anxiety leave the crowd of nervous wolves.

“Cami is a good girl, ya'll don't need to be nervous. She is a welcome member in this pack. I have accepted her, as have Mike and Dylan. I suggest you all welcome her with open arms.”

Henry's voice rumbled over the crowd

and they nodded then lowered their heads in submission to the alpha.

“You still have to challenge the Henry Dyl.” Mike said looking up at Henry barely standing beside Junior, Dylan nodded.

“I challenge you Henry for the position of alpha.” Dylan called to him.

“You are deemed a worthy challenger Dylan. I accept.” Dylan

waited, head bowed for Henry to enter the circle. Mike pulled Pete's body from the challenge area and knelt beside him. He whimpered and wiped his eyes but stayed beside Pete. Shari was backing away from the crowd trying to disappear until Junior was beside her. Cami couldn't hear what he was saying but she nodded then showed him her throat. Whatever Junior said, she had

just given him her complete submission.

Henry circled Dylan now. He was a huge silver wolf who didn't look like he'd ever been sick a day in his life.

Seeming larger and more powerful than Dylan, Cami was suddenly afraid for Dylan. She could stop it at any time with her power but Dylan wouldn't want her to interfere in his challenge and neither would Henry. The wolves circled each other but Henry tired

quickly. He used the last of his strength to lunge at his challenger. Dylan easily over took him. Henry rolled to his side and Dylan sank his teeth into Henry's neck waiting for Henry to pass. Henry growled then groaned. Dylan fell down beside him and whimpered as Henry turned back into his dying human form. Tears fell from many pack members' eyes. Cami tried unsuccessfully to stifle

her sob. Her mate was hurting and now so was she. She could feel his pain, his sorrow, and his loss. Dylan stayed there for several minutes and Cami saw that the crowd was on their knees with their heads bowed. Betty nudged her and nodded toward the grass. Cami pursed her lips and dropped to her knees. She didn't want to bow, she wanted to comfort him. Cami shifted to her wolf and went to her mate. She nuzzled his

face and licked him. Another chorus of howls echoed through the valley. He got to his feet and licked her muzzle. Junior came toward them then.

“Thanks Dyl.” Dylan stood up as a man and lifted his chin.

“This was your responsibility Pup. I don’t want to see you around here again. Take the bitch with you.” Dylan glanced at Shari. Junior snarled at her

but nodded his compliance. “Staying for the funeral?” Junior nodded again.

“Okay. That’s acceptable. You can stay here.”

“Thanks, Dyl.” Junior wrapped his arms around Dylan. The two hugged then parted going their separate ways.

“What happens now?” Cami asked on the way to the SUV. Dylan blew out a breath. Mike climbed into

the backseat.

“Dylan is the alpha. He is responsible for discipline, helping anyone that needs it, pack protection, settling disputes and about a million other annoying things. No more partying, or chasing women.” That got a sharp look from Cami but Dylan just reached over and patted her thigh. “And I’m the new number one beta, which

means I get to party and chase the women now.”

“What’s changed?” Dylan scoffed.

“Well, now I’m more of a catch. You’re mated, so no competition.” Mike grinned at Dylan in the mirror.

“Asshole.” Dylan muttered. Mike laughed almost as loud as Cami.

Chapter 9

Henry's funeral was short and sad. He wouldn't have wanted a long drawn out affair. Henry was a simple man and a lot of hoopla would've pissed him off. Cami didn't know him but she cried just the same. He was laid to rest in a suit at Junior's request and even though it didn't sit right with Dylan, he let Junior have his way. If it was up to

Dylan, Henry would be wearing navy blue work pants and a white button down shirt. Junior gave the eulogy and Betty sang a song that made everyone cry. Pete's funeral was just as simple and over just as quickly. Junior took Shari to his truck as soon as Pete's funeral ended. Dylan had a reception for everyone at Betty's diner after the funeral. Cami and Betty served. It was their way of helping Dylan. Cami

watched him comfort his pack members, his family. Dylan had a way about him that soothed even the most ruffled feathers. He may not have wanted this but he was good at it. The responsibility may make him uneasy deep down but he was handling all of it perfectly. Dylan was the sexiest man she'd ever met and she couldn't wait to get her hands and her tongue on him. His head whipped

around at her, his eyes alight with wolf. Cami's breath hitched and she felt light and giddy all at once. That look, the way his muscles flexed, and the way he was moving toward her now, like she was prey had her aroused beyond belief. "Outside now." Dylan said in her ear quietly but with such command she turned to quivering mush.

"Darlin'." Cami sighed and hurried out of the glass door and onto the sidewalk.

“What’s up?” She nearly bounced with anticipation.

“Come on.” He took her elbow firmly and tugged her around the corner of the restaurant out of sight of people on Main Street. “You can’t think things like that around me when we’re in public.” Was he scolding her? She’d hoped for a kiss and maybe to have his hands on her for a few minutes.

“What things?” She bit the inside of her cheek.

“That you want me like that, that powerfully. It’s a real turn on Cami and its damned difficult not to just throw you down and fuck you in the middle of the diner.” He took her hand and put it on his huge erection. Her mouth made an ‘o’.

“I can’t help what I think Dylan. It

just pops in there and I can't help it if I want you. A lot." Cami stepped toward him and he grabbed her arms holding her away from him. She pouted.

"I love you sweetheart but if I touch you right now, we won't leave this alley tonight. Can you try not to think about it? Try to think about other stuff when we're out okay? I don't know who else can hear your thoughts. You're kind

of broadcasting them.” He chuckled at her horrified face. “I don’t think that anyone else can hear them like I can but we don’t know for sure so try to think about engines or flowers.” She made a face. “Okay, think about the five hundred horse powered goat in my garage. Think about how the engine fits together, how the cylinders will sound when fired, how many steps there are to take it apart. Think about accepting it as

your birthday present. Think about how she will feel growling under you when you finally drive her. That should keep you occupied for awhile.” She nodded and he pressed his lips to hers chastely. “Good girl. I love you.”

“I love you too.” She murmured and followed him back inside. He was going to give her the GTO! It was the wrong thing to put in her head at a

funeral reception. It was so hard to contain the smile that kept curving her lips. The GTO!

Dylan spent the rest of the afternoon calming and soothing pack members that wandered in and out of the diner. Frankie came in and hugged Cami. Dylan was instantly at her side.

“Dylan.” Frankie said. “I am sorry about Henry and Pete but I think

that you did a good thing. It was very kind of you to let them go out with honor.” Frankie stuck out his hand and Dylan accepted it. “You can come back to the bar anytime you like. I know now that you will take good care of her.” Dylan nodded.

“You can expect a full bar tomorrow but you are going to have to hire a waitress. Cami is giving up her

jobs.” Her jaw clenched.

“I am not! I like waitressing at Frankie’s.” Cami stomped her foot and Dylan grinned. She was so adorable when she was mad.

“You can finish your two weeks but after that, I want you at home with me in the evenings. You are going to be very busy as female alpha Darlin’ and you won’t have time for all of your

jobs. The pack needs you for other things.” Her mouth popped open again but he put his finger to her lips to shush her. “And you will get a paycheck for your efforts.”

“Okay.” He would pay her well, he always did. If she was the alpha’s mate and that came with responsibilities, she would accept them, of course. Cami watched the waiter come inside the

diner cautiously. She watched him over Frankie's shoulder. He was watching her too. Cami nudged Dylan with her elbow and looked over to where the waiter sat down in a booth. What the heck was his name? Was it Mario? She thought so. Dylan crossed the diner to his table and stood over him.

“Mario? How are you?” He looked around at the other wolves in the

diner. “Is something wrong? You seem anxious but you are among friends here.” Mario shook his head.

“I’m very sorry to hear about Henry.” Dylan patted his shoulder. “I know he was your friend as well as alpha. I know you were close.” One side of Dylan’s mouth quirked up and he nodded. “Can we speak privately? Later? At your house? I will come by.”

“Sure Mario, you’ll be my first official guest. Whenever you’re ready just stop by and have something to eat before you go. There is a really good cherry pie that Betty made.” Dylan checked on other guests while Cami brought food and drink out to them. She kept an eye on Mario because she thought he was acting suspiciously, he kept watching her, and it was creeping

her out.

Every pack member had stopped by throughout the day and paid their respects then congratulated Dylan on his new position and mating. As the sun began to dip low in the sky, Betty cleared the diner and told Dylan to take his mate home. She would clean up and was closing the diner tomorrow to recover. Cami hugged her good bye and

they headed for home.

He carried her to the bedroom and helped her out of her clothes then led her to the huge bathtub. “I want you to soak and relax.” He poured bath salts and bubbles into the steamy water. “You’re exhausted.” Cami piled her hair on top of her head in a sloppy bun then sank down against the side until just her head poked out. Her eyes slid closed and she

sighed. Dylan smiled and went back to his bedroom to change out of his dress clothes and into a pair of sweats and a tee shirt. Hearing the doorbell, he hurried to the front door to let Mario inside.

“Right on time old friend, we just got in.” Dylan closed the door. “Beer? Water?”

“Beer please, Mr. Ellis.” Mario

looked around the foyer. “This is nice.”

“Dylan. Thanks, and follow me.”

Dylan went to the kitchen and grabbed two beers from the fridge. “So what’s up, you needed to talk.”

“Where is the Principessa?”

Mario glanced down the hall as he followed Dylan into the rec room. “This concerns her too.”

“She’s soaking in the bath. I

thought she needed to rest for awhile.

You can speak with me Mario.” The small bushy haired man nodded sharply.

“Word has spread about her rather quickly. She used her powers in public and the gossip is flying like wild fire.

Soon word will circle the globe that the Principessa has been found.” Dylan grimaced and drew deep on his beer.

“She is not safe Dylan. Word will

eventually make it to the people responsible for her parents' deaths. We will have our work cut out for us if we want to protect her."

"We?"

"Yes. My family has protected the family of the Principessa for centuries, so yes, we. I have called in some family members who are on their way."

Cami listened for a long time in the hall. Apparently, Mario was convinced that she was royalty and that a whole world of bad guys were going to rush in here to either steal her away or to hurt her. That was disturbing. Why would anyone bother? Cami thought. Mario's family was headed for Fern Valley from Europe to protect her and to

test her. Dylan was against it of course.

He did not want strange wolves in the area. Cami went into the rec room and plopped down on the couch beside Dylan. He wrapped an arm around her. “Principessa.” Mario went to his knee.

“Oh please don’t do that. It’s not necessary and if I am a Princess like you say, I don’t want to be treated any different than I always have been.”

“When my family arrives they are going to want a blood sample to prove that you are she.” Mario blushed. “I am sorry but it is necessary. My great uncle will come to confirm your identity, he has been with the royal family since he was a pup. You may be expected to return to Italy.” He bowed again from his place on the floor.

“No.” Cami said. Dylan glanced

at her. “No, I won’t leave my mate and I won’t leave our home. I like it here and I don’t want to live in Italy.”

“Principessa...”

“I said no.” She raised her voice.

“I will let them take a blood test but I won’t leave here. Now if there is nothing further...”

“Of course. I will leave you to rest. I expect them at any time.”

“Fine.” Cami left the room and went to her bedroom. Dylan could feel her anger and something else that made him uneasy.

“Mario, if you don’t mind answering a question,” Mario shook his head. “Her powers don’t work on me, why not?” Mario grinned then chuckled.

“They won’t unless she wants to

be rid of you. You are her mate and its nature's way of protecting you from a spat." Dylan made a face. "We all say and do things to the ones that we love that we don't mean." Mario explained. "For example one might tell their wife that her cooking is terrible. If you said that to the Principessa and she reacted badly she could really hurt you. She could in fact kill you. Her powers are so much greater than your ordinary

strength, so nature has protected you from her biologically. Her powers will never work on you unless she truly wants to be rid of you. Don't make her hate you and you will always have the ability to walk through her fires."

"I like that." Dylan smiled.

"You would." Dylan and Mario laughed loudly walking to the foyer.

“Thank you Mario.” They shook hands and Dylan opened the door to let him out.

“I will be outside until the guard arrives probably in the morning.” Dylan waved and locked the doors then turned his alarm system on. He didn’t usually use it when he was at home. It was mainly for when he was away. It would call the authorities if there was fire,

theft, or flood. He turned lights off as he went and joined Cami in the bedroom. He could sense her anger before he entered the room.

“Is he gone?” She jumped from the bed to stand before him. “I don’t like him, he’s a scary little man Dylan, and I don’t want him here.” Dylan wrapped her up in his arms to hold her. She nuzzled his chest. “I meant what I

said about Italy. I'm not going.”

“Of course you're not sweetness.

You stay with me.” His hand rubbed her back from the base of her neck to the base of her spine. She sighed and he felt her relax. “We need to talk about some things though. He's outside guarding the house from whatever he thinks is hunting you. I don't know if this threat is real or if anything that he said is true but for

your safety and protection, I want to show you something.” He led her to the armoire against the wall. Cami looked at it and then him. Dylan opened the doors wide. “This is the entrance to a safe room. I had it installed to keep safe if humans ever decided to hunt us again.” He stepped through the doors and into a room. Cami followed him. Dylan closed the door and punched in a code on the keypad on the wall showing

it to her. “Don’t forget it, same code to lock and unlock.” She nibbled her lip and shook her head. “Come.” They walked down the short hall and into a small room. There was a sleeping bag, a lap top, ready to eat meals and bottles of water. A toilet and shower stood in the corner. “I didn’t know that I would be mated so it was built for one but there is enough food here for a few months for

the two of us and there is a television, satellite phone, radio, and internet. It is capable of withstanding a bomb blast and will keep just about anything out until help can arrive. I hoped we never have to use it.” Cami wrapped her arms around him again.

“Me either.” She murmured into his chest. “Wait. Hoped? We aren’t sleeping in here are we?”

“No, but if you ever feel threatened or unsafe, I want you to come in here and lock it down. Okay?” She nodded against his chest. “Come on, it’s been a long day.” Dylan tugged her back into the bedroom and closed the armoire then scooped her up and carried her to bed. They climbed in and he held her close, Cami was asleep almost instantly. Dylan lay listening to the

house in the darkness. Would someone come for her? Try to hurt her? He'd just found her, surely they were entitled to more than a few weeks together. He loved this woman, and he wanted to keep her around for a long time. He wanted children with her. His breath hitched. Children? Really? They were a huge responsibility. If she really was royal his children would be heirs to some far away throne. That was some

screwed up shit. A huge responsibility just turned into an astronomical one.

Dylan's ears perked at something outside. Mario was walking around the house, and he was still alone. How long would he do that? He was taking this guard crap seriously. How many of them were coming? Could they trust them? Dylan had doubts. No one got his trust except Mike when it came to

Cami's safety. Mario paced by the window again and Dylan heard a familiar snarl. "Shit. Mike spotted him." Dylan jumped up from the bed and went to the window opening it. The alarm blared loudly when the window connections were broken. "Son of a bitch!" Dylan shouted when Cami screamed and jumped off of the bed. "Easy girl." Dylan pulled her to him. "It's okay."

“Too loud!” She yelled at him with her hands over her ears. Dylan grabbed his keys and pushed ‘off’ on the key fob for the house alarm. It beeped twice and a voice said “Disarmed, not ready to arm.” Cami jumped again.

“House alarm sweetness. It’s okay.”

Dylan went back to the window.

“Mike! Cut the shit, that’s Mario.”

Mike shifted back into his human form.

“What the hell is going on? Why is he out here in the dark casing the house?”

“I am not casing, I am guarding like you should be. The Principessa needs protection.” Mike pulled a hand down his face.

“Cami, are you okay?” Mike called to her.

“No. I’m nearly deaf and am

about to have a heart attack.” Dylan chuckled and pulled her against his side. He kissed her temple. “What is going on?”

“Mike attacked Mario who put up one hell of a fight it looks like.” Mario and Mike smiled at that. “I had the alarm on because Mario has you freaked out and I haven’t gotten a wink of sleep yet. Mike, Mario, come inside and I’ll

turn the alarm back on. You can guard from in here. Mike, we'll be in the room." Mike nodded. "I'll let you guys in through the kitchen." Dylan lowered the window. "Cami go inside the safe room, at least it will be quiet."

"Gladly." She picked up her pillow and opened the armoire. She stepped inside without looking back. Dylan let the men in through the kitchen

and started the coffee maker.

“Help yourselves, work out a schedule, I’m going to sleep.” Mike was eyeing Mario when Dylan left them alone. The best person to guard the house was Mike, he knew every square inch, and if they were both inside, Mike could keep an eye on Mario. Cami said that he was freaking her out, maybe her gut was telling her something. Dylan

went into the safe room and locked it down after turning the house alarm back on. Cami was curled up in the sleeping bag waiting for him. “Hi Darlin’.”

Cami nibbled her bottom lip because she loved that tone of voice. It always raced straight to her core. Dylan climbed in beside her. “Tomorrow we’ll get a bigger bag and an air mattress.” Cami kissed his cheek and curled into his side drifting off to sleep just as quickly as

before.

Chapter 10

Cami woke to the most wonderful sensations. His tongue slid into the well of her vagina then up over her center to curl around the sensitive bundle of nerves. Cami trembled and slid her fingers into his hair. He chuckled against her. The vibrations teased her more.

“Good morning Darlin’.” He left a trail of wet kisses on the insides of her

thighs. Cami tugged him back to her center and he chuckled again. She arched her body up to him. He obliged her and used his tongue on her swollen clit again. The orgasm tore through her, white lights burst behind her eyelids, and she cried out for him. Dylan was there now, over her, covering her. His cock rested against her entrance. Cami wrapped her legs around him and pulled him to her. He smiled against her neck

and thrust into her. She cried out again, her body bowed urging him further. He filled her so well. She loved this feeling, being this close to him, this intimate. She gazed up into his eyes and saw how deeply his emotions ran. He loved her, she saw it, sensed it. His eyes glowed amber, his wolf surfacing, and she felt hers. His growl rumbled through his chest and she answered him

with her own. Desire, love, want arousal, and pleasure were all conveyed with that sound. Dylan bucked into her, his hips rolling against her. Their bodies slicked and slid against one another with the sheen of sweat that covered them both. “Come for me sweetheart.” Cami’s body convulsed and seized, her core milking him, grabbing and tightening. Dylan roared his climax against her shoulder. She

clung to him for a long time after he'd collapsed against her. "I'm crushing you aren't I?"

"No, it feels good. I like it when you stay inside of me when I come because it lasts longer if you don't pull out right away. Stay." She kissed his neck and shoulder, running her tongue over her mark. He twitched inside of her. "Oh, that's good to know." She

licked the mark again with the same result. His laugh vibrated against her shoulder. He ran his tongue slowly over his mark on her neck and her inner muscles tightened and squeezed him deliciously.

“Yeah that is good to know. Come on, get up.” He pulled out of her leaving her bereft. “Let’s eat breakfast, I’m starved.”

“I’ll shower first. There are too many overactive noses in the house.”

Dylan nodded and pulled his briefs on. They stepped out of the armoire into the bedroom and went their separate ways. “Pancakes?” She called after him. Her belly growled loudly.

“Yeah, pancakes got it.” His laughter boomed from the hallway.

Cami showered and dressed

quickly hoping the pancakes were ready, she really was starving, and her appetite was getting ferocious lately. Sliding into her sneakers she hurried to the kitchen to find several pancakes ready and sitting under a lid. She went up on her toes and kissed Dylan's cheek, grabbing two pancakes she went to what had become her seat at the bar. Mike and Mario were both asleep on the couch in the rec room.

“I feel so much safer.” Cami murmured stifling a giggle. Dylan grunted and sipped coffee. Bacon popped and sizzled in a pan next to sausage and his egg mix still waited in the bowl. She didn’t really care about the rest of it. She was more interested in the pancakes, her mouth watered as she poured the maple syrup over it.

“I’ll have to pour that on me

later.” Dylan winked at her and Cami licked a drop off of her finger making a popping sound with her mouth. His breath hitched. “Or now.”

“Pancakes first pretty boy.” Cami winked back at him and cut a triangle then stuck it in her mouth moaning. His eyes gleamed and she smiled at the nearness of his wolf. Mike wandered into the kitchen and poured himself a cup

of coffee. Dylan finished cooking breakfast and made himself a plate when Cami waved off the eggs, bacon, and sausage. “So what do we do now?” Cami asked between bites.

“Well, I guess we wait for Mario’s people but in the meantime, life goes on. We can start with that maple syrup and move on from there.” Cami nudged his shoulder. “What? You

thought that I was kidding?”

“Can we get everyone out of the house for awhile?” She whispered.

“As soon as I eat, I’ll be nothing more than a memory.” Mike offered from his place at the table. Dylan chuckled. The doorbell rang at the same time that Mario’s cell phone started it’s rendition of Volare by Dean Martin startling him awake. Mario grumbled

then jumped off of the couch like he'd been stuck with a pin.

“Oh Principessa! Are you alright?!” He rushed into the kitchen. Cami had just stuffed more of the pancakes in her mouth.

“Fine.” She said around it. He answered his phone speaking Italian. Cami watched him gesture and nod before heading to the front door. Dylan

was right behind him. Cami heard him enter a security code into the alarm keypad then heard the voice.

“Disarmed, ready to arm.” The front door opened and there were voices.

Loud and growling voices, one of those growls belonged to Dylan. Mike was at her side instantly and shifting sensing danger. Cami finished her pancakes.

She was still chewing when they entered behind Dylan. He came to her side.

“How many of them are alphas?” She asked quietly.

“Apparently all of them are, so it must be interesting at their house at Christmas.” Cami giggled. “I don’t think that they mean you harm but be ready in case I’m wrong. Mike, would you care to join us?” He was standing at Dylan’s side in less than a second.

“Mario, introductions?” Mario stepped

from behind the huge wolves that were crowding into the kitchen. Cami didn't like the wall of men. They were all tall, all foreign, and all scary, as far as she was concerned.

“Can you ask them all to sit please? I'm claustrophobic.” Cami asked Mario.

“Of course, Principessa.” Several of the men gasped, they were murmuring

to each other and ignoring Mario's requests, several shook their heads.

Cami's lips pursed. Dylan snarled and the men sat down around the table.

Cami counted six, two more lingered in the hallway, they looked like soldiers.

The six at the table varied in age, one that looked to be nearly eighty must be the uncle she surmised. The five with him looked official in their black suits and ties. They were dressed like Will

Smith and Tommy Lee Jones in the alien movie. She certainly was not an alien! None of them spoke but all watched her with their black intense eyes.

“First off, I am not going to Italy. Second, I stay with my mate and third, you guys can find yourselves another Principessa and finally, whoever is doing the job right now can keep on doing it.” Mario translated and every

eye turned to watch her. “I mean no disrespect but that’s how I feel.” She tucked herself into Dylan’s side. The oldest man in the crowd said something then picked up what looked like a doctor’s bag from the floor.

“My great uncle Fredo would like to prick your finger Principessa to test it like I told you, is that okay?” Cami nodded and walked around the table

holding her finger out. The old man grabbed it and bit her.

“Hey asshole! That hurt.” Cami jerked her finger away. Dylan snarled again and was at her side instantly. The man murmured something and held out a small glass straw. Cami held her finger out again. “If you bite me again I will seriously mess you up buddy.” The old man laughed and held the glass straw out

to her finger, blood was draw up the cylinder. He fitted it with a rubber cap then pulled several vials out with different colored liquids in them then dropped a tiny bit of her blood into each one. He capped them all and shook them gently. His eyes narrowed and he clucked his tongue. “What’s that mean?” Cami looked at Mario who shrugged. The men huddled together and murmured, gesturing wildly.

“Our congratulations Miss, you are gestating.” The man named Fredo said.

“What the hell does that mean?”

Dylan scooped her up and held her tight, laughing. He kissed her soundly and laughed again.

“You’re pregnant.” Her face fell.

“I am? How can I be? I...” Her

jaw dropped and her eyes went round,
“I’m late.” Dylan grinned and Mike
slapped him on the back congratulating
him.

“Good job sweetness.” Dylan
turned to the old man, “Is she your
Princess or not?”

“Yes and no.” Dylan quirked an
eyebrow. “She is the Principessa
Oriana Teodora, which means sunrise

and gift of god. Her father gave her the name because she was born at dawn and she is a gift. She is who we thought she was, but she has said that she doesn't want to be the Principessa. She wants to remain with you, a commoner." He harrumphed and Dylan snarled again.

"She wishes to pass her duties on, is that right Oriana?"

"It's Cami and yeah, I don't want

any part of it. Who is doing whatever it was that you wanted me to do?"

“A second cousin. He is very capable, very fair, and well liked by the European pack union.” Cami made a face. “He asked that if you wished to refute your duties to convey his appreciation for you trusting him to rule in your place. Also, that if you ever find yourself in Venice, to please visit. If

you truly do not want to be the ruler, I must ask that you sign this document disavowing yourself as Principessa, but I must also inform you that once signed in blood it cannot be reversed. You should consider this at great length ‘Cami.’ There is great wealth and privilege with this position.” Cami was shaking her head.

“All I ever wanted as a child was

to have a stable home, to live in one place surrounded by people who loved me and to be in charge of my own life. If I was to go with you and live there, I think my life would no longer be my own. There would be many demands and I don't think that I would enjoy my life like I will here with my mate.” She reached for Dylan's hand and wove her fingers with his.

“You are correct on every count.”

Cami tucked herself into Dylan's side.

“It astounds me though that you have chosen a mate. It is unheard of for a Princess to mate a commoner. Mister Ellis, may I test your blood?” Dylan laughed.

“Yeah sure why not, but I'm biting my own damned finger.” The old man grinned showing huge gleaming white

canines. Dylan pricked his finger with a sharp tooth and held his finger out. The old wolf repeated his procedure and threw his hands in the air.

“Now it makes sense. You Mister Ellis are not an heir to any immediate throne but you are of royal blood.”

Dylan scoffed. “I make no jest your highness. I believe that you are descended from the Spanish throne, it is

diluted but it's there.” He pecked on the vial full of purple liquid with his fingernail. “ Purple is Spain, while blue is for Italy.” He held up the tube that Cami's blood went into. “We can see the lineage through the colors. You are probably the great grandchild of King Frutos, which means fertile by the way, he was never married, but he had hundreds of children in his lifetime. This explains why she accepted you as

her mate. You see, I am right.”

“No you were wrong, you said that I was a commoner and apparently I’m not. Moving on. Cami have you decided on your fate Darlin’?” She trembled.

“Yes, where do I sign kingdom and all of this nonsense away? Oh, if I do sign will that keep the bad people from hunting me?”

“Yes Principessa, we will ensure that word spreads that you have denounced the throne and will live out your life in America with your mate the commoner. There is no need for anyone to know that you will produce a child with royal blood from two countries. The rumor will say that your powers are shoddy at best and that you want nothing to do with the European Packs. In the

future though, this child that you carry will have the same rights to the throne, possibly in two countries, educate your children so that are not as lost as you have been.”

“Okay,” She held her finger up to Dylan who pierced it gently, fire alight in his eyes. Cami scrawled her name across the certificate. “I want a copy of that.” The man blew on the signature

until it was dried. Dylan took it to his office and photocopied it on his all in one printer then brought it back to Mario's uncle.

“Gentlemen, it's been educational but if you will excuse us, my mate and I have the future to discuss. As alpha of Fern Valley I encourage you to make your visit here short.” Dylan scowled at them. There were several nods and they

stood up at once together. Mario shook Dylan's hand then followed them outside. Dylan locked the door behind them.

“Later Dyl, if you need me call, I'm going to the cabin for a nap. This has been way too intense for me and it was late when the old guy finally passed out.” Mike slid the patio door closed behind him and Dylan armed the alarm

system.

“Now about that maple syrup.”

He murmured against Cami’s neck, she giggled and broke free from his grasp.

Racing down the hall toward the bedroom giggling she called over her shoulder, “You have to catch me first.” Dylan snatched up the syrup and followed her.

Epilogue

Cami never regretted her decision to remain with Dylan. They married immediately after the Italian invasion, as she called it and took to her duties as the female alpha like the royalty that she was. She gave Dylan many children and the people involved in her parent's deaths never threatened them. Dylan and Cami share who holds the alpha position

at home with their little pack which is common among royals but they never knew that was why. Cami always felt that sometimes a girl just needs to be in charge.