



DEEP LOVE

CHRISTINE DEPETRILLO

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Moon Valley Packs

Christine DePetrillo

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Dedication

To loving deeply while we're here ...

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Chapter One

Delphi

“If you want to keep those hands, you’ll take them off me right now.” I jerked my arms, succeeding only in sending streaks of pain through both of them as my captors tightened their grips.

“If you could actually make good on that threat, you would have by now,” the goon on my left said. “Time to face the facts, honey. Your power sifts out of you the farther we get from Seraphia. You don’t have the juice to harm a mosquito.”

“And that’s unfortunate,” Goon #2 on my right said, “because it’s mosquito season where you’re going.”

“Look, fellas, this has all been a misunderstanding, and I hate that your precious time has been wasted.” Maybe a little sweetness would get me out of this predicament. “How about you take me back to home base? I’m convinced we can get to the bottom of this mistake—”

“Mistake?” Goon #1 released a braying sound that could have been a laugh. “Since when does she make mistakes?” He looked around me to his partner. “Zeff, do you remember her ever casting anyone out that didn’t deserve to be cast out?”

“Never happened on my watch because it never happens, Criston,” Zeff said.

“Well, there’s a first time for everything, isn’t there?” I relaxed my body, hoping that if they didn’t think I would fight them, these burly soldiers of hers would loosen their sausage fingers around my arms. They were going to leave a mark if they held me with that much force for much longer.

And the bastards were right, of course. My power was at a mere fraction of what it had been and with each step we took away from Seraphia, more dripped out of me and the more human I became. The more likely their hold on my arms would leave bruises too. I could actually see the Chosen City’s borders now, and once I crossed that boundary, there would be only one way to get back in.

I had to die.

Again.

I'd done that once, and I have to be honest, not a fun time was had. Zero stars. Would not recommend. Though what had come after dying had been fan-fucking-tastic. The Sun Goddess, Solari, had welcomed my soul to Seraphia with the warmest embrace. I had been bathed in so much love, it'd been overwhelming at first.

Then my heart soaked it all in and a peace I'd never felt in my human life filled me. I'd been living in the Chosen City in a perpetually blissful state since then.

But someone shattered that bliss by setting me up. I absolutely would not do anything to get myself kicked out of such a perfect place. Only an idiot would risk losing something so beautiful, and I was no idiot.

"Yeah, you are," Zeff said.

"What?" I'd almost forgotten he and Criston were still dragging me toward the exit door.

"You said you were no idiot," Criston said. "We're confirming that, yes, in fact, you are."

"Fuck you both."

"The only soul here that's fucked is yours, sweetheart." Criston shook his head. "Why did you do it?"

"I told you I didn't do it. I wouldn't. Never ever."

"You expect us to believe you didn't re-route all those souls?" Zeff actually stopped walking to look at me, so Criston stopped as well. Neither of them let up on their lobster-claw grips, however.

"Why would I re-route a bunch of souls from a trainwreck?" I asked. "I would never deny a soul entry to Seraphia. I'm there to welcome the souls just as Solari did when I arrived, and you know what? I loved hugging each and every one of them. It makes no sense that I'd send innocent and deserving souls in the other direction." I pointed downward then shivered.

“You have stuck to your story that you were framed,” Zeff said.

“That’s because it isn’t a story.” I actually stomped my foot like a child. “Seraphia is supposed to be all truth and justice and love and light.” I shook my head. “Being accused of something I did not do, being banished over an infraction I did not commit, puts a big ol’ hole in the perfection, doesn’t it?”

“Once we get rid of you,” Criston said, “Seraphia will be perfect again.”

“No, it won’t because you’re getting rid of the wrong soul. The soul who *did* incorrectly send those souls downtown will still be in your precious realm, and who knows what other damage a chaotic soul like that will cause.”

Zeff took up our march to the city limits again, Criston matching his pace on my other side.

“You two are brick walls,” I muttered.

“Thank you.” Zeff puffed out his chest.

“It wasn’t a compliment.”

The border drew closer and closer. This wasn’t the way I’d entered Seraphia upon my death. Instead, we were at some shady back exit reserved for degenerate souls like me.

Only I wasn’t a degenerate soul.

Someone still in Seraphia was, and my only comfort right now was that at some point, Solari would see the massive error she’d made in ousting me. The real soul re-router was a bad seed, and bad seeds couldn’t last in Seraphia.

I was surprised Solari didn’t know who the real culprit was. She was, after all, a goddess with more power than anyone. Everything else in creation was beneath her level. Shouldn’t Solari have been able to see into all the souls in Seraphia and weed out the wrongdoer?

Why should I be sent packing when all I’d ever done was follow orders and enjoy Seraphia?

We finally reached the border, and I was out of delay tactics. This was it.

“Do you understand any attempt to end your second Earthly life prematurely will result in you being denied entry to Seraphia?” Criston asked.

“I’m not going to kill myself.” I pulled free, surprised they had both let go of me, but where could I go? I’d never outrun them, not with my powers nearly gone. A heart already beat in my chest, lungs expanded and contracted with the normal rhythm of breathing, and a contained feeling surrounded me as my soul generated the final details of the human body I’d be stuck in back on Earth. “Though I’m not sure I want to come back here if this is the treatment perfectly innocent souls get.”

Zeff turned me around to face the exit, a plain, white door with a simple, silver knob. Pretty nondescript for the exit from such a monumental place.

“Let’s see ’em, Delphi,” Zeff said.

“I’m not showing you my boobs before I go, Zeff.” I turned back to face them and folded my arms across my chest.

Criston rolled his golden eyes. “We don’t want to see your boobs, Delphi.”

I knew that. Another delay tactic that hadn’t worked.

“Can’t I keep them, boys? Pretty please?” I clasped my hands under my chin. “I’ve grown attached to them.”

“Rules are rules,” Zeff said. “Let’s go.”

A defeated breath whooshed out of me and I let my wings extend from my back. They were such pretty wings, white with lavender tips, and the idea of not having them anymore made my now-human chest ache.

“Wow,” Criston said. “Those are gorgeous. What a shame you have to lose them.”

“Right?” I folded my wings back toward my body. “How about we file the paperwork saying you did take them, but you fellas let me keep them instead? I won’t tell if you won’t.”

Zeff shook his head. “You know we can’t send you back to Earth with angel wings.”

“Let’s not send me back to Earth then,” I said. “Problem solved.” Retracting my wings nearly all the way, I marched toward the two thugs, intent on passing between them and heading back to Seraphia.

Criston snagged a feather on the tip of my right wing, plucking it out completely, while Zeff grabbed my arm and yanked me back toward the exit door.

“C’mon, boys,” I said. “Do you want to be responsible for kicking out the wrong soul?”

“More than we want to be responsible for going against Solari’s orders,” Criston said.

“Yeah, we don’t want to be escorted through this door too,” Zeff said.

I lowered my chin to my chest. “There’s no way out of this, is there?”

For a split second, empathy flashed in these two guards’ eyes, but then it vanished and Zeff gestured to me.

“Your wings. Let’s have them,” he said.

Slowly, I unfurled my wings again to their full span. Criston and Zeff both raised their right hands, and in the next moment, my wings were engulfed in flames, those lavender tips turning to gray ash almost instantly. I braced myself as the fire raced closer to my body, but the flames winked out as quickly as they had appeared.

My wings were decimated. I couldn’t see for sure, but I felt it.

Zeff stepped around me and opened the exit door. “Delphi, you are hereby banished from Seraphia until your human life comes to an end. Only then shall your soul be tried again. If you’ve lived to the best of your ability with love and kindness in your heart, Solari shall welcome your soul home.”

“If not,” Criston said, “you shall get a one-way ticket downstairs where your soul will suffer for all eternity.”

A shudder rippled through me as I turned and faced the open door, just standing there and dreading what was on the other side.

“It’s better if you take that first step yourself,” Zeff said.

“But we will push you if it comes to that,” Criston added.

I glanced at them over my shoulder. “*When* I come back to Seraphia, you two will still be at the top of my shit list.”

“That’s fair,” Criston said.

I chucked them both a middle finger and walked across the threshold. I expected re-entry to Earth to be like descending a staircase or something.

Nope.

That first step led me into a freefall in which I plummeted for-fucking-ever until my body slammed to the ground. The wind was knocked out of me and I struggled to take in a breath, but once I did, the next breath followed easily as did the one after that. I peeled myself off what appeared to be a grassy field and swiped at a smudge of blood on the palm of my hand where I hit a rock or something. More blood pooled at the cut and I was reminded of how much being a human sucked. Such fragile creatures. I hadn’t bled in ages. Hadn’t had a cold. No headaches or pulled muscles. Nothing. Now I was susceptible once again to that and much more.

I rose to my feet and brushed dirt and leaves from the jeans and T-shirt I was wearing. At least Solari found it in her heart to not drop me down here naked. It also appeared I wasn’t starting from being a newborn human. From the looks of it and how I felt in this skin, I was beginning this round of Earth-dwelling at about age thirty.

And I also remembered the last time I was here. Like every detail of my previous life was right there on file in my brain. Solari was going to let me pick up where I’d left off? Odd.

I didn’t immediately recognize where I’d landed, but everything was green and a warm breeze blew through the field around me. I recalled Criston saying it was mosquito season on Earth. My past experiences equated mosquitoes with

summertime, and both the fact that everything appeared to be in bloom and the temperatures were mild led me to believe the summer season was in full swing here.

But where is here?

If Solari had truly dumped me back into my old life, then I should be in Vermont. Moon Valley, specifically, but how much time had I spent in Seraphia? And did time pass the same way there as it did on Earth? And why did I remember my past life and my time in Seraphia? Shouldn't the slate have been wiped clean?

I wouldn't get the answers to any of these questions unless I traveled beyond this field, so I picked a direction and started walking. The wildflowers around me perfumed the air and birds sang in the nearby trees, making me believe with every step that this was my beloved Vermont. Until I'd seen Seraphia, Vermont had been my top favorite place and I'd enjoyed my time in the state.

Before my untimely exit.

I guess that was a running theme for me. Untimely exits from places I didn't want to leave. The first exit, the one that had made me exit Earth, had been due to a horrible car accident. I'd gotten caught in a flash snowstorm that had created whiteout conditions. Snow had accumulated so fast on the road that even people who had spent lifetimes perfecting their winter weather driving had found their skills lacking. My vehicle had been launched into a slide that had sent it directly off a highway bridge. I'd crash-landed on the road below it, and though my body had sustained life-threatening injuries, what had actually done me in was the heart attack I'd had on the way down.

At least that was what Solari had told me right before she'd erased all memories of my first human life upon entrance to Seraphia.

The second exit, the one that had led me out of Seraphia, had been a mistake. I never re-routed any souls. I'd swear this second life on it.

Goddess, I hoped there wouldn't be a third exit that brought more unpleasantness.

I kept walking, the sun beating down on my back. Below my shoulders itched like crazy, and when I slipped my hand under my T-shirt, my fingertips ran across puckered skin.

Where my wings used to be.

Why couldn't the remnants of my angel life in Seraphia have been lingering power instead of wing scars? Solari sure knew how to dole out a punishment that hurt deep. With these scars, I had zero hope of forgetting I was once an angel and living in the most perfect place.

After walking for what felt like endless miles, I finally stumbled upon a collection of houses. Assuming I'd hit a neighborhood, I kept walking until I found myself on a dirt road. I considered stopping at one of the houses to ask where I was, but that would no doubt seem suspicious and how would I explain myself?

Hi. I'm Delphi. I died and became an angel, but I was kicked out of that perfect realm. Want to see my wing scars?

I huffed out a breath and kept walking. My feet were aching as another reminder I was no longer an angel, no longer a pure soul, no longer a resident of Seraphia.

I was a human.

On Earth.

With no clue what I was supposed to do here.

If I had returned as a newborn, at least I would have been born into a family who was bound to take care of me. Being an adult meant I had to figure this shit out on my own.

“Okay, basic necessities,” I said aloud. “I need a shelter, food, water. If Earth still works the same way as when I was here before, I'll need money before I can get any of those other things.”

Deciding I had to start with a job, I walked until I came upon a street filled with shops, restaurants, and businesses. While many of the establishments were unfamiliar, I found

one I recognized. Moose's Diner, still claiming to have the Best Burgers This Side of Burlington and confirming I was indeed in Moon Valley, Vermont. I'd frequented this diner during my first round on Earth, and the fact that Solari had given me this tidbit from my past had to mean that was where I would start on my future.

As I neared the diner, a sign in the window caught my attention.

Help Wanted. Waitstaff needed. Inquire within.

I'd been a teacher in my previous life, but apparently my calling this time was to feed the masses the best burgers this side of Burlington.

Chapter Two

Mason

“For fuck’s sake, guys.” I tripped over the empty beer cans and bottles littering the floor of the Ferguson packhouse. Every weekend the state of this place grew worse. I’d been a member of this pack since birth because my mother was a Ferguson, but sometimes I wish I’d been raised by the Harrister pack, my father’s pack, in New York. I loved Moon Valley, Vermont and most aspects of my werewolf existence, but watching nearly all my pack get shitfaced on a regular basis was getting so old.

And it took a massive amount of alcohol or drugs to bring werewolves down like this. That meant these fools were tossing back ridiculous quantities.

“Loosen up, Mason.” My cousin, Gary, lounged on a leather couch. “We’ll clean it up once we’re feet on our stable.” He paused, his mouth turning down in a frown. “I mean stable on our feet.”

My other cousin, Scott, laughed. “Whenever that might be. We hit it hard last night, bro.”

“Clearly.” I waved my arms around at the absolute mess. “You guys have to cut back. Seriously. This level of partying doesn’t move us forward as a pack.”

“Oh, here he goes,” Gary groaned. “Mason’s Future of the Ferguson speech, part nine thousand.” He rolled his eyes then draped his arm over his forehead. “Dude, you need to party more and worry less.”

“How can I when I’m the only one worrying about this pack?” I bent and picked up several cans and headed for the kitchen to get the recycling bin and some trash bags. “You all complain about how successful the Sinclaire pack is, but do you honestly think they got to be top dogs by consuming large amounts of beer and then taking an entire day to recover?”

I’d been watching Archer Sinclaire closely. That wolf led his pack like a true leader, like someone who actually understood what it meant to be a werewolf trying to make the

most of a human-dominated world. His wolves had good jobs, responded to threats in timely manners, recovered when their Alpha had been killed, and were well respected in the community. I wanted that for the Ferguson pack, but that wasn't going to happen when my family acted like eternal college students at a never-ending frat party.

I proceeded to clean up the packhouse mess alone then found my sister, Sylvie, in the office, a scowl on her face as she stared at the laptop in front of her.

“Hey.” I sat in the chair opposite the desk where she sat. “You see those slob out there?” I arched a thumb to where Gary and Scott and basically three-fourths of the pack were sleeping off massive hangovers.

“I did.” Sylvie rubbed her eyes. “I keep waiting for them to grow the fuck up, but it never happens.”

“We will never be a pack of any substance if they don't shape up.” I dug my fingers into my temples, trying to alleviate the headache that had started the moment I'd set foot in the packhouse. Werewolves didn't typically get headaches so that was a clear indication of how annoyed I was with my pack mates.

Sylvie waved a hand at the laptop screen. “Ferguson Construction isn't going to last much longer if they don't shape up either. They are working at a snail's pace. I mean, a pack of wolves ought to be able to run circles around humans, but these guys are too sloshed most of the time to even show up to work at build sites.” She shook her head. “How can I actively pursue getting them more contracts when they are doing shit jobs on the contracts we currently have?”

I leaned my elbows on my knees. “When did this pack become such a disgrace?”

Sylvie shrugged. “It's been a shitshow ever since I can remember. Our last Alpha way back when screwed us by not having any heirs. The fact that no Alpha has risen to the surface in the absence of a direct heir doesn't help us any either.” She eyed me with a purposeful stare.

I instantly put up my hands. “I’m not the Alpha, Sylvie. We’ve discussed this. No one listens to me in this pack. How can I possibly take charge of it?”

“But if you declared yourself Alpha, the rest of the beasts would *have* to listen to you.”

This wasn’t the first time I’d had—or avoided—this conversation with my sister. I wasn’t an Alpha. Our father hadn’t been an Alpha nor had our mother. I was a regular, run-of-the-mill werewolf, destined to contribute to the pack, but definitely not lead it.

That didn’t stop me from wanting better for the Ferguson pack though.

“I’m not a leader, Sylvie.” I leaned back in my chair.

“You’re the guy with all the great ideas,” she said. “That sounds like a leader to me, and a hell of a lot better than what we’ve currently got, which is absolutely nothing. We have no direction, no ambition, no shot at being anything more than a loose collection of wolves who get wasted together.”

My hands tightened on the armrests of my seat. “There’s no reason we can’t be like the Sinclaire pack.”

Sylvie barked out a laugh. “You aim too high, brother. I’d settle for a pack that didn’t stumble around the packhouse in the middle of the goddamn day when most of them are supposed to be out building shit.”

I glanced to the clock on the wall behind Sylvie. “Speaking of where one is supposed to be, I have to go to work.”

“See?” Sylvie called after me as I made my way to the door. “You’re a responsible wolf who fulfills his commitments.” She flashed me a smile when I glared back at her over my shoulder. “Sounds like Alpha material to me.”

I waved a dismissive hand and continued on my way back to the main area of the packhouse where loud snoring echoed off the damn walls. Grumbling to myself, I left the slumbering idiots and climbed into my pickup truck. I spent a few seconds staring out the windshield at the packhouse and imagining taking charge of the pack.

Jerks like Gary and Scott would never respond to my leadership, despite what Sylvie believed. The pack was full of Garys and Scotts too, so I'd be fighting a losing battle in trying to become Alpha and establish some organization to the floundering werewolves. I kept hoping one of the them would step up as they actually sported the last name Ferguson, but they were all more interested in where they were getting their next drinks or drugs than where the pack was headed. I had no idea how to make them see their behaviors would eventually destroy the pack.

Maybe they just didn't care. Perhaps I didn't either. Being a member of this pack had never brought me anything worthwhile. These wolves wouldn't have my back if I needed them. They could barely take care of themselves, never mind look after the pack at large. Possibly the time for me to strike out on my own had come, though the idea of being a rogue wolf not tied to any pack was not attractive. Rogue wolves rarely lasted long. Despite werewolves having extended lifespans, rogue wolves often found themselves in trouble without the backing of a real pack. Most often, they ended up dead long before their time should have been up.

Though I had considered leaving the pack once. When I'd had someone I'd wanted to share a life with more than I'd wanted to be a part of a pack.

But that was before.

I squeezed my eyes shut, fighting off the memories threatening to flood into my mind. Today, this pack frustrated me to no end, but that didn't mean I was ready to go completely solo. I didn't mind being a werewolf and usually felt most comfortable in my wolf form, but whenever we encountered other wolves in town, I tried at all costs to avoid admitting I was part of the Ferguson pack. A wolf was supposed to be proud of his heritage. The more I saw of my own pack, however, the less I found to make me honored to be a member.

As I drove into town, I thought about my time in the military. Now *those* brothers knew how to have each other's backs without question. I'd never had any doubts that my

Army buddies would give their lives to make sure we all made it out of a situation alive. Too bad I hadn't been able to stay in the military because I'd truly belonged there. All it had taken was one quick healing from a bullet to my back for the questions from the doctors and my commanding officers to start. I'd opened the wound three times to prolong my stay in the hospital, but that wasn't a sustainable strategy.

So I'd played the PTSD card and pretended to be so fucked up by the bullet wound that I couldn't perform the duties of an Army soldier anymore. Made it out with an honorable discharge, but it didn't feel honorable to me. It felt like being a werewolf was denying me of any real happiness in the world.

That, of course, was bullshit. Being a werewolf had many perks I wouldn't trade to be a regular human. The fact that the bullet wound I'd received hadn't left any permanent damage was only one example. Still, it would have been nice to remain in the Army and be surrounded by competent adults who didn't drink themselves into oblivion.

Besides, my real happiness had been stolen by other means that had nothing to do with being a werewolf.

I arrived at Moose's Diner and parked my pickup in its usual spot near the dumpster. Sylvie would say my truck belonged *in* the dumpster, but I loved the old girl and she hadn't let me down yet. She'd survived many a Vermont winter, needing nothing more than the regular oil change and new tires every once in a while.

I gave her a love tap then walked to the back door of the diner. The air smelled like barbecue sauce and fries, fragrances I preferred over the alcohol-and-body-odor stench of the Ferguson packhouse. I sniffed at my own shirt, forever hoping that stink hadn't stuck to me. I should probably stop going to the packhouse altogether, but a part of me worried if I didn't, my cousins would get more out of control. I was pretty sure my lectures were the only thing that reined them in a little.

Or at least made them check their behavior a bit to avoid hearing my lectures. Plus, Sylvie was stuck there at the packhouse as she tried her best to run the business end of

Ferguson Construction. I had to visit if only to lend her moral support.

I pulled the diner's back door open and stepped in to find Claude, the chef on shift before me, prepping the station for the dinner crowd. Even the staff at the diner was more supportive than my own pack.

"Thanks, man." I shoved my keys into the front pocket of my jeans and grabbed my chef's coat off the hook by the door.

"No problem, *mon ami*." Claude rinsed a knife at the sink then wiped his hands. "It's been slow all day so I figured I'd give you a head start." He put his hands on his hips as he looked at me. "Which it looks like you could use. More family troubles?"

Claude didn't know my family was comprised of werewolves, but I'd told him enough tales of my drunken and stoned cousins that he knew they were royal pains in my ass.

"Found the lot of them basically passed out from their partying last night." I stepped up to the sink and scrubbed my hands, letting the hot water wash away some of my irritation. At least the next several hours would feel purposeful as I whipped up food for the good citizens of and visitors to Moon Valley.

"Maybe you need to let them all fail miserably," Claude said. "Perhaps then they will learn the lesson that they need to grow up."

"You know, Claude, that's the point I'm at," I said. "If they don't care, why should I?"

"Every man for himself."

Technically, it was every *wolf* for himself, but the sentiment was the same.

Claude squeezed my shoulders then gave my back a hearty pat. "Okay, chef, I'm out of here. Penelope is coming over tonight and I need time to not smell like diner food."

"Hey, chicks like diner food, don't they?"

"Not this chick," Claude said. "She's classy."

“What’s she doing with you then?”

Claude chucked me a middle finger then removed his chef’s coat and tossed it in the laundry bin by the office. “Happy cooking, Mason.” He opened the back door and stepped out, but he came back a moment later. “I forgot to tell you that Jessica is interviewing someone for waitstaff in the office. She’s only to be interrupted if someone cuts off something important in the kitchen or a zombie invasion blows through the dining area.”

“Roger that.” I saluted him then shot a glance to the closed office door. I seriously hoped Jessica had a winner in there. The last three people she’d hired for waitstaff had turned out to be total flakes with zero common sense. The one from last week had spilled an entire tray of entrées.

On a customer.

The noise alone had been ridiculous. To then see a customer covered in chili, chicken fingers, and cheddar broccoli soup had been a disaster. When the waitress had burst into tears and run from the diner, I’d had to swoop in to clean up. Thanks to all my experience cleaning the Ferguson packhouse, I had the scene spotless in no time. A free meal certificate had been offered to the customer and he’d left with a promise that all had been forgiven.

“Are there no competent waiters out there?” Jessica had asked me after the diner had closed. She’d marched to her office then had backtracked to me. “Thanks for cleaning that up and smoothing things over, by the way. You were so good with that customer. Why aren’t there more of you that I could hire for the empty waitstaff positions?”

Who did she have in her office now? Whoever it was better have some experience in this business. Not everyone was cut out to work in food service. I didn’t know if being a chef was my calling, but I was a decent cook and I enjoyed coming up with new recipes, experimenting with different flavor combinations and ingredients. This job had turned out to be a good place to land after my discharge from the military. I hadn’t expected to still be here five years later, but I didn’t

need a ton of money as a single guy in his early thirties. Just enough to keep myself afloat.

The first orders of the dinner crowd hit the kitchen so I dove into filling those. Claude had said the day had been slow, but the evening was humming and I stayed busy, flipping burgers, grilling chicken, and cooking up whatever customers ordered from the menu.

I barely noticed when Jessica's door finally opened and she stepped out.

I dropped the knife in my hand, however, when another woman exited the office behind her.

Chapter Three

Delphi

Mason Harrister. I was staring at Mason Harrister in the kitchen of Moose's Diner. That wild brown hair and those sky-blue eyes were the same, but the dark beard framing his mouth was new. And hot. Very hot. And why did he look so yummy in that chef's coat?

Why was he wearing a chef's coat?

"Oh, great, Mason, you're here now." Jessica made a beeline for him, motioning for me to follow her. "I want to introduce you to our new waitress, Delphi—"

"Adamo," he finished. "Delphi Adamo."

I held my breath, waiting for him to say, *But you died six years ago*. When he met my gaze, however, I saw he wasn't planning to get hysterical. That was so Mason Harrister. Ever the calming presence in the room.

At least that was what he'd always been for me.

But still, shouldn't seeing someone he'd thought to be dead—someone he'd claimed to love—freak him out at least a little? What was he? A robot?

"Oh, you two know each other?" Jessica split a glance between the two of us. "Super. I guess that takes care of that then." She rubbed her hands together. "Delphi is ready to start right away so I'm going to grab her an official Moose's Diner T-shirt." She turned to face me. "If you have any questions, Mason's the guy to ask. He knows this place as well as I do, maybe better." She shot Mason a smile. "He's also the nicest person here."

That definitely sounded like the Mason I remembered from my first life here.

"Be right back with that T-shirt." Jessica walked off toward a door at the other end of the kitchen, leaving Mason and I gaping at each other.

Say something. But I wasn't sure if I wanted him or me to say something.

“How . . . how are you here?” Mason's dark brows crinkled.

“Mason, you wouldn't believe me if I told you.” That was the truth. My return trip to Earth was the stuff of paranormal books and movies, not real life.

After picking up the knife he'd dropped and setting it on a counter, he took several steps closer, his left hand slowly rising. When his fingertips brushed against my arm, he jumped back.

“Fuck. You're real. I'd convinced myself that I was dreaming.”

“Because you dream of me often?” I'd meant the comment to be light and funny, but Mason's face grew serious.

“All the time, Delphi.” His voice was a whisper. “All the time.”

My throat instantly stung and I wanted nothing more than to run to him and have his arms around me again, but Jessica bounded back over. The woman was seriously excited to have hired me. I hoped I turned out to be a halfway decent waitress for her.

“Here you go.” She waved the T-shirt like a flag then tossed it to me.

I caught the shirt and put it on over the T-shirt I was wearing.

“Now jeans are fine for pants to wear to work,” Jessica said, “but make sure they are clean and you always wear the T-shirt. You can have two more shirts to take home with you so you can get them into your laundry rotation.” She grabbed a pad and a pen and handed them to me. “Some restaurants have switched over to digital technology for taking orders, but I've always found pen and paper never freezes up on you or needs updates or any of that nonsense.”

I took the pad and pen. “Works for me.”

“Super.” She looked at Mason then at me again. “So how do you two know each other?”

We used to be in love. Then I died.

“We’re old friends,” Mason said, “who have a ton of catching up to do.”

“Oh, fun! But no catching up until your shifts are done.” Jessica grabbed me by the wrist and dragged me to the doors that led to the main dining area. “Okay, take section five in the corner over there.” She pointed to a set of booths I knew well from when I used to come here—often with Mason. “It’s pretty busy tonight so try not to get flustered. Smile, converse with the diners, take their orders, and try not to drop anything on them.” She shot a look to Mason and they both rolled their eyes.

“Got it.” With a quick peek back at Mason, I pushed open the doors and headed for section five. I was on the move all night, but that was good because it gave me less time to worry about what I would tell Mason about my miraculous reappearance. I’d been so rattled about getting kicked out of Seraphia—for reasons that were not my own doing—that I hadn’t considered that I’d run into people who knew me from before I’d died.

My parents didn’t live in Vermont so I’d figured I had some time to deal with them, if I even decided to tell them I was back. We hadn’t been all that close, and sure, my sudden death had probably been a blow to them, but did I want to spark up a relationship that had always been a little one-sided?

Not at all like the relationship I’d had with Mason. He’d been a giver in every sense of the word. And judging by the scrumptious-smelling and beautiful food Mason cooked up in that kitchen, he gave people some delicious gifts to eat.

Finally, the last of the customers paid their bills and wandered out into the night, leaving only staff to clean up, prep for tomorrow, and close up. While I was filling the salt and pepper shakers at the diner’s small bar area, Jessica came out and slid a key on a keychain shaped like the state of Vermont across the wooden top.

“That’s for the apartment I told you about,” she said. “I’ve been renting it out, but it’s currently open, so it’s yours. I’ll mark it as taken online, and you can stay until you find something you like better.”

“I don’t have any money for a down payment or rent right now,” I admitted, glad it was only the two of us in earshot but wondering if Mason was still in the kitchen.

Jessica waved a hand. “Not a problem. You were a fabulous waitress tonight, so how about I deduct a little from your paycheck each week to put toward rent?”

“That would work out great,” I said. “You said Mason was the nicest person here, but he has some competition.”

“Actually, he’s rubbed off on me.” She chuckled as she screwed the tops onto the shakers I’d filled. “Hiring him was the best thing I’ve ever done here. He’s never late, he keeps a neat kitchen, the man can cook, and I’m pretty sure that ninety-percent of our female patrons come to get a peek at him.”

That made sense. Mason had always been easy on the eyes and from what I’d seen today, he’d only gotten better looking. I hadn’t been able to keep tabs on him or anyone else I’d known while in Seraphia. A common misconception after you died was that you spent eternity looking after your loved ones. Not so. Death severed those ties, and if you were lucky, you entered a state of nonstop bliss in the Chosen City.

If you weren’t lucky, you went to a place that served up terror and torture instead. Either way, your connection to those you knew in life was not maintained. You didn’t feel bad about it because you were either focused on the extreme peace and love and perfection of Seraphia or you were enduring too much pain and suffering to care about anything else.

And apparently, if you were kicked out of Seraphia and returned to the life you’d been living before your death, all your memories were restored. As I’d been waiting tables all night, little tidbits of my time with Mason had been flashing through my mind.

Like that night we spent on a sailboat on Lake Champlain, our fifth date but the first time we'd been intimate. I'd lost my virginity to Mason, and he'd somehow managed to be both gentle with me and rock my world at the same time.

Like that camping trip we'd gone on in Maine where we'd had an up close and personal encounter with a black bear and had lived to tell the story.

Like that fancy date we'd had in New York City where we'd met Austin Rayhill, our favorite action-adventure movie star. We'd gotten an autograph and a photo with Austin and his wife, Charlie, that we'd printed, framed, and hung in Mason's little cabin on Rodgers Lake.

Like saying goodbye to Mason when he'd joined the Army and crying myself to sleep for nearly a month afterward.

Like Mason surprising me by having huge bunches of tulips delivered to the school I'd taught at every hour on the hour on my birthday because he couldn't be with me in person.

Like the beautifully mundane evenings we'd shared in Moon Valley, planning our futures together.

Until I'd gotten into that car accident and been robbed of said future with the man I loved more than anyone in the world.

But I'm back now.

Had Solari made a miscalculation in where and when she'd sent me? Wasn't getting booted from Seraphia and being sent back to Earth supposed to be a punishment?

For something I didn't do.

Seeing Mason again, however, felt like the polar opposite of a punishment. It felt like a second chance.

"Is Mason with anyone?" I asked Jessica.

"Like married?" Jessica shook her head. "No. He hasn't had a girlfriend since I've known him. I've tried to set him up with my younger sister, Emily, but he's declined every time. I thought maybe he was into guys instead, but he didn't want

me to set him up with my gay cousin, Edward, either.” She shrugged then her eyes bugged. “OMG! Has he not dated anyone else because he was waiting for you to return?” She clasped her hands and brought them up to her chest. “That would be the absolutely sweetest thing and so like Mason actually.”

I stared at Jessica, her speculation cycling around in my brain. Was it possible that Mason hadn’t moved on? Had he chosen to be alone over being with someone who wasn’t me?

We had been pretty serious. Talked about marriage after Mason completed his first tour of duty with the Army. We’d never done more than talking about marriage though. I’d died while he was on the other side of the world.

Had he been grieving the loss of me all this time?

Part of me liked that he hadn’t found someone else, but another part—a bigger part—was heartbroken he’d been stagnant in his personal life.

“So?” Jessica’s voice brought me out of my musings. “Where you and Mason an item?”

“Uhh . . . yeah.” I saw no reason to lie to Jessica, especially since she had been so kind to me by hiring me on the spot *and* giving me a place to crash. “We were pretty close.”

“What happened to break you two up?” Jessica leaned forward on her elbows as if ready to gobble up a juicy secret.

Of course I couldn’t tell her the truth. I’d already lied to her about why I had no identification on me.

“I was mugged,” I’d told her during my interview. “Thief took my purse. I’m in the process of getting a new I.D.” Which I guess I actually had to do, but I hadn’t figured out how yet because Delphi Adamo of Moon Valley, Vermont had a gravestone in Withers Memorial Cemetery.

“Mason joined the military,” I said. “And I was here. The long distance thing didn’t work out.” Not a total lie. Seraphia *was* a long distance from Vermont.

“But now you’re back, and he’s not in the military anymore.” Jessica’s face was full of eagerness.

“Why isn’t he in the military anymore?” Hadn’t Mason been planning to make a career of service as his father had? We’d had many conversations about living on bases and me getting teaching jobs on bases too.

Jessica squinted toward the kitchen as if making sure Mason wasn’t around. “From what I can piece together because our dear Mason can be a bit of a vault, he was injured in active duty.”

My heart instantly squeezed at hearing Mason had been hurt. Clearly, he’d survived, but if the injury had been what had stolen his dream of being career military, I ached for him.

“He returned here to Moon Valley, stumbled around for a while doing odd jobs in town, then one day he was having lunch here at the diner,” Jessica said, a faint smile tilting up her lips. “My chef at that time sucked eggs and a customer told him so. He ended up marching out during his shift, leaving Moose’s Diner with no chef on a busy-as-shit Saturday.” She shook her head. “I was panicked because I don’t cook at all. I mean, I can screw up toast, Delphi. Honestly. But Mason rose from his seat, strode into the kitchen, and picked up where my previous chef had left off. He saved the freaking day and I begged him to work here.”

“And he accepted?”

“No. It took me a solid month of begging.” She laughed. “I’m pretty sure he only agreed to work here to shut me up.” She slapped her palms onto the bar top. “I don’t care what made him agree though. Aside from being a real peach of a human being, his cooking skills have brought this diner up several notches.”

“I do remember Mason being a good cook,” I said. “He was always toying around in the kitchen. I enjoyed being his taste tester.”

Jessica tagged my forearm. “Maybe you can get that job back.”

I glanced over my shoulder toward the kitchen. “Maybe.”

The man hadn’t completely lost his shit over seeing me risen from the grave, and I’d caught him watching me a few times throughout our shift together. Actually, I’d *felt* him watching me, and I’d liked it. Perhaps he would believe the real story of how I’d come to be back here.

Possibly we could be together as we’d always planned.

The man in question came through the swinging kitchen door and gave Jessica and me a quick smile.

“That group at table four said your pork and apple salsa was orgasmic,” Jessica said to him, causing Mason’s cheeks to color.

Goddess, he’s adorable.

I’d always thought so, but Mason Harrister was also a big ol’ slice of sexy. Especially when those beautiful blue eyes of his were directed my way. Sure, they were full of questions right now, but I easily recalled how they deepened to a midnight blue when he was naked and panting my name.

My cheeks were no doubt colored now too.

Jessica slid her gaze from Mason to me and back to Mason. “Okay, kids. I’m going to catch up on some paperwork in my office. I’ll see you both tomorrow. Thanks again, Delphi, for being a competent waitress.” With that she made herself scarce, leaving Mason and me staring at each other.

“Can we . . . talk?” Mason asked.

“Of course.” I picked up the key Jessica had left with me. “I’m staying at Jessica’s rental apartment.”

“Okay.” Mason ducked into the kitchen while I set the last of the salt and pepper shakers on a tray to be ready for the tables tomorrow. When he returned, he had a small box that he held up. “I saved us two pieces of blueberry pie. It used to be ___”

“My favorite.” I took a few steps closer to him, taking the box from him. “It still is.”

“Good.” He stepped aside, opened the kitchen door, and motioned for me to go ahead of him, ever the perfect gentleman.

We didn't speak as we exited the back door of the diner and walked the short distance to Jessica's rental apartment. I let us inside and closed the door, setting the pie box on a small table nearby.

When I turned back around, Mason pulled me into a hug and as I breathed him in, I forgot all about the bliss I'd felt in Seraphia.

Chapter Four

Mason

This. This right here. It was everything.

Wrapping my arms around Delphi was all I'd wanted to do throughout our entire shift together at the diner. The need to feel her body pressed against mine again was instinctual. I'd spent the years she'd been gone wishing she hadn't gotten into that car accident. Wishing I'd been around to drive her wherever she'd been going that night. Wishing I hadn't spent so much time away from her while I was in the Army.

Wishing I'd married her when I'd had the chance.

And now, by some stroke of crazy luck, Delphi Adamo was here. In my arms. Right now.

"I missed you so much," I whispered into her hair, inhaling the familiar scent of her that now had a touch of Moose's Diner added to it.

Her hold on me tightened and she burrowed her face into the curve of my neck, seeming to breathe me in as well. "I missed you too, Mason. More than I have the words to express."

As much as I didn't want to, I released her so I could look into those brown eyes where I'd spent many an hour getting lost.

She blinked back at me, her palms resting on my chest as if maintaining contact was essential. "You want to know where the hell I've been all this time, don't you?"

"It is a burning question. One I have been thinking about since you walked out of Jessica's office." I tucked some strands of her long, brown hair behind her left ear. "I attended your wake, your funeral, Delphi. I saw you in a coffin. A coffin that was lowered into a grave and it gutted me." I squeezed my eyes shut, not wanting to remember saying goodbye to the woman I'd loved with my whole heart. "I've visited your gravestone, talked to you, wished I could go back

in time and change the series of events that led to your death. But . . .”

“But I’m not dead.” Delphi stepped back so we were no longer touching. She walked around me, found a lamp on an end table, and switched it on to cast a soft, golden glow in the room.

I’d been in this apartment before to repair some things for Jessica. I’d also readied it for her rental customers on occasion when she didn’t have time to do it herself. It was a one-bedroom apartment in a small complex that contained identical apartments. Jessica had explained that when she’d first moved to Vermont from Michigan and taken over Moose’s Diner after her uncle had passed away, this had been where she’d lived. As she told the story, she’d hired me, which had led to increased business at the diner, and she’d then been able to afford a little house five miles from the diner. I wasn’t sure I had anything to do with the success of the diner, but it was nice she thought so.

Delphi and I were standing in the apartment’s small living room now, which had a leather couch, two wooden end tables with lamps, a pair of chairs upholstered in a moose-bear-deer-patterned fabric, and an entertainment center housing a TV and some Vermont-themed knickknacks. Beyond the living room was the kitchen with all the usual necessities plus an island with two stools. A hallway led to the single bedroom and a bathroom. The apartment wasn’t anything grand, but it was a good place to temporarily call home.

Of course I wanted nothing more than to squirrel Delphi away to my cabin on Rodgers Lake, but I could be patient and step our way back into whatever this was.

Delphi walked to the kitchen and opened a few cupboards until she found glasses. She pulled two down and filled them with water from the tap. She brought them to the living room where I was still standing.

She handed me one of the glasses. “I don’t have any other drinks to offer you at the moment.” She gestured to the couch. “Let’s sit.”

We sat, and I set my water glass on the end table while Delphi took a long swig of hers, nearly draining it before putting it down. She scratched at her forehead, fiddled with her hands, ran her palms along the thighs of her jeans, fidgeted on the couch cushion.

“Delphi.” I put my hands atop hers in her lap to still her. “Tell me what happened.”

“Right.” She met my gaze. “It’s going to sound totally bonkers though. Like, you’re going to want to lock me up after hearing what I’m about to say. It’s unbelievable.”

Wait a minute.

Was she . . . was she a werewolf like me? Was that why she hadn’t died in that car crash? Had she survived what injuries she’d sustained? Had she known there would be questions why she *hadn’t* died from such injuries and she’d figured letting everyone think she was dead was a better alternative?

I leaned closer and sniffed her, but she didn’t smell like a wolf. She never had.

“Did you sniff me?” Her brows crinkled.

“Maybe.”

“Why?”

“Also an unbelievable story,” I said. “You go first with your story though.”

“Okay.” She stood and paced in the small living room. “I did die in that car crash. My body is in that grave you saw it go into. We could go dig it up if you want to confirm.”

“No. I believe you died.” My heart certainly had known she was gone.

She gave me a quick nod then scrunched up her face as if bracing herself for whatever reaction I was about to have to what she was going to say.

“I died and have been living as an angel in a place called Seraphia.” She pointed a finger heavenward. “Someone

framed me for re-routing a group of souls and I was kicked out of that eternal paradise, but I didn't re-route them. I would never do that." She squared her shoulders for a moment then gestured to herself. "Now I'm back, in a body that is remarkably identical to the one I'd inhabited before, I have all the memories of my previous life on Earth, and I remember every moment you and I spent together."

I chewed on her words for a few silent moments, the crazy story making far more sense to me than any notion involving her faking her death or being in hiding or any number of other scenarios I'd imagined while cooking in the diner tonight.

And she wasn't a werewolf. She wasn't like me.

"Mason?" Her voice made me snap my head up to look at her.

"Yeah?"

"Say something," she said. "You must think I'm insane." She threw herself onto the couch beside me.

"Umm . . . no, actually I don't." I angled to face her. "I've experienced things that don't seem possible, but they are. They happen."

"Things you've seen during your time in the Army?" She reached a hand out and rubbed my forearm.

"Some of the things I saw while living the military life were hard to witness, yes," I said slowly, "but I had some shit going on before the Army too. Shit that makes it easy for me to believe you've risen from the dead."

Delphi puffed out a breath. "That must have been some shit. Does it have to do with your family? I remember them being pains in your ass."

"Yeah. That stuff is still a part of my life." I took my turn standing and pacing the living room. "My family continues to present some difficulties, but it's different than the typical issues people deal with when it comes to their relatives." I stopped pacing and grabbed Delphi's wrists, tugging her to her feet. "It's probably best if I *show* you the main issue that makes believing your angel story so easy for me."

I led her to the door of the apartment, opened it, and took her outside to the back parking lot of the complex. We walked for a few moments into the patch of woods behind the building. Delphi didn't question where I was taking her or what we were doing in the woods. She never had questioned me about anything. She had always been up for whatever I wanted to do. She seized every opportunity and that was one of the things I'd loved most about her.

"Okay. Promise me you won't run off after I do what I'm about to do," I said.

"Mason, I never thought I'd see you again," Delphi said, her voice a little strained. "There is nothing you could say or do right now that would make me run off."

"And you know I would never hurt you, right?"

"Of course."

Nodding, I pulled off my Moose's Diner T-shirt and started unzipping my jeans, while Delphi shot a panicked look around the immediate vicinity.

"No one's around." I removed my boots before peeling off my jeans and stepped out of my boxers and socks, adding to the pile.

Delphi's eyes were wide and locked on my dick. My alert, eager dick who had been awakened the moment I'd laid eyes on Delphi at the diner tonight. She licked her lips and I had a sudden vision of her mouth surrounding my length as she sucked me to a happy ending. My dick definitely recalled how skilled Delphi had been at making his day.

"I hope to hell you still look at me like that after this next display," I said.

"How could I look at you any other way, Mason?" She put her hands to her cheeks. "My Goddess, you're still so beautiful."

I wanted to strip off her clothes and show her exactly how our bodies remembered each other, but that would have to wait. She'd shared her story with me. She deserved to hear—or *see*—mine.

“Okay, here it goes.”

Werewolf rules were pretty strict about *not* changing in front of humans, but that rule probably didn't apply when I was in the company of a human who had died, spent time as an angel in the afterlife, and then had been returned to earth.

Returned to me.

I summoned my wolf and the familiar tingle traveled throughout my human body. In the next moment, I was standing on all fours in front of Delphi.

True to her word, she didn't run off. She didn't scream. She didn't even look afraid. Surprise was clear on her face though, and she put her hand to her mouth as she stared at me.

She lowered her hand and took several steps closer to me. “You're a . . . you're a wolf.”

I sunk to my belly like a dog would, letting her know I wanted her to approach, to touch me, to accept me. I couldn't stop my tail from swishing back and forth when her fingers made contact with my gray fur.

“Holy shit,” she whispered, her hands coasting over my back. “You're amazing.” She kneeled beside me and leaned forward, pressing her forehead into my furry side. “Gorgeous.” Delphi scooted around so she was in front of me and cupped my face in her hands. Her gaze met mine and she smiled. “Still have those beautiful blue eyes, even as a wolf.” She dropped a kiss on my nose then scratched my ears, causing a low rumble to buzz in my throat. “Oh, you like that, do you?”

I pushed my nose into her cheek, stealing a few sneaky licks before rubbing my body against hers as I circled around her.

“Are you marking me?” She chuckled then wrapped her arms around my neck, giving me a squeeze.

My human form came rushing back without me asking for it, and I pulled Delphi into my lap. “Would it be a bad thing if I was marking you?”

She shook her head and my gaze zoomed in on her mouth. I could resist no longer.

My lips caught hers in a kiss, and I slid my hand to her cheek, loving the feel of her smooth skin as we deepened the kiss. Our tongues tangled, primal need building between us with each velvety stroke. When a soft moan escaped from Delphi, my desire for her exploded. I was done holding back, my shock at seeing her again replaced by a flood of the love I'd once felt for her.

The love I'd always felt for her.

“Let's go back inside,” I managed to say around our kissing. “What I want to do to you shouldn't be done in the dark woods.”

Delphi shivered in my hold, and that ripple of her body against my dick made me nearly blow my load right then and there. She tossed me my clothes then sent me the sexiest grin in creation.

“Tell me whatever you want to do to me doesn't involve you putting those clothes back on.”

I eyed the stretch of parking lot between the woods and the apartment building. “It doesn't, but maybe for the return trip to the apartment?”

She narrowed her eyes at me. “Okay. I'll allow it, but we aren't staying dressed for long.”

Yippee!

“Were you a wolf when we were together before?” she asked.

“Yes.” I slipped back into my clothes then grabbed her hand, tugging her back toward the apartment building. “I was born a werewolf.”

“Werewolf.” She said the word slowly as if trying it out for the first time. “I probably should be mad you didn't tell me this about yourself when we were together before, but I guess I get why you didn't.”

“I couldn’t tell you before,” Mason said. “There are rules about revealing ourselves. I’m not sure I didn’t break that rule by telling you now, but I guess I don’t care about rules as much as I care about being straight with you.”

I let us into the apartment then immediately turned around to face Delphi.

“I don’t care about rules either,” she said. “I only care that you and I are here right now together.” The smile she gave me radiated the same warmth and love that had always been between us. A warmth and love I’d been missing in my life since Delphi had been gone.

“I didn’t think I’d ever get to see you again.” I hooked my arm around her waist and drew her in close, my other hand coming up to slide along the curve of her neck. I brushed my lips against hers in what ended up being the tenderest of kisses. “People kept trying to set me up with someone else, but I couldn’t do it, Delphi. I couldn’t be with someone who wasn’t you.”

She captured my mouth in a kiss that was far from tender and full of wanting, of unquenchable desire, of let’s make up for the time we’d lost instead. Kissing Delphi had always been a favorite activity of mine and that hadn’t changed at all.

“It would have been okay if you’d moved on, Mason,” she said. “That’s what humans who are left behind do. Move on.”

My lips tipped up. “Good thing I’m not a human then, isn’t it?”

Chapter Five

Delphi

Mason scooped me up into his arms and charged down the hallway, pushing a door open with his foot. The fact that he'd revealed himself to be a werewolf should have blown my mind, but I'd always known Mason was different from the other guys I'd dated. He had this vibe surrounding him that was equal parts compassionate and intense. I'd seen him show great kindness to people he'd encountered, but I'd also witnessed him be singularly focused on his goals. Was that a result of being a werewolf or was that merely Mason's unique personality?

Also, how could a former human turned angel turned human again judge anyone else for being something more than what they appeared to be?

"You said you were born a werewolf," I said as he deposited me on the bed in the apartment's only bedroom. "Does that mean your family members are werewolves too?"

Mason nodded as he crawled onto the bed and stretched out beside me. "My parents are werewolves. You met my mom, remember?"

"Yes. She didn't like me." The woman had been less than welcoming when Mason had taken me to see her at the house where he'd grown up. She'd pretty much glared at me the entire night.

Mason rubbed his bearded jaw and winced. "She had a reason." He rolled to his back and stared at the ceiling for a few quiet moments. "Werewolves and humans aren't supposed to be mates. It's another one of the rules."

"Werewolves have a lot of rules." I draped my arm over his chest, needing the contact.

"Indeed they do." He dragged his rough fingertips along my forearm. It goosebumped my flesh everywhere. "The Moon Goddess, Lunai, is in charge of werewolf fated mates. She creates the pair bonds between werewolves and approves

the unions. She never would have approved a union between us.”

“Is that why we didn’t get married?”

Mason turned his head to look at me, and I loved staring back into his pretty blue eyes again. “No. I wanted to marry you, Delphi. More than anything. I’d planned to ask you when I returned from that first tour of duty with the Army as we’d always talked about.” He flattened my hand over his heart. “I swear.”

“I believe you.” I kissed his shoulder. “But your family wouldn’t have approved of us, right?”

“Probably not, but I was prepared to leave my pack to be with you,” Mason said. “The Ferguson pack—my mother’s pack—is comprised of a bunch of disorderly wolves who I spend more time trying to discipline than anything else. My cousins are one headache after another. The only wolf I actually care about in the pack is my sister.”

“Sylvie, right?”

“Yes. She’s the only one who has her head screwed on right in that pack. My mother has become as bad as the rest of them since my father left her and returned to his pack in New York. He couldn’t deal with how unruly the Ferguson pack is.”

“Which leaves you to deal with the unruliness?” I guessed.

“Pretty much. Our pack currently has no Alpha. My sister thinks I should step up, but my cousins don’t listen to me. They’ll never respect me as an Alpha, and honestly, I don’t want the job anyway.”

“You’d make an excellent leader.” I remembered how Mason had always taken charge of whatever he was doing.

Mason rolled his eyes. “Now you sound like Sylvie, but I understand my father leaving the pack more and more. I was angry at him at first, but the bullshit my cousins pull is downright juvenile. They’re drunk or high most of the time and are running our pack’s construction company into the ground with their irresponsibility while Sylvie tries to keep it afloat. I wish the pack would implode and be done with it.”

“Or you could take control of it and lead them to the next level.” I slid my hand free from under his and traced a finger along his whiskered jaw. “I don’t know all the ins and outs of being a werewolf pack’s Alpha, but I have no doubt in my mind that you’d rock the role.”

Mason took my hand and dropped featherlight kisses to the tips of my fingers, a faint smile turning up his lips. “You were always my biggest cheerleader.”

“Easy to cheer for the best.” I pressed another kiss to his shoulder, wishing all our clothes were gone.

Patience.

We needed this time to get caught up and to deal with the fact that werewolves and angels were both real.

“Why are you not still in the military?” I asked, deciding to get all the important conversations out of the way and confirming if what Jessica had told me at the diner was true.

Mason did a crunch to sit up and removed his T-shirt. He angled so his back was facing me. “Turn on the light there.”

I rolled away from him and flicked on the bedside lamp. When I rolled back, a circular scar on Mason’s back was visible in the shadowy light. I ran my fingers over it, causing Mason to suck in a shuddery breath.

“I was shot in the line of duty,” he said. When he turned to face me, he pointed to a matching circle to the left of his belly button. “The bullet went straight through, but of course, military protocol was to ship me off to the hospital because vital organs had been hit. By the time the ambulance pulled up to the hospital, however, that bullet wound was healing due to werewolf abilities. I’d actually had to put my finger in the wound three times on the drive to keep it from sealing.”

“Oh no.”

“Yeah. Long story short, I had to leave the military because, as a werewolf, I healed too fast from injuries. My superiors would have wanted explanations I wasn’t allowed to give them, explanations they wouldn’t have believed.” He shrugged. “I’d hoped my werewolf speed and general agility

would keep me from getting hurt in the first place, but chaos often ensues in the midst of battle.”

“I’m so sorry, Mason,” I said. “I know you wanted to make a career of being in the military. How did your father manage to do it?”

“He was luckier than me.” Mason then waved a hand. “It’s okay. I’m over that now. I was devastated at first then a little panicked because I hadn’t had a Plan B.”

“Then you came to the rescue at Moose’s Diner.”

“Ah, Jessica told you?”

I nodded. “Sharing your cooking skills with the world is noble work as well.”

“I guess.” Mason fingered the scar on his stomach. “Cooking is certainly easier than putting silver onto this wound had been.”

“Silver?”

“It’s one of the few things that can bring a werewolf down,” Mason explained. “While I was in the hospital, I’d swiped a silver fork from my dinner tray and at night, I’d press the fork to the bullet wound to essentially burn it. That’s why there’s some scarring. It also gave me a little time to hang around in the hospital and plan what to do next. Unfortunately, the only thing I could come up with was to leave the military for good.”

I straddled his lap then gently pushed him back on the bed so he was lying beneath me. He was rock hard against me, and I seriously hoped we were about to skip to the World’s Best Reunion.

“Well, leaving the military and leaving Seraphia landed us both at Moose’s Diner, so perhaps everything worked out for the best.”

“It sure feels like it.” Mason’s hands came to rest on my hips. “I never thought I’d have the chance to see you again.” He coasted his hands along my sides. “To touch you.” He

grabbed a fistful of my diner T-shirt and tugged so I hovered over him, our faces lined up. “To kiss you.”

I immediately closed the distance between us, pressing my lips to his. When his tongue traced the seam of my mouth, I granted him entry and he stroked my tongue with his. My hips instinctively ground against his and a low growl sounded from Mason.

I backed up, loving the blissed out look on his face as he slowly opened his eyes. “I always loved that sound, but I love it more now knowing you can change into an actual wolf and growl.”

His smile lit up his eyes as well as something deep in my chest. “I always dreamed of telling you what I was. I’d made up my mind to do it so many times, but then my mother would say something about what a disaster it would be and why couldn’t I find a wolf to mate with. I’d then lose my nerve, but the desire to marry you only grew stronger, Delphi. I promise you that if I had asked you to marry me, I would have told you about werewolves first so you could have made an informed decision.”

I sat back a bit. “You know, I probably would have freaked if you had told me about werewolves then. Dying, becoming an angel, residing in Seraphia, and returning to Earth all made taking the werewolf news easier.”

“So I probably would have lost you for a time anyway.” Mason nodded his understanding. “But now we’re both here again.”

“Yes, we are.”

“Let’s not waste another moment.”

He peeled off my Moose’s Diner T-shirt and the T-shirt I’d been wearing under it all night. Our jeans and underwear were tossed aside next, and I have to say that lying with a naked Mason again was everything.

“I’m sorry you were kicked out of what sounds like utopia.” Mason climbed over me so he was half draped on my body. He propped himself up on his elbow then played with

the ends of my hair. “But I’m also not sorry because having you here again fills this empty space inside me.” He pressed his hand to his chest. “An empty space no one but you can fill, Delphi.”

My throat stung at how sincere he was in his beautiful words to me. All I could do was hook my hand at the back of his neck and pull him down for a kiss that hopefully relayed a fraction of what I felt for this man.

“I forget why Seraphia felt so perfect to me while I was there,” I said. “Because being with you is way more amazing.”

Mason lowered so his face rested between my breasts for a few deep breaths that we took together. When he raised his head, he teased my nipple with his skilled mouth and made my desire for him increase by an infinite amount.

He left no inch of me unattended and by the time he slid into me, I wanted him so badly, I feared I might shatter if I didn’t get to feel him inside me again. With slow strokes, Mason brought me to a high even angels never knew.

We soared past the tragedy of my death, the loss of Mason’s military career, the fact that werewolves and angels existed, and the years Mason and I had been separated. Tonight was about reconnecting in a way that took all the love we’d had for each other in the past and amplified it in the now. I hadn’t thought I could love him more than I had back then.

But I’d been wrong.

Mason and I crested together, growls and moans mingling as our bodies shook with pleasure. We let the aftershocks ripple through us as we simmered in a love-making haze I would have been perfectly happy to stay in forever.

“I’ve officially decided that getting kicked out of Seraphia is not a punishment,” I announced as we came down from the peak. “Whoever framed me for re-routing those souls did me an incredible favor.”

“Did me an incredible favor too.” Mason dropped kisses along my jaw as he slid out of me, causing me to close my eyes and revel in how I felt right now. He tugged me to my

feet and led me to the bathroom, poking his arm into the shower to turn it on. “Do you have any ideas on who put the blame on you?”

I shook my head. “As far as I knew, that stuff didn’t happen in Seraphia. All light and love there, you know? I didn’t think bad apples gained entry. I also didn’t think Solari made mistakes.”

“Who’s Solari?” Mason pulled me into the shower with him and the spray of hot water was a welcome feeling.

“The Sun Goddess.” I let the water soak my hair then Mason turned me around so he could wash it.

“I always wondered if a Sun Goddess existed,” Mason said. “The werewolves have Lunai, the Moon Goddess, so I figured it was possible.”

We switched roles and I washed Mason’s hair, loving how he’d gone down on his knees and rested his forehead on my stomach. We’d just been intimate and were in the midst of cleaning up, but damn, I wanted to get dirty again.

Very dirty.

“Well, I suppose goddesses don’t matter much to us now,” I said. “I’ve offended the Sun Goddess—though I’ve done nothing wrong—and you’ve offended the Moon Goddess by choosing to make love to a human—something that’s deemed wrong.”

“Oh, but it feels so right.” Mason pressed a kiss to my stomach then rose to his full height. “You and I together has always felt right.”

The emotions welling up inside me for Mason were stronger than they’d been the first time we were together. I loved him more than anything in this world or in the afterlife.

Mason Harrister was certainly worth losing my wings.

Chapter Six

Mason

A part of me still feared this was all a dream. A fantastic, phenomenal dream. I'd spent so much time wishing Delphi was still here with me. To have her back now was a fucking miracle, but if it wasn't true, I'd be crushed beyond repair.

"Mason?" Delphi turned around to face me.

I'd been towel-drying her gorgeous body after our shower. "Hmm?"

Delphi reached for the towel I now noticed I'd been holding instead of rubbing over her wet skin. "Are you okay?"

"I'm still worrying that maybe I'm actually asleep and none of this is real." I gestured between the two of us.

She wrapped the towel around her, securing it by tucking an end in above her breasts. Her hands then came to rest on my shoulders, massaging the area then coasting up to cup my face.

"It's real. What we did in the bedroom is real. What we're feeling for each other again—or maybe *still*—is real." She leaned forward and brushed her lips against mine. "We're getting a second chance, Mason."

I slid my arms around her waist, my hands traveling up her back, and hugged her to me, intending never to let her go. My fingers brushed against two long, ragged scars at her shoulder blades. I'd noticed them in the shower, but my attention had quickly gone to the way water droplets glistened on Delphi's sexy-as-hell body.

"Is this where your wings were?" I asked.

"Yeah." Delphi stepped out of my hold to walk toward the wall mirror above the vanity in the bathroom. She turned so her back was reflected and peered over her shoulder, wincing at what she saw.

"Well, that looks like shit." She reached over her shoulder and ran her fingertip over one of the scars. "I wish you could

have seen my wings, Mason. They were white with lavender tips and so beautiful.”

Being a werewolf was inconvenient at times, but for the most part, my wolf was such a part of me that I couldn't imagine not being able to turn, not having fur and fangs. Having wings was probably the same, and I ached for Delphi.

“What happened to your wings?” I asked, taking several steps closer but not touching her.

She sighed then turned to face the mirror but her gaze was on me. “After I was falsely accused of re-routing souls from humans who had died in a train accident, two of Solari's guards marched me to the border of Seraphia. They burned my wings off before booting me out the door.”

I cringed. “Did that hurt?”

“Physically? No. In every other way imaginable? Yes.” She swiveled to face me, the lights above the vanity illuminating those two scars so I could see their details in the mirror. “When flames engulfed them, I knew Solari wasn't going to let me back into the Chosen City. She believed I'd committed that terrible act of re-routing the souls. She wasn't going to suddenly realize her mistake. She wasn't going to welcome me back into her embrace.”

Delphi wrapped her arms around her and closed her eyes for a moment, a single tear rolling down her cheek. As much as I wanted her with me, I also wanted her to be endlessly happy.

“Is there something we can do?”

She opened her eyes to look at me and swiped the tear away. “You mean to get me back into Seraphia?”

I nodded, my throat too tight to verbally reply. I didn't want to lose Delphi again, but I'd do whatever it took to help her clear her name with Solari, to get her wings back, to allow her to live peacefully even if that meant living in Seraphia rather than with me.

“I know of nothing we can do.” She closed the distance between us and hugged me. “But that's okay because I'd rather

be with you, Mason. I want to live a long, full life with you. I want everything we didn't get to have because I died."

I met her gaze when she backed up a step. "You're sure?"

"That I want to love a super-hot werewolf?" She grinned. "Absolutely."

I picked her up and spun her around until her towel came loose and dropped to the floor.

"Oops." I set her down, but I kicked her towel out of reach when she bent to grab it.

"Hey!" She shot her arm out and untucked the towel I had around my waist so it joined hers on the bathroom tile. "Two can play this game."

And play we did. *Several* times.

Delphi asked if I could stay at Jessica's apartment with her tonight and I didn't need to be asked twice. Cuddling with her all night was a way more enticing offer than going back to my empty cabin.

"I'd love to stay," I said, "but am I the only person who's hungry?"

She shook her head. "I'm starving, but there's no food here."

"Untrue." I hopped out of bed, ran down the hallway, and retrieved the box with the blueberry pie in it. Stopping in the kitchen, I grabbed two forks then raced back to the bedroom. "We have pie!"

Delphi rose to her knees, still magnificently naked, and clapped. "I forgot about the pie!"

I climbed back on the bed to kneel in front of her. "You mean to tell me that I scrambled your brain so much with my skilled lovemaking you failed to remember this deliciousness?" I opened the box and presented the pie wedges to her.

She peeked inside, her eyes rolling in anticipation as she plucked one of the forks from my grip. "Maybe I find you

more delicious than blueberry pie.”

I motioned for her to take the first taste and she didn't hesitate, spearing a good-sized mouthful on her fork. She raised the bite to her mouth, holding it up in a brief salute to me before devouring it.

“Oh my.” She closed her eyes as she chewed. “Better than I remembered.” She peered into the box. “Did you make this pie?”

“I did, but I don't always make the desserts at the diner,” I said. “Jessica often farms desserts out to a bakery in town, which is fine by me. I have enough to cook up on a nightly basis, and I prefer cooking to baking. Once in a while, however, I get a hankering for pie.” I take my own forkful. “Especially blueberry because it makes me think of you.”

Delphi's gaze went all soft, but she didn't say anything. Instead she took another bite of pie and released a yummy noise that bordered on erotic.

I hadn't factored in that watching her eat pie would turn me on, and I was about to commit to another round of naked fun once we finished the pie, but my phone ringing from my jeans still on the bedroom floor made me groan instead.

I stuck my fork in my slice of pie so it stood erect and slid off the bed to retrieve my phone from the back pocket of my jeans.

“Shit,” I said. “It's my sister.”

“Go ahead and take the call,” Delphi said. “It could be important.”

Grumbling, I tapped the answer button. “Hey, Sylvie. What's up?”

“Apparently our cousins' time as free men is up, that's what's up.” Sylvie's tone was ten levels of pissed off, and I didn't know what my cousins had done this time, but my blood pressure instantly skyrocketed.

“What the fuck did they do now?” After putting Sylvie on speaker so I could have my hands free, I grabbed my boxers

and jeans from the floor and wiggled into them. I didn't miss the little sound of disapproval Delphi made as I grew less and less naked by putting on more and more clothes.

“Gary got trashed, hopped into a car because driving under the influence is always a genius move, and plowed his truck into a house. A house!” Sylvie reported, her voice getting higher and more agitated as she reached the end of her sentence.

“Shit.” I raked my fingers through my hair after putting on my diner T-shirt.

“Oh, but it gets better, my dear brother,” Sylvie said. “The house he parked his truck in? It belongs to Moon Valley's police chief.”

“Fuck.”

Delphi's eyes bugged, but she didn't stop eating her blueberry pie, which despite my rising anger over my idiot cousin's bullshit, made me smile.

So did the fact that she was still naked.

“And don't let me forget to mention that Scott was in the truck with him, got out of the vehicle, and pissed on the police chief's couch that was now beside Gary's truck.” Sylvie let out a roar. “According to Darwin, these two wolves should not still be alive.” My sister was officially riled up if she'd tossed out the *wolves* word without worrying that she might be on speaker and I might not be alone.

But, of course, I was usually alone. Not tonight though. Tonight I had my Delphi back, and she was probably the only reason my blood pressure had sailed back down so quickly and I wasn't roaring along with Sylvie.

“First of all, was anyone hurt?” I asked, then shoveled the last bit of my pie into my mouth because I wasn't about to let Gary and Scott deprive me of blueberry pie.

“Fortunately, the police chief and his family were in their backyard at the time of impact so they're all fine,” Sylvie said. “They came into the house upon hearing the crash and clearly identified Gary and Scott and saw Scott whip out his dick to

use their couch as a toilet bowl. The two schlubs have some minor cuts and bruises that will heal within the hour. Lucky werewolf bastards.”

“Well, one can hope that such an accident rattled something loose in their thick skulls to prompt them into being more responsible.” I exited the bedroom and walked down the hallway to the living room where I found my shoes.

Sylvie was quiet for a few seconds. “Why have you calmed down so quickly? You were just pissed at them for making a mess of the packhouse this morning. *This* is a way bigger mess. You should be ready to pull out their fangs right now.”

Delphi joined me on the couch, fully dressed with a dot of blueberry pie filling on her lower lip that I couldn’t resist kissing away.

“I am upset,” I told my sister, “but something truly amazing has happened tonight that makes it hard for me to be as furious as I should be.” I beamed a smile at Delphi, loving that she cuddled up to my side and rested her head on my shoulder.

“Did you get laid or something?” Sylvie asked, making Delphi bark out a laugh that my sister had to have heard. “Holy shit! You *did* get laid and you’re still with her and she can hear everything I’ve been saying.” Sylvie grew quiet for a few seconds. “Oh my Goddess!”

I could easily picture the panic attack my sister was having as she realized she’d called our cousins wolves and referenced the packhouse. “Calm down, Sylvie. It’s all okay. Where are you?”

“In the office where I’ve been all fucking day, trying to salvage what’s left of Ferguson Construction.”

“And where are Gary and Scott right now?” I asked.

“The police station. Scott used his one phone call to call me because he thought you were going to have a coronary, but it turns out *I’m* the one having a coronary because you’re riding a sextastic high or some shit.”

Delphi and I both laughed now, probably making Sylvie madder, but all the problems I'd been having with the Ferguson pack seemed utterly ridiculous now that the most important person was back in my life.

"Okay, we'll meet you at the police station and figure this shit out." I looked at Delphi and she nodded that she was up for coming with me.

"*We?* Who is *we*?" my sister asked. "Take me off speaker, will you, dammit?"

I tapped the button and put the phone up to my ear. "Relax, Sylvie. You're going to be happy with my sextastic partner."

"Do I know her?"

"Yes, indeedy. See you in a few." I ended the call before she could reply and true to Sylvie's style, a text immediately came in.

Sylvie: Jerk. Who is it???

I replied with a laughing emoji then shoved my phone into my back pocket and held my hand out to Delphi. "C'mon. My truck is in the diner's parking lot."

She took my hand and let me pull her to her feet, but then she hesitated. "I want to be there for you as you deal with what sounds like a difficult situation, but maybe I shouldn't be seen at the police station yet. Someone might recognize me. I'm actually surprised no customers at the diner tonight knew me." She angled her hands to herself. "I look the same as I did right before I died."

I hadn't considered that. I'd been too busy enjoying having her back to think about anyone else in this town who had been in her life.

Selfish much?

"How about if you stay in the truck then?" I tugged on her arm again and this time she followed me to the apartment's door. "I have a baseball hat in there you could wear, but we'll save the big reveal to Sylvie until we're somewhere private."

“Okay.” She leaned into me as I shut the apartment door behind us. “I’m open to anything that lets us still be in each other’s company.”

I squeezed her hand then brought it up to my lips to press a kiss to her knuckles. “Me too.”

We launched into a brisk walk through the warm, summer night, making it to my truck in no time at all. I opened the passenger side and rummaged around until my hands closed on my Ferguson Construction baseball hat. I had one, though I didn’t work in the business with my packmates. Tried that. Didn’t love working alongside Gary and Scott and my other drunk and high relatives.

“Here we go.” I handed the hat to Delphi and she corralled her dark hair, pulled it through the back of the hat, and settled the hat on her beautiful head.

She held her hands out to either side of her. “Am I adequately disguised?”

“Maybe to someone who hasn’t spent an evening getting reacquainted with every inch of you.” I pulled her up against me, angling my head so I didn’t bump into the bill of the baseball hat, and brushed my lips against hers. “I’d know you anywhere, my angel.”

She melted against me and we both gave in to a heated round of kissing before my phone buzzed in my pocket.

“Right,” she said. “We need to get you to your sister and cousins.”

“Damn them.” I dropped a quick kiss to her nose then arched my arm toward the passenger seat. “Your chariot awaits.”

She climbed in and I closed the door. I checked my phone to find a text from my mother who had apparently found out about my cousins.

Mom: You’re going to help your cousins, right?

I have to say it ticked me off that she expected me to dig them out of every stupid thing they got themselves into. I

wasn't the pack's Alpha.

But we definitely needed one.

Me: I'm on it.

Stowing my phone back in my pocket, I jogged to the driver's side, and for the first time in forever, these problems with my cousins didn't feel insurmountable. I *would* dig them out of this. Everything *would* be all right.

Because I had Delphi back.

Chapter Seven

Delphi

Watching Mason walk toward the police station, his long legs carrying him from his truck to the front entrance, shouldn't have gotten me all hot for him, but it absolutely did. Shouldn't I have been able to get a grip on my desire after all the lovemaking we'd done back at the apartment? Was my need for him going to be insatiable now that we were together again?

Before he opened the police station door to go inside, he shot me a quick glance over his shoulder as if he knew I'd been ogling him. The left corner of his mouth turned up slightly, and damn if I didn't want to scurry right over to his side. Only Sylvie jogging to catch up to him kept me rooted to my seat in his truck.

Barely.

I needed something to distract me from wanting to be near Mason. I scanned his truck, but the front seats were devoid of anything interesting because he was apparently still the tidy guy I'd known him to be. A peek in the back, however, turned up a small stack of books on the seat. I reached an arm back and pulled one off the top of the pile.

Italian Recipes Your Nonna Would Approve. I flipped through the book, only succeeding in making myself super hungry.

I grabbed another book. *Spicy Mexican Dishes.* The colorful pictures in this one made everything look incredibly appetizing and increased my hunger tenfold.

I swiveled in my seat to read the rest of the titles, noting that *all* the books were cookbooks. Mason was great at his job cooking at the diner, but the books made me wonder if he wanted a more serious career as a chef. The man could bake too if that blueberry pie was any evidence. I could easily picture Mason working in a fancy restaurant, creating artwork on each plate that was served to his customers. The dishes I

had hauled out to people tonight at Moose's Diner were all beautiful. Probably too beautiful for a small-town diner in the Vermont woods.

A quick survey of the back seat didn't turn up anything else interesting so I focused on the front entrance of the police station again. As it was nearly two in the morning now, the place was not a buzz of activity. It was nice to know that while I'd been in Seraphia, Moon Valley hadn't gone to shit and turned into some crime-ridden hellhole. Unfortunately, Mason's cousins added a bad element.

When Mason and I had been together before, he'd kept me away from his family for the most part. Now I knew why. Bringing a human around a pack of werewolves who A.) were not sober most of the time and B.) wouldn't approve of our relationship would have complicated things. Still, I would have liked to have helped Mason with his family issues if I could have. The best I could do was be here for him now.

I settled deeper into the passenger seat and must have dozed off because the driver side door opening jolted me awake.

Mason got in, chuckling softly. "Did I wear you out?"

I poked him in the biceps, loving the hard muscle that met my fingertip. "Shut up."

He laughed louder then started his truck.

"So what's happening with your cousins?" I asked as he pulled out of the parking space.

"I negotiated a deal with the police chief." Mason chuckled. "Honestly, I'm not sure how I accomplished that, but he agreed to let Ferguson Construction repair the damage to his house. Free of charge, of course, which I'm pretty sure gave my sister a mini-stroke, but it was the best way to keep Gary and Scott out of serious legal trouble. It also distracted the chief from the fact that although my cousins are drunk, their blood-alcohol content doesn't reflect that because they're werewolves. He also didn't notice they were nearly healed of their scrapes and bruises from the accident already."

“That all sounds like a genius plan.” I wasn’t surprised he’d come up with it. Mason had always had a sense of justice and fairness.

“If my relatives can keep it together enough to actually repair the house it will be a genius plan.” Mason scrubbed a hand over his face then scratched at the underside of his bearded chin. “The thing is they *are* good builders. When they’re sober. They built a gazebo in the little park near Rodgers Lake that is gorgeous. I’d had to basically make our packhouse and my relatives’ homes dry by commandeering all their liquor to get them to build it though. They’d hated me, but they’d gotten the job done.”

“Might be time to make another booze sweep before they start on the police chief’s house then,” I said.

“It’s at the top of my to-do list for tomorrow.” He tapped the dashboard clock as we headed toward the apartment. “Or later today, I suppose.”

“A lot has happened since this afternoon, hasn’t it?”

“You got that right.” He reached for my hand and interlaced his fingers with mine. “A lot of awesome stuff has happened. Stuff that made dealing with my pack’s nonsense not that big of a deal.”

I brushed my free hand over his forearm, giving it a little squeeze. “Can I take this moment right now to reiterate that you would make a phenomenal Alpha for your pack?”

Mason slid his hand free and clamped it onto the steering wheel, his jaw tensed as he drove.

“Hear me out, Mason. Granted, I don’t know a ton about werewolves or pack dynamics or anything, but I do know you. You have all the qualities of a leader, and it seems to me, that you are already acting as the Alpha of the Ferguson pack. Who did Sylvie call to help with the situation?” I poked his biceps again. “You. Who marched down to the police station as soon as the phone call with your sister ended? You. Who managed to smooth things over with the police chief so your cousins

avoid a lifetime behind bars? You. If you ask me, you *are* this pack's Alpha."

A low grumble sounded from Mason, but his jaw loosened as he turned into the apartment building's parking lot. He didn't say anything as he parked his truck and shut off the engine. He squinted out the windshield for a few quiet moments then angled to face me.

"You're right," he finally said.

"I know."

Mason nudged my shoulder with his fist, a small grin on his lips. "Don't get cocky."

Another vehicle pulled into the lot and took the space beside Mason's truck.

"That's Sylvie," he said. "I told her to meet us here so I could introduce her to my—"

"Sextastic partner?" I finished.

"Yes, and she must be super curious to meet at this crazy hour." He waved a hand at the dashboard clock now proclaiming it almost four in the morning. "C'mon."

Mason opened his car door and climbed out. I caught the tail end of what Sylvie was saying to her brother as I slid out of the passenger side. I hung back in the shadows to listen.

". . . from the Sinclaire pack? The Romero? Which one, Mason?"

"None of those, Sylvie," Mason said. "She's not a werewolf."

"Not a werewolf? What do you mean? You said you found your mate." A frustrated growl sounded. "Don't tell me you fell for another human, Mason. Losing Delphi clearly illustrated how fragile humans are and why wolves don't take them as mates. They just don't last as long as we do."

Interesting to pick up the little tidbit that werewolves have an extended lifespan. How much longer than a human's was it? I was also curious how long I had as a human who was an

angel and then became human again. Did the normal human laws apply to me or did I retain any of my angel benefits? I wanted a long life with Mason, especially because we'd been cheated out of several years together while I was in Seraphia.

"Look, Sylvie," Mason began, "you know I haven't been able to find anyone I loved as much as Delphi."

"And I keep praying to Lunai to send you someone," Sylvie said. "You deserve a good mate, Mason."

"Have you ever heard of Solari?" Mason asked.

"No. Who's that?" Sylvie asked.

"She's the Sun Goddess," I answered as I rounded the hood of the truck to join them. "She welcomes souls into this place called Seraphia after their human bodies have died." I kept my head low so the bill covered my face still. "She also kicks souls out of Seraphia and sends them back into their human bodies for another go at an Earthly life."

Slowly, I pulled the Ferguson Construction baseball hat off my head, letting my hair spill out around me. I raised my gaze and met Sylvie's to find her bug-eyed as she stared at me.

"Delphi?" My name was a shocked gasp from her mouth. "How?"

"I pissed Solari off with something I didn't do and she sent me back here." I arced my arms out to encompass the area around us.

"I didn't know that was possible." Sylvie had barely blinked as she looked at me.

"Yeah, well, I didn't know werewolves were possible, but here you are." I motioned to Sylvie and Mason.

Sylvie's gaze flicked to Mason, her green eyes widening even more. "You told her?"

"I did, and before you come at me about breaking the rules, I have to say I don't believe the rules apply here." Mason hooked his arm around my back, his hand resting at my waist. "The rules say no telling humans about werewolves, but Delphi lived as an angel, Sylvie." He pointed upwards. "Like

with wings and everything. She *died* and came back. That puts her clearly in the not-entirely-human category if you ask me.”

“I won’t tell anyone if that’s what you’re worried about,” I told Sylvie. “I just want to be with Mason and get to live the life I was ripped out of when I croaked.” I slid my arm around Mason and drew him closer. “I loved your brother back then, and I love him now. I want to love him for all the days I have here.”

Mason squeezed me and dropped a kiss on the top of my head. “I love you and I want that too.”

“Our pack is a genuine disaster, Mason,” Sylvie said. “You being with a non-werewolf isn’t going to help matters.” She massaged her temples and walked away then swiveled on her heel and paced back to us. “I was actually hatching a plan to set you up with a female from the Sinclaire pack so we could maybe merge or something. At least then we’d have access to a competent Alpha and maybe some hope of surviving.”

Mason released me to rest his hands on his sister’s shoulders. No doubt a move to get her to stop pacing. “If you promise to accept Delphi as my mate *and* help me convince the rest of the pack to accept her,” he said, “I will be Alpha.”

Sylvie’s eyes narrowed at Mason. “You will? You’re serious?”

“Completely serious.”

“I am glad to hear that.”

All three of us turned to find a woman with fiery red hair wearing a long, flowing white robe approaching us. She didn’t so much as walk as float.

Instantly, Mason and Sylvie sunk to their knees. Mason clamped a hand onto my forearm and tugged me down next to him.

“Moon Goddess,” Sylvie said. “It is an honor to see you.”

This absolutely stunning woman—or goddess—stopped in front of us. She put out her two hands, one of them going

under Sylvie's chin, the other under Mason's. It looked akin to a mother's loving caress and both of them closed their eyes.

"I have been waiting for someone to step up to lead the Ferguson pack, wishing I could command one of you to accept the task," Lunai said. "Alas, that is not within my responsibilities. I only see to the pair bonds." On the word *bonds*, the Moon Goddess flicked her penetrating gaze to me.

My gaze shot to the ground, wishing I could fade into the landscape, but Mason's grip on me tightened.

"I know she is not a wolf," he said, "but I love her, Lunai. With everything I have, I love her."

"And that love radiates between you. It is clear in your auras." She angled her head at me.

"She is the reason I can lead the Ferguson pack," Mason said. "I'm complete now that I have Delphi back. My heart is whole and I'm ready to take charge, fix the problems in the pack, and bring some respect back to the Ferguson wolves."

"I promise to help him however I can," I added. "I'm willing to learn everything there is to learn about werewolves, and I also swear never to tell anyone they exist."

"I accept these oaths." Lunai gestured for all three of us to stand. "I hold you to them as well."

"Does this mean we have your blessing to be mates?" Mason asked.

Lunai studied us for a weighted moment. Would Mason choose not to be with me if the Moon Goddess didn't approve of our union? Would he decide to leave his pack that clearly needed him?

Would I be left to live down here on Earth without the one person who made me feel loved so deeply? Now that would indeed be a punishment.

"I bless this match," Lunai finally said.

I couldn't help myself. I jumped into Mason's arms and gave him what was probably a crushing hug judging by the way the air whooshed out of him. He recovered quickly

though, and his arms wrapped around me while he kissed my temple.

When he released me, he turned to Lunai. “Thank you, Moon Goddess. I will not let you down in leading the Ferguson pack.”

“With the support of strong females like your mate and your dear sister here,” Lunai said, motioning to Sylvie, “you can only succeed.” The Moon Goddess smiled at us as her power vibrated in the air.

Especially when her gaze focused back on me. “You are not an ordinary human, are you?”

“She is not,” another voice answered.

And I recognized that voice.

Chapter Eight

Mason

It only took one guess to determine who this glowing female with golden wings and shining blond hair walking toward us was. A heat like that of the sun warmed my face as she drew closer.

“Solari,” Lunai said, her face like stone. “I have not seen you in an age.”

“Some of us have far more responsibilities than others.” Solari stopped beside the Moon Goddess.

I never expected Lunai to roll her eyes, but it happened. “And now I remember why I enjoyed not seeing you in an age. We are each in charge of important matters.”

Solari didn’t reply because her gaze was on Delphi, causing a sudden tightness in my chest.

“It seems I owe you an apology, Delphi Adamo.” Solari’s glow faded a bit as she took on a more solid form. She pulled her golden wings in and smoothed the front of the silky white suit she wore. “You maintained that you did not re-route those souls from the trainwreck and I have been made aware of evidence supporting that claim.”

“You mean you fucked up?” Delphi asked, making me gasp along with Sylvie.

Lunai, however, laughed. A deep, belly laugh that I had the sense she didn’t release often. She looked at me. “You’ve chosen well, wolf. Very well indeed.”

“Chosen?” Solari slid her gaze to me then faced Lunai. “What do you mean?”

“She means Mason and I are mated,” Delphi said. “She’s blessed the union and everything.”

Solari turned back to Delphi and something about the look in her violet eyes made my gut churn. “Did she now?”

Delphi took my hand. “I accept your apology, by the way. Who did re-route the souls?”

“That’s not important,” Solari said. “What is important, however, is correcting the error.”

Delphi’s brow creased. “Correcting the error?”

That swirling in my stomach intensified and I gripped Delphi’s hand tighter. Sylvie positioned herself on Delphi’s other side and a step in front of her. The defensive stance let me know my sister didn’t like where this conversation was going either.

“You did nothing wrong so your soul belongs in Seraphia,” Solari said.

“But I don’t want—”

Delphi’s sentence was cut off when a flash of golden lightning zipped down from the sky, slammed into the ground, and radiated out. Sylvie and I were thrown back, our wolves exploding so we each landed on four paws instead of slamming our spines on the hard pavement of the apartment building’s parking lot.

It took a few moments for the spots from the lightning display to fade from my vision. When they did, I immediately noticed three things.

First, deep cracks cut through the parking lot from the lightning’s impact.

Second, a few golden feathers littered the area around us.

And third, Delphi was gone.

A loud howl erupted from my throat and Sylvie sidled up beside me, rubbing her cheek against mine. How could I survive losing Delphi again? How?

The answer was simple. I couldn’t.

Delphi had made no mention of being able to find people who had passed once in Seraphia, but I had to believe it was possible. That our souls were destined to find each other no matter what. I didn’t know if werewolf souls ended up in

Seraphia, but living here on Earth without Delphi was not an option. Not after having her back. Not after Lunai had blessed our mating bond. Not after dreaming about a future together.

A future we were robbed of once already.

I bolted over the fissures in the parking lot and headed for the main road. Sylvie was right behind me, but if I stopped to let her catch up, she'd try to stop me, and I had to do this.

Had to.

I ran through a basically deserted Moon Valley at this hour of the early morning and headed for the interstate. There was sure to be some traffic there. Some exhausted truckers maybe, not quite paying attention to the road ahead of them. I climbed an embankment, prepared to rocket right onto that highway, but a thick red haze rose from the ground, completely surrounding me.

My limbs froze up, my paws rooted to the ground somehow. I could neither advance nor retreat. I snarled and barked, a wave of wildness I'd never felt before crashing over me. Sylvie howled somewhere in the distance behind me, no doubt as trapped as I was right now.

A motor sounded and when I looked to the highway no more than fifty yards from my stuck position, a huge tractor-trailer barreled on by. That thing would have flattened me nicely, and my soul could have been on its way to find Delphi.

My mate.

An ache a million times more powerful than the one I'd felt after learning Delphi had died in that car accident throbbed inside me. I tried to break free from my captivity, but I was so weak, as if something was draining every ounce of my werewolf strength from me.

"Stop struggling, Alpha," a voice said from the red fog.

"Lunai?"

She materialized from the mist as it dissipated and waved a hand over me, causing me to shift back to human. "I won't let

you end yourself. You have a pack to lead, one that needs you.”

“But *I* need Delphi.” I stayed on all fours, bits of rock and gravel grinding against my bare knees and palms, but I was too fatigued to stand.

Too heartbroken. Again.

Lunai came closer and crouched in front of me. She tipped my head up with a finger to my chin. Her touch made all my pain leach out of me. “I can make you forget her.”

I jerked back so we no longer had direct contact. “I don’t want to forget her. I want her back.”

Lunai rose to standing and folded her arms across her chest, regarding me as if looking at an alien creature she couldn’t identify. “Is your love so deep for her that you’re willing to die for the chance to be with her again?”

“Deeper.”

The Moon Goddess smiled and suddenly I was back in my jeans and Moose’s Diner T-shirt.

“Mason? Where are you?” My sister’s voice was panicked.

“Over here,” I called and a moment later, Sylvie emerged fully dressed as well from the dark woods that bordered the highway. “Oh, thank the Goddess, you’re all right. I thought you were going to—”

“I was.”

Sylvie shuddered.

“There are far less painful ways for you to get to Seraphia,” Lunai said.

“I don’t care how painful or not painful it is,” I said. “I need to get Delphi back. We’re mates. We’ve always been mates. With her by my side, I can lead the Ferguson pack. I can turn them into something respectable with her. Without Delphi, none of it matters.”

Sylvie put her arm around my back and gave me a supportive squeeze.

“There have been many changes in the wolves recently. Pair bonds being broken. Rival pack members becoming mates. Wolves turning humans and becoming mates.” Lunai gestured to me. “Now I have a wolf who wants to die to find his angel mate in the afterlife.”

“Please, Lunai.” My voice was full of begging, but I didn’t care. I would beg for Delphi. I would do anything for her. “If you can get me to Seraphia, I’m ready to do it your way. I’m ready right now. If not . . .” I motioned to the highway behind her, which I was still considering as a real option.

Sylvie’s grip on me tightened. “Don’t make me watch my brother die, Lunai.”

“You will not have unlimited time,” Lunai said. “I can send you to Seraphia, but you have to act fast. Solari will most likely have taken Delphi straight to the Chosen City for a full cleansing of her soul. That process takes a little while, but once it is done, Delphi will not remember you. She will only know the bliss of Seraphia, of being an angel.”

“I understand.” My bond to Delphi would have to be enough to help me find her quickly.

Sylvie gave me a hug then stepped back. “You’d better come back because I don’t want to be the only wolf with a brain in the Ferguson pack.” She swiped at the tears rolling down her cheeks. “Oh, yeah. I also love you.”

I pulled her in for another hug. “I promise to be back.” I kissed the top of her head. “And I love you too.”

“You won’t be able to shift up there,” Lunai said. “You will be a human with a temporary pass to Seraphia, so to speak. Just as I have the power to send you there, Solari has the power to send you back here . . . or to another place.” She pointed a finger to the ground and a shudder rippled through both Sylvie and me. “You’d better be convincing in your argument for letting you have Delphi back.”

“I will.” Though I had no idea how to convince the Sun Goddess to give me what was actually a third chance with

Delphi. The right words would come to me when I needed them, wouldn't they?

"Kneel." Lunai put her hands out as I sank to my knees in front of her. "Let the love in your heart guide you, wolf."

I expected more ceremony, perhaps some chanting, maybe another magical haze, but none of that happened. I was kneeling in front of Lunai in the woods by the highway with Sylvie standing next to me one moment. In the next moment, I was in an all-white room with windowed walls that gave a view of the most beautiful gardens I had ever seen. Waterfalls cascaded from rocky heights, falling musically into glistening pools. Flowers of every kind and color stretched for as far as I could see out every window. Bright green moss growing on boulders looked so soft. I had an overwhelming urge to find a way out of the room so I could sit on that verdant carpet and soak up the glorious sunshine that bathed everything in golden light.

I'm in Heaven.

I had known that when Delphi talked of Seraphia, she'd been essentially describing Heaven, but I pictured it as a harsher place. One that would kick her out for something she hadn't done. One that didn't forgive.

But this place? This place was light and love and a tranquility that could never be found anywhere else.

And I'd never be anywhere else if I didn't find Delphi and Solari and plead my case.

I scanned the room, but it didn't have any doors, so I approached one wall of windows. Not surprisingly, they were made of seamless glass with no way of opening them.

"C'mon, Solari," I said to the empty room. "I know you know I'm here."

"I do."

I whirled around from the windows to find the Sun Goddess sitting on a golden throne that was not in the room a moment ago. Did I not hear her enter because of her own

powers or because I no longer had my enhanced werewolf senses of hearing or smell?

Which was incredibly weird, by the way. I never realized how much I relied on those more developed senses when in human form.

“And you also know *why* I’m here.” I folded my arms across my chest, going for a confident, down-to-business attitude. Or at least the façade of that attitude anyway. In reality, my heart beat so hard I worried it would short-circuit from too much activity. “Where is Delphi?”

“Getting fitted for new wings.”

I couldn’t tell if Solari was joking or not. Did goddesses joke? It seemed as if Lunai had a sense of humor so why shouldn’t Solari? Her face didn’t look particularly jovial, however.

“Lunai wouldn’t have sent me here if she didn’t truly believe Delphi and I are mates.” I dared to take a few steps closer to Solari. Should I kneel? Bow? Offer her my firstborn?

Firstborn.

It wasn’t until that moment that I pictured having children with Delphi. I’d put the entire idea of procreation out of my mind after she’d died. I didn’t want to bring a child into a world that didn’t have Delphi in it. Having a child with her now, however, was something I wanted very much.

“Something that could benefit everyone,” I said.

“What?” Solari’s blond brows lowered.

“A child,” I said. “Look, I came here to beg you to let me have Delphi back, to allow us to live the life we were cheated out of years ago. I still want that, but maybe we can all get something out of this deal.”

“Deal? I don’t make deals,” Solari said. “Especially with werewolves.”

“I have a human side too,” I pointed out. “I have a foot—or a paw—in both categories. I have the benefits of both.”

“You also have the flaws of both.”

“That’s true, but that’s what makes us all unique, right? That’s what time on Earth is all about, isn’t it? Making the most of the benefits, and learning from the struggles the flaws create,” I said. “It’s also about relationships. About finding a love that amplifies life. Humans need love. Werewolves need love, and I’m willing to bet angels are the truest form of love.” I spread my arms out to either side of me. “How could they not be in this beautiful place?”

Solari didn’t say anything, but she was so focused on me that I knew she’d heard me.

“What if you sent Delphi back to Earth with me, but you let her keep her wings and her status as an angel? She can have her human form, but act as a liaison between Earth and Seraphia. You originally kicked Delphi out because of some re-routing of souls, right? You discovered the mistake, but a liaison could have probably helped you avoid the mix-up altogether.”

A chair suddenly appeared beside me and Solari motioned for me to sit. I took that as a good sign that she was actually listening to what I had to say—what I was essentially making up on the fucking spot—and wanted to hear more.

I lowered into the chair. “I agreed to be Alpha of my pack. One of the Alpha’s duties is to make sure the pack has a succession of Alphas. The problems with the Ferguson pack right now are a direct result of our previous Alpha not having any heirs. Yes, it’s true that relations can step up, but it’s better to have a planned line of Alphas, ready to assume the role. That way the proper training can occur along the way.”

“So you want to have heirs with Delphi to get your Alpha cycle back on track?” Solari drummed her fingers on the armrest of her throne.

“I do, but if she remains an angel and we mate, our pups will be human, werewolf, and angel with their feet, paws, and wings in all three realms. Imagine the unity we could achieve, the new precedent of integration, the sheer awesomeness of

what Delphi and I can create, and that can serve both you and Lunai.”

I’d gotten so excited with this idea that I’d popped out of my seat and paced in front of Solari instead.

“We’d be adding something to the world that has never been there before, something with so many possibilities.” I stopped in front of Solari. “All I need is Delphi, my mate, my angel, my deep love back.”

Solari angled her head at me. “I have seen some wolves that Lunai oversees who have the passion and energy that you have, but none that have so much light.”

Was that a compliment? It felt like a compliment, and compliments could only mean Solari was about to agree to my plans. I’d done it. I’d convinced her. I closed my eyes, relishing my victory.

When I opened them, I was standing in my driveway at my cabin on Rodgers Lake.

And I was alone.

Chapter Nine

Delphi

“No!” I pounded my fists against the walls. While I hadn’t been able to see Mason as he spoke with Solari in the next room, I’d immediately sensed he was in Seraphia and I’d heard everything he’d said. I’d basked in the fact that he wanted to have children with me, to create a family together. I wanted that too. So damn much.

And he was a genius for the angle he was playing with trying to win Solari over.

Human-werewolf-angel babies? Fucking brilliant!

But of course it was a clever plan. I’d expect nothing less from Mason, Alpha of the Ferguson pack, chef at Moose’s Diner, and owner of my entire heart.

Solari had sounded as if she’d been about to agree, but then I felt Mason leave Seraphia. Felt the loss like a knife to my gut. I had my wings back, but I was still human. I hadn’t forgotten Mason yet or the endless love I had for him.

“Why did you send him back?” I yelled, my fists still beating against the wall. “Mason and I were meant to be together!”

“Indeed you were.”

I turned to face Solari who had appeared in the room. “He figured out a way to come here, to make a plea for me, to propose an alliance with you, and you sent him back without me.”

Solari’s wings were out in a resting position close to her back and they bristled slightly as she walked a circle around me. “What did you think of his proposed alliance? Would you wish to be returned as an angel inhabiting a human body and act as my liaison? Do you want to produce heirs for the Ferguson pack? Are you agreeable to having me play a part in shaping your young into individuals who act on behalf of humans, werewolves, and angels?”

That was a great many questions, but my answer was the same for all of them.

“Yes.”

“You don’t need to time to contemplate these questions?” Solari clasped her hands in front of her.

“What’s to contemplate? I know that as long as Mason and I are together, whatever life we make and however our children are raised will be wonderful.”

“And you have no problems reporting to me? Traveling between Earth and Seraphia on occasion for different matters?”

An excitement rattled around inside me. Solari was considering Mason’s wild plan.

“As long as you don’t take me away from anything important involving the many children Mason and I will have, then I am happy to work for you, Solari.”

“Many children?”

I shrugged one shoulder. “Why stop at one or two?”

The flood of love I’d felt on my first trip to Seraphia when Solari herself had welcomed me crashed over me. I actually stumbled back a few steps under the power of the emotion, the warmth, the sheer joy that filled my heart.

“I suppose allowing you to return would be sufficient apology for casting you out in the first place,” Solari said. “I am truly sorry for that mistake, Delphi. Human investigators looked into the trainwreck and determined that a group of humans had an elaborate plot to kill everyone on that train. They planned to pin it on a handful of politicians who were traveling on the train to damage their re-election campaigns. That group is the same group of souls that was re-routed.”

“Only they didn’t get re-routed,” I said. “They went exactly where they were supposed to go.”

“Correct. I’m not sure how your name came to me as the one responsible, but it is matters such as these that you would be most useful as a liaison on Earth.”

“Because you’re going to agree to Mason’s suggestions?” I pressed my hands together in a prayer motion.

“We’ll have another meeting after I’ve had a chance to consider what I want your role to be exactly and what our goals should be in terms of the unity your werewolf hopes to achieve.”

I opened my mouth to agree, but Solari’s golden wings spread and she opened her arms to me.

“Come here, Delphi.”

I stepped into her embrace and her goddess wings wrapped around me. I felt incredibly safe and peaceful in that winged cocoon, but when her wings slowly peeled away, I was crouched by a lake.

One that I knew.

I immediately stood and turned in a half-circle until Mason’s cabin came into view.

“Thank you, Solari!”

I ran as fast as I could toward Mason’s cabin, the rising sun painting the sky above Rodgers Lake a multitude of pinks and oranges. Mason and I used to sit on the end of the dock on his property to watch sunrises together, our feet dangling into the water. I couldn’t wait to do that again with him.

And our children.

I reached the back door of his cabin and knocked. I waited for what seemed like an eternity then knocked a few more times, but Mason did not make an appearance.

A trickle of unease mixed into my bloodstream and traveled throughout my body. Where was he? As far as I could tell it was still early morning and most likely still the same day.

I closed my hand around the doorknob, surprised when it turned and I was able to open the door. The interior of the cabin was bright, but I didn’t see the one person I wanted to see more than anyone else.

Memories of the times we'd spent together at this cabin flickered into my mind, one after the other after the other. Each one brought a smile to my face, but if I couldn't find Mason, how were we supposed to make more memories in this cabin?

What if Solari had sent Mason back to Earth, but she'd messed up somehow? What if he was currently trying to find his way back here after getting dropped off somewhere else?

"Mason?" I went down his hallway, only darkness at the end where his bedroom was.

And where he was.

Mason was lying on his bed, stomach down and the blankets only pulled up to his waist so his beautifully muscled back was on display. An empty bottle of tequila was on the bedside table and a shot glass was beside it but turned on its side so a little puddle of liquor had pooled on the table top.

"So you went full Ferguson on me, did you?" I whispered. I couldn't blame him. He'd no doubt thought Solari had dismissed his proposal, that he and I would never be together again. There would have been *two* empty tequila bottles if I'd been in his shoes.

I crept closer, taking a few moments to appreciate the mere sight of my werewolf mate. Goddess, I loved him so much.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, I caressed Mason's back, causing him to release a low hum.

"Wake up, Mason." I pressed a kiss to his shoulder blade then shook him gently. "Wake up and let's start making those babies you want."

His eyes slowly opened and he blinked at me as he rolled to his side. With a crinkled brow, he raised a hand and slid it along my thigh. "Promise me this isn't some bullshit goddess trick or a tequila-infused hangover hallucination."

I laughed and leaned over him to capture his tempting mouth. Instant heat sparked between us and Mason's arms wrapped around me as the kiss deepened. He turned us so I

was lying beneath him, never losing the connection our lips had.

Mason was naked beneath the blankets and he wasted no time in ridding me of the simple white dress I was wearing. Apparently, Solari had thought the dress appropriate for this much anticipated reunion. Had she chosen it because it was so easy to remove? Whatever the reason, I was glad to have it off me and to have my naked body pressed against Mason's naked body.

He trailed kisses along my jaw, the column of my throat, my collar bone, and between the valley of my breasts. The light scrape of his beard along my flesh sent delicious shivers throughout my entire body. Capturing first one breast for some adoration then the other, Mason primed me for making love to him. His tongue swirled around my nipples and I arched into him, eager to surround his length and drown in this love we shared.

Mason dipped his finger into my wet heat, growling at what he found there.

"I'm ready for you, Mason. So ready," I whispered.

"I get to keep you this time, right?" He kissed my chin, my nose, my forehead then met my gaze. "For a long time?"

"Solari agreed to your plan."

I pushed him to his back and straddled him, my fiery core rubbing against his arousal and pulling another growl out of him.

Sexiest noise ever.

"I thought we didn't have a deal when she sent me back here alone," Mason said. "I had to promise Sylvie that I wouldn't intentionally drown myself in the lake. I made the promise, but honestly . . . I almost didn't keep it." He waved a hand at the empty tequila bottle. "I chose to drown in a different form instead, but it didn't make the pain go away. Not even a little bit."

I leaned down and brushed his lips with mine. "I was right on the other side of the wall of the room you were in with

Solari in Seraphia. I nearly broke that wall down with my fists when she sent you back to Earth without me.”

“But you talked her into sending you too?”

I shook my head. “She’d decided to send me after talking to you, but she wanted to make sure I agreed to the terms of the deal.”

“Would have been nice if she let me know that,” Mason grumbled. “It would have saved me the trouble of getting shitfaced.”

“Too shitfaced to finish what’s going on here?” I wiggled my hips a little so I gyrated against his erection.

“No, ma’am.” He clamped his hands onto my hips. “I will never say no to making love to you.”

“Especially now that we have heirs to make.”

He crunched up to sitting and tucked my hair behind my ears. “You want them, right? Children? With me?”

I cupped his cheeks. “Of course. Our children are going to be remarkable.”

I let my white, lavender-tipped wings spread to their full span and Mason gasped as he reached out a tentative hand to stroke the feathers.

“She let you keep them,” he said.

“Angels need their wings,” I said. “And I need you.”

“They are so beautiful.” His gaze met mine. “Just like you.”

Mason chose that moment to enter me, his length gliding in, filling me. He pulled back and thrust in again, hitting all the right spots as he did so. It didn’t take long for me to completely break apart and ride a wave of euphoria only Mason could bring me.

As he found his release, I caught a flash of extended canine teeth in his mouth and shit if that wasn’t the hottest thing ever. He nipped at my flesh, but I sensed he wanted to really bite me.

For some reason that idea thrilled me.

“Do it,” I said.

Mason’s blue gaze locked onto mine. “It’s how wolves finalize the mating bond.”

“Bite me,” I said, “then marry me because that’s how humans finalize the mating bond.”

He laughed, showing more of those impressive canine fangs. He then leaned forward and caught the skin between my shoulder and neck in a bite that pinched a little but mostly added an entirely new layer of sexual energy to our lovemaking. I orgasmed again from the bite and he was definitely getting a round two out of it as well.

Mason released me from the bite and licked the puncture marks with his tongue, effectively banishing any sense of pain I’d had.

“I feel more yours,” I said.

“Same.” Mason nuzzled the curve of my neck and I loved being all tangled up with him. “How do angels finalize the mating bond?”

I brought my wings in a bit. Getting off the bed, I bent to pick up a pair of jeans for Mason to put on and my discarded dress for me. “Get dressed and I’ll show you.”

Mason wasted no time following my command and was by my side at the French doors that led to a patio off his bedroom. I took his hand, opened one of the doors, and tugged him outside to stand in the middle of the patio.

“Hold on tight now.” I placed his hands at my waist, waiting for him to link them behind me. I spread my wings to their full span.

And we flew.

Over the quiet and still lake.

Above the green-leafed mountains.

Into the perfect morning sky.

When I set us back down in Mason's yard, he led me back into the cabin and to his bedroom. After rummaging around in a dresser drawer, he guided me outside again and to the end of the dock. Fireflies zipped around in graceful arcs. Bees buzzed in the wildflowers. Birds sang the day's songs, and sunlight warmed the soles of my bare feet on the worn wooden dock boards. A perfectly blue sky stretched above us, promising a flawless summer day in Moon Valley.

Mason held up a small box. "I bought this when I was in the Army with the plan of asking you to marry me when I returned to the United States. You weren't here when I got back though, and I thought I'd never be happy again."

He opened the box to reveal a round diamond that sparkled as much as the sun shining on the lake and I put my hands to my mouth.

"You told me to marry you to finalize our bond, and there's nothing I want to do more," Mason said.

I held out my hand, splaying my fingers so he had easy access to the one that was so eager to wear that ring. "Put it on! Put it on!"

Mason chuckled and freed the ring from the box. He stashed the box in his back pocket and slid the ring onto my finger. "We'll always be there for each other. We'll straighten out what is now *our* pack."

"We'll add to that pack with our human-werewolf-angel babies," I added.

"Yes, we will, my angel," Mason agreed. "But most importantly, we'll share this deep love for all the days we have together."

"Let them be many, Alpha."

Mason pulled me up against him and we kissed in the morning sunlight. When we ended the kiss and headed back to the cabin, Solari and Lunai were standing on either side of where the dock rested on the shore. They both gave us an approving nod then shook hands with each other before disappearing.

“You did that.” I gestured to where the two goddesses had been. “You’ve united them.”

“No, *we* did,” Mason said, pressing a kiss to my forehead. “And we’re only getting started.”

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About the Author

Christine DePetrillo can often be found hugging trees, conversing with dragonflies, and walking barefoot through sun-warmed soil. She finds joy in listening to the wind, bathing in moonlight, and breathing in the fragrances of things that bloom. If she had her way, the sky would be the only roof over her head.

Her love of nature seeps into every story she tells. As does her obsession with bearded mountain men who build, often smell like sawdust, and know how to cherish the women they love. Today she writes tales meant to make you laugh, maybe make you sweat, and definitely make you believe in the power of love.

She lives in Vermont with her husband and many woodland creatures who defend her fiercely from all evils.

Find Christine's other titles at [**www.christinedepetrillo.weebly.com**](http://www.christinedepetrillo.weebly.com). Connect on Facebook at [**www.facebook.com/christinedepetrilloauthor**](https://www.facebook.com/christinedepetrilloauthor), on Instagram at [**@christinedepetrillo**](https://www.instagram.com/christinedepetrillo), and at the [**Small Town Hearts Facebook Group**](#). Sign up for her newsletter here [**www.christinedepetrillo.weebly.com**](http://www.christinedepetrillo.weebly.com) for new release information.