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HIS TO PLAY WITH

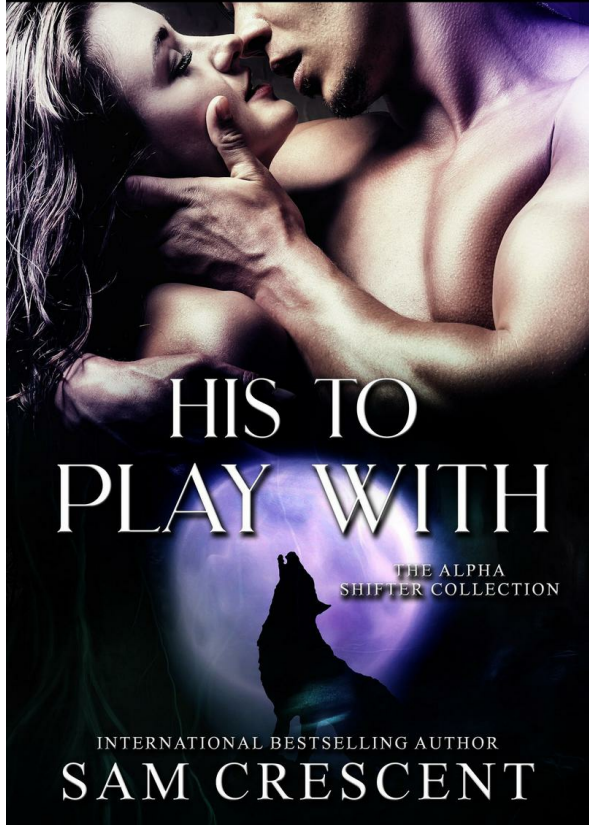
THE ALPHA
SHIFTER COLLECTION



INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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HIS TO PLAY WITH

The Alpha Shifter Collection, 12

Sam Crescent

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CHAPTER ONE

This was insane.

Anger rushed through Holly Meek as she stared across the large dining hall at the heartless bastard.

“You can’t possibly be serious,” she said.

“I don’t want your pack’s stink around me. I don’t trust wolves that travel in packs.”

She scoffed. “I told you why we had to move. The hunters closed in. We lost good men and women.” It was a miracle they’d been able to get the children out in time. Human hunters were rare, but one of their pack had betrayed them. For drugs, he’d given them all the information the hunters needed to attack them.

Her father hadn’t been prepared.

The bloodbath would stay with her forever.

It had taken them weeks to stumble into this small town. Not many locals and they’d stuck to the forest, biding their time to slowly join the community, but this man, Damon Barasic, had denied them. His scent covered the entire town, forest, and surrounding areas. There was no other sign of any other wolf. Just him.

Her father had approached and was denied residence.

Now Holly stood in his large house, more like a mansion, trying to reason with him. They were all tired. Exhaustion meant bad news in wolf form. If they were too tired during their turn, the wolf took over completely and they were at the mercy of their beast until they went back to sleep.

“Do I look like I care?” He speared a piece of steak and shoved it in his mouth, his gaze on her the entire time.

“Fine.” She held her hands up in surrender. “I’m sorry for wasting your time. We’ll be gone tomorrow morning.”

The children were not in a fit state to move. Holly didn’t know what she was going to do to get them moving.

She ran fingers through her hair, turning on her heel to leave, already making plans.

“You’re not going to offer me anything?” Damon asked.

Holly stopped and looked toward him. “Excuse me?”

“You’re the alpha’s daughter, am I correct?”

“Yes.”

“And you don’t think you could offer me ... a peace offering? Or convince me to let you and your rodents stay?”

“We’re not rodents.” Anger rushed down her spine. The need to defend her pack was strong, but she also knew she had no way of winning if she started a fight with this man. She was strong, but not up to his strength. The scent of him cried alpha. It came off him in waves, almost all-consuming the scent was so strong. “What do you want? Money?”

“I don’t need money.”

“Someone to clean your lands?”

“No.”

This was getting more confusing by the second. “If you don’t need someone to clean your lands or your house, what do you want?”

“I want someone to play with.”

This made her frown. “Excuse me?” He was a grown man, she doubted very much he meant playdates.

Damon sat back. His gaze went down the full length of her body before traveling back up.

She knew as a wolf, her body was rare. Most of the female wolves were slender. Holly had been a bigger woman, curvy all her life. As a young child, she’d been bigger, then as a teenager, she’d gained even more weight. After her transformation, she’d kept all her curves and was one of the biggest women within the pack. Her mother was also a curvy woman and Holly’s father completely doted on her. Their love was something Holly hoped to find for herself.

She’d yet to find a mate.

No one within the pack had staked a claim and there was certainly no compelling feeling to mate with anyone.

“You know what I mean,” he said.

“Be blunt then.”

“I want someone to fuck.”

His words echoed around the large hall. Holly stayed perfectly tense.

“Was that blunt enough for you?”

“Is this a joke?”

“I don’t joke about sex.”

She looked past his shoulder. “Do you want to have your pick of the females within the pack?” There was no way she’d ask anyone to bed this man for their safety. It was out of the question.

“Hell, no. You.”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me. I want you. No one else.” He smiled. “Holly, become my fuck toy, my plaything, and you and your pack of rodents can stay here permanently.”

She glared at him. “Don’t call them rodents.”

He shrugged.

She couldn’t believe she was hearing this. It was crazy. He wanted her to become his ... fuck toy, and in return, her family and pack were safe.

“What does this mean? Do I have to come to you every single time you call?” she asked.

Damon sighed. “No. It means your family and pack will stay here and you will live here. You will not return to your family. You will remain here. You will belong to me for however long I see fit.”

“And when you’re bored with me?”

“Depending on how well you serve me, you and your family can stay and live out your lives on my lands.”

She hated this. “And if I refuse?”

“You leave.”

“You’re not giving me any options here.”

Damon laughed. “You’re not in any place to have options. You think I should just allow you to stay here out of the goodness of my heart?”

“Yes.”

“The world doesn’t work that way.”

“Didn’t you ever have a pack? Don’t you understand that bond?”

“I understand that packs are fucking vicious.” Damon growled each word. He no longer looked calm and collected. Now he looked ready to kill. “For you stepping on my land, I had the right to kill you all.” He snarled each word, and she felt the heat of his anger.

This man was strong and powerful. He displayed alpha tendencies clearly, and Holly sank to her knees.

“Please. I’m begging you,” she said.

“You will beg, Holly, but those are my only conditions. For your pack to stay, you belong to me.”

“Do I have time to ... answer?” she asked.

He snorted. “Your family comes with a price. I should have known.”

“You’re asking me to give my body for my family and I don’t ... I can’t even go and tell them?”

“Do you think they’ll allow you to give yourself to me?” he asked. “Are your pack selfish enough?”

“No,” she said without hesitation.

“So, they won’t allow you to come back. They will move on and risk death and chaos because of their feelings for you.” He chuckled. “And you need to think about it?”

She hated this man so much. He was cold. Unfeeling, and such a cruel man. Hatred consumed her.

Her family and pack were her world. At twenty-three years old, she had devoted every waking moment to the pack. Even before she turned, she’d been there helping, guiding where she could.

Wrapping her arms around her waist, she stared at the coldness

surrounding her. His home was massive, but it wasn't lived in, not truly. This man, this lonely alpha, was all alone. There was a story to him. She didn't know what it was, but she had a feeling deep down, there had to be a heart beating within his chest, even if it was filled with ultimatums.

"I have some ... conditions," she said.

"You think you're in a position to tell me what you want?"

"Yes."

"Fine. Entertain me then."

"You can't hurt me. You can't cut me or break any bone."

He wrinkled his nose. "You misunderstand me, I want you to fuck, not to break. If I wanted to hurt something, I'd take it out on a punching bag or go and find a local bear to piss off. I will not hurt you, but I will make you beg for more." He moved from the table, coming toward her.

Holly kept her back straight, staring at him as he advanced. The scent of him got stronger the closer he got. He didn't touch her, and she tilted her head back to look at him. Damon was much taller than her, standing at over six feet.

He reached out, stroking one of her blonde locks and tucking it behind her ear. He did this without even touching her.

Heat flooded her body.

Her reaction annoyed her. How dare she find any part of this man appealing? She intended to belong to him, but anything else, she would never want him or crave him. He'd get her body, but that would be all.

"Do you think I can't smell your reaction to me? Your pussy is so wet for me right now, and I've got to say, Holly, I want to taste you."

He didn't touch her.

Seconds passed.

Minutes.

She hoped he didn't take away his offer. He was so close, and the temptation to touch him was strong. What the hell was wrong with her body?

She'd never been with a man. Had never even desired sex or touch. During the full moon, when she ran, she'd witness couples coming together. Within her father's pack, there was no hiding love. Every single member embraced it. Seeing couples together made her yearn for her own mate. Finding her mate wasn't as easy as the books claimed to be. Some matings took time.

"I accept your conditions, Holly. You will not be harmed in any way."

"Then I accept your proposal. My body and me in exchange for my family and pack being able to safely stay here."

She'd just signed over her fate to a monster.

After Holly agreed to his demands, he'd sent for his butler, Henry, to escort her to her new rooms. He needed her out of the way before he bent her over the table and fucked her like an animal.

Her scent was intoxicating.

His mouth watered, and his cock was hard as fucking rock at the lingering smell of her. The moment he saw her on the edge of the forest, his wolf had growled. It was the first time in his life a female had ever driven him to act. He'd wanted to claim her. Her pack adored her. For two days, he'd watched them without anyone seeing him. Even her alpha of a father

hadn't sensed another alpha lurking. What kind of leader didn't detect danger?

The pack wasn't strong. They were all ... weak. From what he heard, they'd been traveling for days, escaping a human hunt.

Most packs would have accepted them into their lives with ease, but not him. He'd not had anything to do with wolves in over thirty years. After being expelled from one pack and hunted by another, he vowed he'd never allow any near him.

Now he had an entire pack on his lands, and ones that were being hunted by humans. Not a good combination.

When it came to Holly, her curves, her smile, he'd stuck to the shadows just watching her. Her pack was drawn to her. Whenever there was a problem, she was the first person they went to. The love they all felt, he sensed it. They would do anything for her, which was why he couldn't allow her to return to her family and had instead sent word to the pack by Henry.

He stayed in his dining hall, waiting for the necessary confrontation.

His cock was stiff. The need to go and fuck strong, but he waited.

Many believed he was a heartless monster, but in truth, life had made him this way. For Damon, it was easier to live alone in his mansion than to ever risk letting people get close.

He rubbed at his temple, and the memory of Holly smiling at one of the children filled his mind. The young girl had been crying as she ran over to Holly. She'd tripped, falling, and torn her jeans. Holly had used some medical supplies, wiping away the girl's pain, and then hugged her close, picking her up and dancing.

From tears to laughter, he'd been mesmerized.

The little girl had clung to Holly's neck like a lifeline, and she hadn't seemed to mind, carrying her around on her hip for the rest of the day, feeding her, helping others.

What kind of woman was Holly?

The kind who would give herself to make a home for her family and pack.

The door of his home slammed open. Her father had finally arrived.

"Where is she? Holly! Holly!"

Damon got to his feet and walked to the door to see the man himself. He was tall, his long, blond hair bound at the nape of his neck. Amber eyes turned toward him with a growl. "What kind of monster are you?"

"The kind that is giving permission for you and your mutts to stay here."

"Not out of the kindness of your heart. I want my daughter. We will not stay on your lands. Holly." The father glared at him. "What have you done with my daughter?"

Damon was ready to fight.

There was no way this man was taking Holly away from him. He'd followed her as she journeyed to his home after he'd invaded their pack and told them to leave. She'd hesitated outside of his home, only to square her shoulders and wait for him to come. He'd run to the kitchens where a change of clothes was waiting for him and his cold dinner.

Did she know he'd been following her?

"I'm right here," Holly said, appearing at the top of the stairs. She still wore the stained clothing she'd come in. She stood at the top of the stairs,

hand on the banister as she slowly made her way down.

It was then he noticed she leaned a little to one side.

Damon sniffed the air and there it was. The young woman was in pain but she refused to let it show. Irritation swamped him. He'd been too busy paying attention to his need for her that he hadn't even taken the time to see if she was hurt. He assumed she was fine.

"Holly, you do not have to do this. None of us want this. You must return to the pack and we will leave."

"And go where? You and I both know this is our best chance. We have nowhere else to go, and with the moon coming in a matter of days. You've got to... Exhaustion is not a good place to be when we're due to change. Please, Dad."

"No! We will risk it. None of us want this for you. We can make it. All we've got to do is keep on moving."

"No," Holly said. She'd made it down to their level and took her father's hand, pressing a kiss to each of his hands. "You know this is the right thing to do. The right thing. Children who lost their parents, they don't need us going rogue on them. They need stability."

"I cannot ask you to do this for us," her father said.

"Daddy, no one can tell me or ask me to do anything I don't want to do. I'll do anything for the pack." She glanced behind her to look at him. "And he's given his word he won't cast you out. You can make a life here. We all can. Please. Do not make this harder. I want to do this for us."

"You're a good person, Holly. You know we wouldn't ask this of you."

She smiled. "I know, but that is why I have to do this." She let go of his

hands and wrapped her arms around him.

Damon watched as her father gripped the back of her neck in a hug. He didn't like the love coming off them. Had never witnessed such public displays of affection.

"Leave," Damon said. "And consider yourself lucky that I don't see your invasion on my property as the insult it is."

Holly stepped back. Damon put his hands on her shoulders, holding her against him. To anyone looking, it would appear he was holding her captive, but the truth was he merely held her up straight.

Her father looked at her one last time before turning on his heel and leaving.

Fucking coward.

"You're in pain."

"It's nothing."

Within seconds, he had her in his arms and carried her up to his bedroom. Henry had shown her to the guest bedroom. Kicking the door closed, he went straight to his en-suite and placed her on the counter near the sink.

"What are you doing?"

"Taking care of you." He grabbed the medical supplies from the cabinet beneath the sink and went toward her.

He reached for her shirt and she slapped his hands away. "Don't touch me."

"You're in pain. Untreated wounds can still cause infection and death in a damn wolf, Holly. Don't be so fucking stubborn. You think you can

escape this through dying? You die on me and your pack will be cast out.”

She lifted her shirt up so it rested beneath her tits. Her abdomen was bruised and several cuts lined her body. He also caught the hand-stitched right side that looked clean, but painful.

“Fuck, Holly.”

“I got ... shot. It wasn’t anything more than a graze, but it ... hurts.”

He gritted his teeth, angry with the humans for hunting them.

“Why didn’t you tell your family?” he asked.

“They were all running. I was helping a child. They didn’t need to know.”

“But they’d all blame themselves if you dropped dead from an infection. Stupid woman.”

“Just because you don’t understand what love and compassion is. I was doing what I could for my family.”

“And look where it got you,” he said.

“You don’t even know me. You have no right to speak about my decisions. Asshole.”

He laughed. “It’s nice to know you’ve still got a nice working tongue.”

“Be careful. I bite.”

“I can’t wait.”

CHAPTER TWO

One week later

Holly didn't know what she was expecting out of this ... man, but it certainly wasn't patience. He'd given her an ultimatum, and she'd expected to be his fuck toy from that night. Damon hadn't touched her sexually.

He took his time restitching her side, being careful as he did. The man had a gentle touch even as he pierced her skin with the needle to stitch her up. He gave her a mild painkiller. The pain wasn't so bad. Being shot was worse. Seeing the dead bodies of loved ones, that was even more horrible.

Damon regularly changed her bandages and took care of her.

His sweetness was not what she expected and it actually unnerved her. Where was the asshole demand-making monster?

Sitting for dinner on the seventh night, she watched him as he worked on his laptop. Each night, he took dinner while working. His attention completely devoted to the device in front of him.

"What do you do?" she asked.

He looked up and she pointed at his screen.

"Stocks and shares. I play the markets."

"And it works?"

"Look around you."

"You're not worried about a bad investment?"

"I never fall victim to a bad investment." He slammed the lid on his laptop closed. "What do you do?"

"I was ... I took care of the children. I was like a nanny or a caretaker."

“You found that fulfilling?”

“Yes.” She stared down at her food, her appetite waning under his scrutiny. “There’s nothing wrong with making a living out of caring for others.”

“I didn’t say there was, but there’s not a lot of money in it.”

“Maybe not, but not everything is about money.”

“Babe, everything is about money. The more you got, the easier life is. Let’s face it, if your pack had been dripping in gold, you wouldn’t have needed to bargain your life away.”

“Because a man who has everything would want more gold. You wouldn’t have changed your bargaining chip.”

“Oh, yeah, and what makes you so sure?”

“Simple. Look around you. You’re lonely. We never got another scent of a pack of wolves close by. With your sheer size and power, I’d say you wouldn’t be able to use human women, which means you have to seek out willing pack women who are unmated. I imagine they’re rare to find.”

“You’d be surprised.”

Jealousy rushed through her. “If women are so easy to come by, why me?”

“Why not you?”

“Come on, Damon, with your money, you could have any woman you want.”

“Nothing in this life is free. You want to stay here, there is a cost. Be grateful I didn’t ask for all of your pack’s females.”

She clenched her jaw, angry with him.

Finishing her food, she was determined to keep her strength up for the full moon. The pain she'd been experiencing since their escape was gone, and had been so under Damon's watchful eye, which only made her even angrier. The son of a bitch shouldn't have helped her. She didn't want to be in his debt, and she certainly didn't want to have any reason to like him.

Henry, his one and only butler who lived with him, came in to remove their plates once they finished.

"Goodnight," she said, hoping to make the escape to her room.

"Wait," Damon said.

She stood at the table and glared at him.

"Come here."

"I'm not a dog."

"Come here. Don't make me repeat myself again."

She wanted to argue with him, but instead, she stepped toward him until she stood beside his chair. "What?"

He gripped her waist and pulled her close so she stood between him and the table. Damon stood, leaving her no choice but to tilt her head back to look at him.

Stupid tall man. She hated him for his height.

Holly kept her hands at her sides as he went for the shirt she wore, slowly lifting it. The bruising was all gone and the cut at her side had healed. She'd already removed the stitches that morning as there was nothing to knit together.

With the food, rest, and medical care, her body had taken over the healing process.

His fingers touched her waist. "It's good to see you're all healed up."

She pressed her lips together, refusing to give him an answer.

He chuckled. His face pressed against her neck, and she gasped. Inhaling deeply, the wolf within her liked him. She wanted to come out and play.

Holly closed her eyes as both of his hands lifted her and placed her on the tabletop. His fingers went to the button of her jeans, flicking the catch open. He'd sent Henry to get what few clothes she had. When they arrived, he'd been annoyed and ordered her some new ones.

He surprised her by getting the sizing perfect.

The zipper being pulled down echoed around the room, and with a moan, she couldn't help but spread her legs as they were removed.

Damon threw them to the floor. His hands went to her thighs and spread them open.

He stared into her eyes. One of his hands grabbed the back of her neck and tilted her head to look at him. "I have been a very patient man."

"A week isn't a long time."

"Says the woman whose cunt is soaking wet and desperate for me to fuck you."

She clenched her teeth together, refusing to give in to him. Damon made her want to submit and fight him with equal measure. So long as he kept his mouth shut, he was more than tolerable. Damon kept on opening his mouth, and she didn't know how to get him to shut up to make this easier.

"I hate you," she said.

"You can hate me all you want, but that doesn't stop you from wanting

me.”

“I don’t want you.” The lie fell from her lips with ease.

“No?” He pressed a hand between her legs. The flimsy panties she wore were no match for him. He slid his fingers beneath the fabric with ease, and she gasped as he stroked along her slit.

Much to her embarrassment, he found her soaking wet. Sinking her teeth into her bottom lip, she tried to contain her moans.

“You can try to hide this all you want, but we both know who you want.” He leaned in so close she expected him to kiss her.

He moved to her neck, flicking his tongue across her pulse. “Lie down.”

She wanted to argue with him, to put up more of a fight. Instead, she leaned back against the tabletop, intent on denying him everything.

“You can keep on glaring at me. I don’t mind.” He lifted her legs so they were on the edge of the table. His large hands were on the inside of her thighs, and when he touched the lips of her sex, she gasped as he spread her open.

His groan echoed around the large room and she stared at him, shocked as the hungry look he gave her sent an answering heat all the way through her body.

Slowly, he moved, getting closer to her pussy. She never expected him to lick from her entrance up to her clit, but that was exactly what he did, circling her bud before sliding back down. Each time he went near her opening, she expected him to penetrate her, but instead, he teased her. She reached out, holding on to the edge of the table.

He let go of her inner thighs and pussy lips to grasp her ass. Then his mouth was on her clit, drawing it between his teeth, nibbling on her. Each touch and stroke made her ache and moan for more. He drove her wild with each passing second.

No man had ever touched her like this. His tongue was pure sin, and she couldn't get enough and didn't want him to stop.

His name spilled from her lips as he pushed her higher and higher, sending her near the edge of orgasm, but he kept her on that path, holding her captive, refusing to let her fall over. Each time she thought she was going to come, he held back, keeping his tongue poised in the same spot.

It was maddening.

Fire rushed through her body and only when he was ready did she fall over the edge. She cried out. She'd brought herself to orgasm many times, but none of them were like this. She'd never experienced this as his tongue danced between her thighs, heightening her need. The pleasure was intense, and Damon wouldn't be stopped. He slowed down his strokes, finally coming up for air, and as she looked at him, she saw her release on his face.

Heat flooded her cheeks as she stared at him.

Damon, this stranger, had just given her her first orgasm and at that moment, she hated him for it.

"You can have that anytime you want, sweet Holly, you've just got to learn to ask for more."

Holly was a stubborn woman.

Damon had only known her for a couple of weeks now but he was

already enthralled. She tried to avoid him most days, but breakfast and dinner, he made a point of sitting with her. Every single day since the first time he'd licked her pussy, he'd made it a ritual. After she finished her dinner, he demanded she come closer to him, and he'd spread her open and feast on her juicy pussy. Each time, she'd try to fight him, but her body knew what she wanted better than she did.

He adored the blush that would stain her cheeks after he finished. Holly wouldn't stick around, and he'd leave for his en-suite bathroom where he'd deal with his own dick. His hand wasn't what he wanted though. Tonight, as he stared at Holly, he wanted those plump, juicy lips wrapped around his dick by any means possible.

“I got word your family has found a small farm.”

“A farm?”

“Each one of your pack has been able to find some housing or other.”
He smiled at her.

“Thank you.”

“I didn't do anything.”

“You allowed them to stay. That's enough.” She rubbed at her temple.
“And the children who lost their parents?”

“I have no news about them, but I imagine in a pack as close as yours, you will deal with that problem.”

“They're not a problem.” She glared at him.

He chuckled. “Of course not.”

“Why don't you have a pack?” she asked.

“I don't need one.”

“Clearly, but why not? We’re social beings. Being alone is not ... a choice.”

He raised a brow.

“Unless you like living alone, and if you do, well, then you got everything you wanted, but then you wouldn’t need me.” Her face had heated.

“Are you thinking about me between those pretty thighs?”

“You’re vulgar.”

“And you pretend too much. Our very nature is to be open and to want to be close.”

“Exactly, which is why I don’t understand why you’re so lonely.”

“I’m not lonely.”

“Tell me.”

“No.” He put his fork down. “Not until you earn it.”

She sighed. “I completely understand why people don’t want to have anything to do with you.”

“Suck my cock and swallow my cum, and I’ll give you the answer you want.”

Henry had already made himself scarce. Damon had told him to not be in any room for long when he was alone with Holly.

The desire he felt for this woman increased every single day. All he had to do was sniff the air with her scent in it, and his need rose so fast. He couldn’t recall a time in his life where his cock was so hard, but for Holly, he was in a perpetual state of hunger.

She looked away. “Why can’t you just tell me?”

“Nothing in life is ever free.”

“And you’re going to make it your mission to show everyone that?”

“Just you.” He winked and she growled.

“You’re a pig.”

“And think what this pig does to that pussy. Even now, your hatred of me does not even begin to compare to how aroused you are. You want to suck my dick, Holly. You have since the first time I licked your cunt.”

“Why are you so vulgar?” she asked.

“I don’t believe in coloring up my language and playing false niceties. I see it how it is and I speak bluntly. To the point.”

“Fine.”

“I’m done. If you want to learn more, come to my room tonight. I’ll be waiting.” He stepped away from the table and made his way toward his bedroom. Damon hadn’t demanded she share his bed. She slept in the spare bedroom closest to him. Each night, when she went to sleep, he’d sneak into her room and watch her.

She looked so peaceful.

He’d seen her begin to heal, to grow stronger. The limpness had left her hair, and now it was full, the blonde strands appearing more golden than ever. Even her lips were a sharper red, and those beautiful green eyes shot emerald fire at him.

After stripping out of his clothes, he took a quick shower and changed into a robe, staring at the door.

Would Holly come to him?

He’d demanded she belong to him, but he hadn’t used her yet. He

hadn't put his dick inside her even though he craved it.

Time and patience.

It drove him insane and also turned him on. There was pleasure in the teasing and tormenting that he couldn't deny.

There was a timid knock on the door and he called for her to enter.

She stepped inside his bedroom. The white nightshirt he'd purchased for her accentuated those curves, the fullness of her tits and hips, making his balls tighten even more.

"You want to know more about me."

"I think it's only fair I know more about the man blackmailing me with my family and pack."

"Now you're using the word blackmail. I'm not keeping you here against your will. You can leave at any time. It's you who has chosen to stick around." He pressed his fingers together. "Take off your nightie."

Her hands clenched into fists for a split second, only to uncurl and reach for the edge of her nightie to pull it up and over her head. She didn't wear any panties, and he got to finally see her completely naked. The view before him was far better than he ever imagined.

His cock ached, and gripping the belt of his robe, he tugged it open and spread it wide, allowing it to fall to the floor. Wrapping his fingers around his cock, he sat on the edge of the bed, working his length as he stared at her. Those tits were meant for sucking. He couldn't wait for them to be hanging in front of his face as he fucked her hard.

"Come here."

"I don't like it when you order me around like that."

“Do you want me to repeat it?” he asked.

She stepped toward him, her footfalls light as she came closer. With his gaze on her, he banded an arm around her waist, pulling her against him, and he took one nipple into his mouth, sucking on the hard red bud. She cried out. Her hands went to his shoulders, but she didn't push him away.

This woman was full of yearning, hungry for physical touch. How had none of her pack known it? She was a good woman, but surely one of the males or females had to have known she was desperate for this. They'd left her vulnerable, and now she was in his arms, and he had no intention of letting her go.

After running his hands down her back, he grabbed her ass, squeezing the plump flesh. Nothing about her was slender, and he couldn't get enough. He pressed a kiss to her stomach and drew away.

“On your knees.”

She sank down, gracefully. Her gaze was on his cock and he saw the way she licked her lips.

Smiling, he wrapped his fingers around his cock, holding it tight as if it was a trophy.

“Open.”

Her lips parted.

“Stick your tongue out.”

She pushed her tongue out.

“Now, lick it.” He waited as she closed the distance, her tongue gliding across his cock. He stared at her, mesmerized as he worked around the root, coating him in her saliva. Soaking him.

“Now suck me.”

She stopped at the head, the tip of her tongue playing across the little slit before she covered him with her mouth.

He wrapped her hair around his fist, holding on to her as she sank onto his length, taking him until he hit the back of her throat.

She moaned, gagging slightly, but he held her in place, making her wait until he eased her off his length. Up and down, she bobbed her head, moaning around his dick as he fucked her face. He'd alternate between slow and fast strokes, going throat-deep, then shallow. All the while, his orgasm was so close. Tears leaked out of the corners of her eyes. Having her on her knees, at his mercy, he couldn't take it anymore.

“Don't swallow it until I tell you.” He growled, taking her mouth with one final thrust, spilling his cum into her mouth, flooding her.

He eased back, and Holly tilted her head back slightly so she didn't lose it all. He stroked one of her nipples as he watched her until he finally asked her to open her mouth.

She did, and he saw his creamy spunk coating her mouth and tongue.

“Swallow it all.”

With his hands at her throat, he waited as she took it, drinking him all down.

“Show me.”

She opened her mouth, and nothing remained.

“Good girl. I'm alone because my pack kicked me out. They hated to have a man stronger than their alpha. I was punished for being an alpha and completely not related to the pack. They expelled me.”

CHAPTER THREE

“They expelled me.”

The words kept going around Holly’s head the following morning. Was that why he was alone? The one pack that was supposed to love him had pushed him aside? Why? He was an alpha, there was no denying that. She felt the energy pouring off him in waves. Even her father struggled to stand toe to toe with him. The other night when her father came for her, she’d felt the tremor in his hands.

Damon was ... powerful.

Why didn’t he have a pack of his own?

It made no sense. He was strong enough to have an army of men and women. Damon had been blessed with good looks, and well, his cock certainly wasn’t something to mock or pity.

Holly had seen many a naked man in her pack, but none of them matched up to Damon. Nakedness was very common in her pack. They didn’t hide from nature. She rubbed at her temple as she stared out across his garden. The rain fell thick and fast.

An overcast and miserable day, but the air was full of refreshing scents. She always loved the rain and storms. Her parents had often gotten pissed because she’d leave the house in the middle of the night to go and stand in them.

Wrapping her arms around her knees, she stayed on the back stone steps, admiring the view.

“What are you doing out here?” Damon asked, invading her thoughts.

She turned to find the man himself dressed in a business suit. He

constantly wore black slacks and a crisp white shirt.

“Nothing.”

“You’re bored?”

“No. I like watching the rain.”

Damon confused her. He demanded she stay to use her, to fuck her. To treat her as his own personal fuck toy and yet, nothing. He hadn’t done anything other than lick her pussy and last night, sucking his cock, she’d been there willingly. This drove her crazy. She hadn’t been forced at any point.

This man was a horrible human being. He had no compassion and demanded payment for everything. He owned her body. Sure, the decision had been between a rock and a hard place, but it hadn’t exactly been difficult for her.

“What’s to like?”

“I always have, even as a kid. I love being in it.”

“Then why aren’t you?”

He was so close. The masculine scent assaulted her, making her mouth water. She got to her feet, stepping out into the rain.

She spread her arms out wide, spinning in a circle, letting out a whoop. Closing her eyes, she tilted her head back, drowning herself in water. It felt so good. She didn’t want it to stop.

After seconds passed and the rain continued to pour, she heard movement and expected Damon to have left, bored.

Opening her eyes, she turned to find him walking toward her with purpose. She stayed perfectly still, not sure what he was doing.

He reached her, banded an arm around her waist, then sank his hand

into her hair and slammed his lips down on hers.

She moaned but didn't kiss him back. This was their first kiss. She'd been with him two weeks, and this was their first official kiss. With her hands at her sides, she wasn't sure what to do.

"Kiss me back," he said, seeming to know the answer to all of life's important questions.

She tentatively pressed against him, her tongue sliding out to touch his. It was all the invitation he needed as he plundered her mouth, deepening the kiss. He swallowed down her whimper.

As suddenly as the kiss started, Damon released her, but he didn't go far. His hands went to her shirt and Holly found herself tugging at his expensive business suit. Buttons sprayed, fabric tore under their combined need.

Within seconds, Damon had her on the sodden ground, the smell of the earth surrounding them.

His hard cock pressed against her core, and she gasped, tensing up. Holly didn't know when they'd gone from kissing to him about to take her.

In slow motion, he pressed one hand to the ground beside her head, reaching between them. The hard tip of his cock slid between her slit, bumping her clit. Instant pleasure hit her, only for her to freeze as he slid the tip down, going to her entrance.

She hadn't told him she was a virgin.

Ever since she turned eighteen, she'd seen lots of sex, knew all about it, but never took a mate or a male. No one had ever even talked to her the way Damon did, let alone slept with her.

In one hard thrust, Holly knew it was going to hurt, what she didn't realize was exactly how painful. She screamed, digging her nails against his shoulders, trying to push him away.

Damon stilled. "You're a virgin."

Tears filled her eyes as she looked at him. With a jerk of her head, she nodded at him, and this time, he cursed.

Heat filled her cheeks as she watched him. She saw the anger and the upset, knowing deep down it was all her fault.

Damon pressed his head against hers. He wasn't all the way inside her. The dull ache was still there, capturing her breath with every single second that passed.

He cupped her cheek. "Look at me."

She opened her eyes, and he slammed his lips down on hers, kissing her. He didn't move, just kissed her hard and passionately.

Holly removed her nails from his flesh and kissed him back, releasing a little moan as he nipped at her lips.

The pain had lessened. There was a discomfort.

"Do you want me to stop?"

"No."

"I don't want to hurt you."

"A woman's first time is always going to be painful. Nothing you do is going to change that."

He released a growl, which awakened her need. Her pussy tightened, and Damon took her hands, pressing her against the ground as he started to slide in and out of her. There was no rush to his movements. Slow and

steady. Taking his time.

Holly's arousal returned as he worked her pussy, stroking her harder, and she began to feel heat filling her body.

"Fuck!" Damon pounded inside her, no longer going slowly.

She loved the feel of his cock as he took her, working in and out hard and fast, not treating her like broken glass, but having her. He let go of her hands to grasp her hips. The sheer force of his grip would leave bruises tomorrow.

She was so close to orgasm, but Damon found his release first. His cock pulsed his cum inside her as she watched him ride out the wave of his orgasm. She enjoyed seeing him come apart when she knelt between his spread thighs. There was something hypnotic about watching him. Damon didn't hold anything back. He let go completely.

He finished his release but he further surprised her as he pulled out of her, causing her to wince.

He held her ass, lifting her, and then his tongue teased across her clit.

Holly didn't think she'd be able to come, but under his tutelage, he surprised her by getting her close and tipping her into an orgasm, leaving her screaming.

He kissed her clit and lowered her down to the ground. His cum had already leaked out of her pussy, dripping down to her anus.

Silence fell between them.

The rain pelted their flesh, and Damon shocked her by lifting her in his arms.

She released a scream, wrapping her arms around him, holding on for

dear life as he carried her naked through to the house. “Damon, put me down. You don’t need to carry me. I can walk.”

He refused to release her.

His body was pure muscle, and there was no getting him to do what he didn’t want to.

She had no choice but to stay within his arms as he carried her up to his en-suite bathroom. Holly was getting more used to showering in his en-suite than in her own.

He placed her on the lid of the toilet seat, and she watched him as he started to run a bath, adding some salts and testing the water.

Damon turned off the tap and grabbed her, plunging her into the warm water.

She broke the surface, blowing out bubbles only to feel his fingers wrapped around her neck. This wasn’t playful.

He was angry. “Why didn’t you tell me you were a virgin?”

Was he angry about being her first? It was strange as she thought men liked being a woman’s first.

A virgin.

Damon couldn’t believe it, and yet all the signs had been there if only he’d looked. She’d always said no man had ever touched her. He figured she exaggerated a little. How could a woman so fucking sexy and curvy be a virgin?

It made no sense.

Holly grabbed his wrist. Fear flashed in her eyes with the way they

widened. He didn't care.

"You're angry?"

"Of course, I'm angry. This changes everything."

"It changes nothing. It's not like you gave me any ifs or buts when you told me you wanted to use me as a fuck toy!" She glared at him.

Damn it. She really pushed him.

He had no intention of hurting her. "You should have said something."

"Because it's easy to break in that little tidbit of information. Hi, Damon, yeah, I'll totally fuck you so my family and pack can have a safe home, but please be warned, I'm a virgin." She made her voice high-pitched before dropping it to its normal tone. "Like it would have made any difference."

"How?"

"What?"

"How are you still a virgin?"

"I haven't had sex with anyone. It's the standard way."

He was tempted to scare her a little more, to squeeze her neck, but instead, he pulled back to glare at her. He wrapped his fingers around the back of her neck. "Don't be a smartass with me."

"It's all I know."

"I will spank your ass if you keep it up."

She chuckled. "Most men would be happy to be a woman's first time."

"Oh, I'm happy, Holly. Believe me, knowing my dick is red with virgin blood, it makes me so fucking happy. But you do know what this means,

don't you?"

"It means nothing."

"It means you're mine. There was a use-by date on your ass but there isn't anymore. You will belong to me completely."

"How dare you. Nothing has changed."

"Everything did the moment I popped that sweet cherry."

"You don't scare me, asshole. I will make your life a misery."

"Go ahead. You have no idea the kind of life I've lived. Try to make me miserable." He slammed his lips down on hers to stop her from talking any more.

She shoved at his shoulder, but he continued to kiss her. He smelled her virgin blood on his cock and the memory of her cry would stay with him forever. He wasn't a monster. If he'd known she was a virgin, he wouldn't have believed her, but he would've tried to go easy with her.

There had been so many opportunities to take her, but instead, he'd waited until the right moment hit.

Seeing her in the rain, the smile on her lips, it had struck him hard. His wolf had wanted her, but so had he. The moment had been then. Feeling her cherry give to him and hearing the scream, it had been equal parts joy and anger.

Holly was his in every single way that mattered.

He broke the kiss and climbed into the tub, lifting her and placing her between his spread legs. She collapsed against him, her hand going to his heart as she glared up at him. "You could have asked me to move."

"Where's the fun in that?" He ran his hands all over her body, loving

the way she was flush against him. Sliding down to her ass, he gave the curve a squeeze and groaned. “You have such a fuckable body. I can’t get enough of it.” He kissed her neck and couldn’t get enough of the way she felt in his arms.

Silence fell between them as he allowed her to rest.

He still couldn’t believe she was a virgin. He’d never been with a virgin in all his forty years. The women he’d taken had all been as hungry and desperate for touch as he was.

Living on his own was easy, but he couldn’t deny there were times his wolf missed the presence of another wolf. Having Holly and all of her pack around would certainly make his life a lot easier to deal with.

“Why did you get kicked out of the pack?” she asked.

Her voice sounded so soft, almost sleepy. “I don’t give you any information without something in return.”

“So taking my virginity isn’t something you consider worthy?”

He growled. “Yes, I do.”

“Then by your rules, you’ve got to share.” She tucked some damp hair behind her ear, glancing up at him.

“I have no reason as to why I was removed. Not a definite reason. The alpha in charge, I believe he was threatened by me.”

“Because you’re a natural alpha?”

“Yes.”

“Can they do that? I thought you had to pose a threat or at the very least, challenge him. Did you challenge him?”

“No, I didn’t.” He sighed, rubbing at his temple.

“Didn’t he break some kind of rule?”

“No. I don’t think there is any kind of rule for an alpha doing what he thinks is the best for the pack.” He shrugged. “That’s all he did. He felt I would challenge him and weaken the pack. I was expelled before he allowed that to happen.” The memory, even now all these years later, was a cruel one.

“How old were you?” she asked.

“Just before my nineteenth birthday.”

“No!” Holly gasped. “What kind of monster does that? I know for a fact some wolves haven’t even grown accustomed to their wolf yet. My father wouldn’t dream of expelling anyone.”

“He hasn’t?”

“No. I don’t know if you realize it, but we’re kind of a peace-loving breed of pack. My father wouldn’t dream of hurting anyone.”

“Your father is not a good alpha.”

“Says the man who got removed from his pack for no good reason.”

“Has your father even encountered another alpha wolf?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said, surprising him.

“What?”

“My dad is not afraid of future alphas. He offers them guidance and will even consult with them on pack matters. He believes helping other alphas, even if they go away and form their own packs, is a great tool for peace and creating alliances. He’s not afraid of nurturing the next generation even if that means the risk of being challenged.”

“Your father is a fool.”

“My father is a great man.” She tried to get up, but with how he held

her, there was no chance of escape. He liked her to fight though, which was why he kept his hold on her.

“You’re not going anywhere until I’m good and ready.”

“You’re an asshole. Has anyone ever told you that?”

“You just did, and a couple of times before that.”

She glared at him. “Let me go.”

“No. You’re going to be sore, Holly. In case you were wondering, I wasn’t gentle with you. Another reason I’m so pissed off with you. Just lie still and be a good girl.”

“I’m not a damn toy.”

“That’s true.”

“You’re ... intolerable.”

“Probably another reason I got removed from my pack.”

“Don’t make jokes about that. It’s not funny.”

“I never said it was.”

Holly lay back down, and he stroked her back, loving her closeness. The blissful peace of silence, but he had a feeling it wouldn’t last.

“Don’t you miss it?” she asked.

“What?”

“Being part of a pack.”

“My experiences with all packs are bad ones. I wouldn’t trust anyone around me, so no, I don’t miss it.” It was partly a lie. He didn’t miss the judgment or the fighting.

She sighed.

“If you gave us a chance, we could give you a real sense of being part of a pack and being home.”

“With all due respect, you were forced out of your homes due to human hunters. I’ve never heard of anything like that.” He kissed the top of her head. “Stop thinking about it. It’ll make it easier.”

She lifted up and shook her head. “I can’t not think about it, Damon. It was so ... scary.” She shivered.

“Nothing is going to hurt you here, okay? I’m here.”

“They don’t care about that. They attack and hunt for sport. They don’t care about not invading homes.” She sighed.

She settled back down in his arms and the water began to grow cold.

He hoped she had enough time to relieve the soreness. He wouldn’t take her again tonight, but he certainly wouldn’t wait around. His dick was already rock-hard at the thought of fucking her again.

Damon wanted to be inside her, to feel her come as he filled her with his cum. When the water was too cold, he lifted the plug, and with his strength, he moved her, lifting her in his arms and carrying her through to the bedroom without even drying them.

“Damon?”

“Shh, it’s fine,” he said.

He slid her beneath the covers, climbing in behind her. Banding an arm around her, he pulled her in close, pressing his face against her neck and breathing her in.

“Trust me. Go to sleep.”

CHAPTER FOUR

“What if Henry comes in?”

“He won’t.”

Holly looked toward the door with a sigh. They were in his office. Damon had requested her presence as she’d been in the garden. Henry escorted her to their “master.” It was how she had started to refer to Damon inside her head.

“Strip. Slowly.”

She wore a pair of jeans and a shirt. There were plenty of skirts and dresses in her wardrobe, but she didn’t dare wear any of them, as she didn’t think they would suit her.

With her gaze on him, she couldn’t find another argument with him. This morning, she’d woken up in his arms to find he’d been watching her. He wouldn’t tell her how long he’d been doing that, but it had been long enough.

He’d kissed her lips before climbing out of bed, claiming to have lots of work to do. She didn’t know what could be so important for him to get to. All morning she’d relived the previous night. The way he touched her. His hands on her body. The feel of him inside her. Every single part of her had been completely flooded with pleasure. She spent a lot of time in the garden as it didn’t have his scent. She wasn’t used to being so aroused.

Even her wolf was restless within her.

She removed her shirt, letting it fall to the ground, followed by her jeans. In her underwear, she waited for the next instruction.

“No. All of it off.”

She removed her bra and panties.

Now naked, she put her hands on her hips, allowing him to look his fill. “Do you like what you see?” she asked.

“You have no idea.”

The way his hand moved, she knew he touched himself. Seconds passed, and she heard the sound of his zipper sliding down. An answering heat flooded her pussy. She was so incredibly turned on at that moment.

All she wanted was to feel his touch.

“I can smell you from here.”

“You want to see all of me?” With her hands on her hips, she began to slowly turn around, giving him a view of all of her. When her back was toward him, he groaned.

“Bend over, let me see that pretty ass. I want you to spread it for me.”

She bent forward, holding her ass cheeks and spreading them open.

“Oh, fuck, look at that cunt. You’re so wet for me. Come here.”

She stood up and moved toward him. The moment she was within arm’s reach, Damon grabbed her and moved her so that her back was still toward him. His cock brushed against her entrance, and she gasped as she slowly sank down on his dick. Inch by glorious inch slid inside her.

Dropping her head back against his shoulder, she couldn’t contain her pleased moans.

“Fuck, yeah,” he said. His hands reached up to cup her tits, squeezing them, pushing them together. He pinched the hard buds. “Touch your pussy,” he said.

She put her hand between her thighs, fingering her pussy, sliding her

fingers up and down, across her slit.

Damon let go of her breasts, going to her hips. "Don't stop."

He held her in his arms and moved her up and down his length. She continued to finger her pussy as he took her.

"The only thing that would make this better is if we were sitting in front of a mirror. You'd get to see your pretty cunt filled with my dick." He licked her neck before sinking his teeth into the flesh.

She cried out as he broke the skin, marking her body.

"You can't mate with me."

"I can mate with you, Holly. No one else is ever going to get the chance of being with you."

The force of his thrusts took her breath away.

She begged for more as he filled her, going harder and deeper inside her.

"Come for me. Drown my dick with your cum!"

She didn't expect to come so fast, but with a few strokes, she did so, screaming his name. She reached forward, squeezing the edge of his desk, thrusting up and down on his length as her orgasm took her completely by surprise.

She sank her teeth into her lip.

The sounds of their wet bodies echoed around the room.

Damon wasn't done. He lifted up, moving her until she was flat against his desk. He shoved everything out of the way. All his books and pens went flying to the floor. He grabbed her hips, and if she thought she'd been fucked before, she knew he was showing her how it was meant to be, to be taken by

him. He held her in place as he pounded inside her. The desk didn't move and the feel of Damon didn't let up.

His hard cock constantly slammed deep inside her, sending her own arousal higher and higher. She held on to the desk, and his balls slapped against her pussy, each slap turning her on.

"Fuck, you feel so good. So fucking tight. You were made for me, Holly. Made for me to fuck!" He thrust inside her one final time, and his growl filled the room, sending goosebumps erupting all over her flesh from the sheer power of it. This man was full of alpha and as he spilled his seed inside her, she wanted nothing more than to submit to him.

After he finished, Damon didn't move away, he stayed with her, playing with her back, stroking lines and swirls around it.

"You can ask me any question," he said.

She pushed some of her hair behind her face. "Is this really how this is going to work? Sex for answers?"

"It has worked so far."

She sighed. "Don't you ever miss being part of a pack?"

"Really? You're going to waste your one question on that? Such a fucking lame one."

He sounded disgusted with her, but her curiosity got the better of her.

"Rules are rules, and do I need to remind you, these are your rules?" She waited. There was nowhere for her to go.

"Fine. No, I don't. I've been without a pack for so long, I don't even think about it. The truth is, I don't even know the way one is run. It's all foreign to me."

This made her incredibly sad for him. “It must have been hard at nineteen to be on your own,” she said.

He sighed. “I wasn’t always on my own, Holly. I did encounter other packs, but they didn’t leave me wanting to join them.”

She’d felt the scars on his body. “What did they do?”

“Holly, that’s a second question.”

She sighed. “Okay, I’ll wait until you’re ready to tell me, but I hate the thought of you being alone.”

“Holly, baby, you hate me.”

She laughed. She couldn’t help it. “I don’t hate you, not really. I’m not capable of hating anyone.” She didn’t know how best to explain it, and it did feel really weird having him balls deep inside her. The only man she’d ever been with was the same man keeping her here to protect her family.

“You’ll be surprised what you will be able to do when you’re pushed to the limit.”

“Is that why you hate so many packs? They pushed you to the limit?”

“That’s another two questions.”

“You’re not playing fair.”

He withdrew from her, and when she made to stand, he put his hand on her back. “Stay.”

She held herself still, hearing him sit down.

Her face was on fire. She didn’t know why he needed her to sit down. “What is it?”

“I’m watching my cum spill from your pussy.”

She gasped as his fingers were suddenly between her thighs, pushing his cum back inside her.

“I’m not on the pill,” she said.

“We both know the pill doesn’t work on female wolves. The only person who can get you pregnant is your true mate. Stand up.”

Finding your true mate wasn’t easy. Couples could be together for years and never have children as they weren’t a true mated couple. There were times she wished it was as easy as they claimed it was in the books. You saw your one true mate and it was a match made in heaven. It was never so easy and it sucked.

Pregnancy, the meeting of wolves, or the joining of minds. They were the three ways of finding one’s mate. Two of the three were required in wolf form. The ability to join minds was to hear each other’s thoughts in wolf form.

Her parents found each other using that. Then, of course, their wolves had been attracted to one another, and then they’d gotten pregnant with her.

True mates were a thing of joy.

She wished she could experience it once. She couldn’t communicate with any of the wolves within her pack, nor was there an attraction. It all sucked.

“Time for you to go get cleaned up. I’ve got work to do,” Damon said.

Maybe she did hate him a little bit.

“Which question do you want answered?” Damon asked, running the tips of his fingers up Holly’s naked back.

He'd worked all afternoon and throughout dinner. Holly had sat at the table, watching him as he clicked away on his computer.

"Isn't it time for you to ask me a question?" Holly asked. "And that doesn't count as a question."

He chuckled. "Fine. Have you ever found your mate?"

"No."

"That was fast."

"We both know what needs to happen to find a mate. I've never been that lucky." She shrugged. "Maybe one day I will be, but for now, I'm not. Move on. What did they do to you?"

Damon was pissed off. "I've got two questions. I didn't ask you one from just now." After finishing his work, he'd been so hungry for her body. He'd taken her in the shower, fucking her hard against the tiled wall.

Most of today, he'd been insatiable, and it was only due to his control that he'd kept himself in check. Otherwise, he'd have taken her multiple times today. More than what he already had.

She'd been a virgin, and he wanted her to recover. Making her sore wouldn't work for him. "Fine. Ask away."

"Tell me about the night with the hunters," he said.

Holly tensed up. "I ... do I have to?"

"I'll talk about my experience with the packs."

She blew out a breath and rolled over, grabbing the blanket as she sat up. She placed it over her tits and beneath her arms. "Okay, fine." She tucked some hair behind her ear. "We ... we used to live in a small community. Like a town. It had the basic essentials if normal human couples came to town. We

could all blend in and were able to scent them the moment they arrived.”

He saw the hint of a smile on her lips.

“I loved this town. It had a supermarket, but nearly every other store was artisanal, you know? Natural herbs and remedies. We lived near a forest and mostly foraged for what we needed there. We were an earthy bunch.” She giggled. “We tended to have patrols, though. People within the pack would stay up to keep an eye in case anyone arrived late at night. We were also aware of hunters, but we’d never met any of them.”

Her hands shook, and he reached out, taking one within his own.

“Daniel, he was a recent father of a little girl. He took this shift.” She pressed her lips together. “He didn’t make it, but he was able to sound the alarm to alert us to intruders. It was so dark. The alarm was just a standard one. I think it has a similar sound to tsunami alarms or something. My dad thought it would be good. We’d know the sound and others would assume we were having some kind of drill. That noise scared the crap out of me. I only ever heard it before when there was a drill.” She looked down at their hands. “We didn’t have a whole lot of time before we heard someone in our house.”

“I’ve got you,” Damon said.

“I heard the screams. Men, women, and even kids. Gunshots. I think what freaked me out so much was the sound of laughter. They were happy to be killing our kind. My dad killed the man who broke into our house. Slit his throat, and it was the first time I saw real death like that. We made it out onto the street, and I saw them all. There had to be at least twenty if not thirty hunters. All dressed in black. They had guns and knives. I couldn’t believe it was happening. Kids were running away. Their parents killed. I ran to get them. It’s where I saw Daniel. They had gutted him from his stomach up to

his neck, but he wasn't ... he wasn't dead. He held this locket around his neck that his wife had given him. I remember him showing it off as it had a picture of his wife and newborn little girl. He told me to take it. To take care of his family and that he was sorry for not saving all of us. He died holding my hand."

Damon squeezed her hand and reached out to wipe the tears away. He felt her pain. His stomach twisted at the thought of what she went through. He couldn't have that. There was no way he would allow her to be hurt by humans ever again.

"No one will ever harm you here," he said.

"Damon, you can't make promises like that. My dad never thought we'd be attacked. We never hunted in their territory, keeping to the forest. We never hurt anyone, and look what happened." She swiped at the tears falling down her face. "I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize. Was Daniel's wife and ... child?"

"The son made it. I went to his house. His wife ... she'd been gutted in the same way. She had time to hide their baby. I heard him screaming. I grabbed him and ran."

"Where is he now?"

"With the pack. We all took turns to take care of them, you know."

He nodded.

"So that's the saddest story I've got to share. What about you?"

Damon couldn't believe what he heard. Holly's fear and pain were palpable. The wolf within him stirred, and it hungered for blood, for revenge. He was so fucking angry that someone had made his mate feel that way.

Damon paused. Mate? No, Holly wasn't his mate. She was just his plaything. He used her for his own needs.

Ours.

The thought echoed in his mind as he looked at her.

No. He wasn't about to let his wolf take control. Holly was just some fun, nothing else. He wasn't going to see her as anything more. There was no mate for him.

"The packs that I ... visited, they would force me to submit to their alpha," Damon said. He pointed at several scars on his body that he'd used ink to cover. He didn't need anyone's pity, nor did he care to get it.

"You have a lot of tattoos."

"I have a lot of scars." He sighed. "They feared me, Holly. So they made me pay." He pointed to one scar on his arm. "You see this, they chained me up, using silver. You know we're not affected by it, but they put acid on the chains as well."

Holly winced.

"Yeah, I had to be chained up as one by one, every single male from the pack hit me. If I broke free, I was to leave immediately. I took thirty blows before I broke free and attacked. I stopped myself from killing their alpha."

"Why?" she asked. "You would have been able to be part of their pack. To rule them. You're an alpha, Damon, you can't deny it."

"Why would I want to be part of a pack that hurt me? I wanted nothing from them and certainly not to guide them. I wanted to kill them. Another pack hunted me down and tried to kill me. The story is the same for the next

five years of my life since being expelled from my home, Holly. Then I just ... I gave up. I left each pack. I learned the stock markets. I bussed tables, taking every single job I could until I won big and invested well. I found this place, got it renovated, and bought up the land all around me. Slowly, piece by piece, I found myself again. I don't need a pack. I never have."

Holly touched his cheek. "I am so sorry those packs did that to you. They do not know what they lost."

He stared into her green eyes. "Holly, you don't have to have feelings for me. You're here to keep your family safe. Remember that."

"Oh, right, yes." She released him and he missed her touch.

The tension in the room mounted, and he got to his feet. "I need some food."

Without looking back, he left the bedroom, walking down to the kitchen where he found Henry making himself a hot chocolate. The man was a chocolate lover. He had to eat at least one square a day or he was a moody bastard.

"Hello, sir," Henry said.

"I told you not to call me sir when we're alone," Damon said. He was still completely naked, as was Henry.

"I know."

Henry was a wolf, but he was a weak wolf. One that couldn't turn. During one of his visits to the packs many years ago, he'd been chained up with Henry. The men and women had raped and abused Henry for years. They kept him chained up as they didn't think his mind was stable.

For the few days he'd been with that pack, Damon had learned that

Henry was very much stable, he just wanted to leave. The pack wouldn't let him. Why allow their punching bag to leave when they could use him whenever they wanted?

Damon had saved him when he left. They'd been together ever since. He took care of the man. Henry didn't need to be his butler or even work for him, but it was what he wanted to do.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I'm fine.”

“That girl is getting to you.”

“I don't need you to tell me that.”

Henry laughed. “Sir, I really think you do.”

He glared at his friend, grabbing the milk from the fridge, and poured himself a large glass. Holly was getting under his skin. He should let her go, but the very thought of it went against all that he wanted.

CHAPTER FIVE

Holly frowned as she looked up to see Damon advancing toward her the following day. She'd slept in his arms last night and woke up this morning to see that he left. He wasn't at breakfast, and when she asked Henry, he told her Damon had gone out for the morning on some errands.

Getting to her feet, she stepped toward Damon.

"Come on, get some shoes on."

"What's going on?"

"I thought you'd like to see how your pack is doing," Damon said. "I don't have all day. Come on. Hurry up." He turned to leave.

She grabbed his arm. "Wait? My pack?"

"Yes. I've got the car waiting. Come on."

She'd left her shoes on the cold cement floor, opting to go shoeless to feel the grass beneath her feet.

After slipping them on, she turned toward him with a smile. Excitement lit a fire within her stomach. "I'm ready."

He took her hand, and together, they walked through his home, going straight out the front door, toward the car. Henry sat in the driver's seat.

"Henry?"

"I'm curious," Henry said.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

Damon nodded, and Holly glanced between the two men, not really sure what was going on between them. They seemed to be communicating

something with each other. She was so excited just to be in the car.

They left Damon's house and she glanced behind her to see the gates close, locking out the world.

"You don't want anyone to get in?"

"I'm not a fool. I know if people were determined to get in, they would. It's my job to make their life difficult, and I do such a good job at it." He winked at her.

She smiled.

Damon still hadn't let go of her hand.

She pushed some hair out of her face. "Where did you go this morning?"

"I went to patrol."

"Patrol?"

"I wanted to make sure it was safe."

"But Henry said you were out all morning."

"I didn't patrol my grounds, Holly. I went further out."

"Oh." She glanced at him. "You ... went to check for hunters?"

"Men who come into your homes like that will follow you. I need to talk with your dad and with the men who are capable of hunting," Damon said.

He gave her hand a squeeze. Her stomach had tightened. "We ran for days," she said. "They would have no way of finding us."

"If someone from your pack was captured you'd be amazed what they would be willing to do to end the pain."

The very thought of one of their own using them to get free made her feel sick. “I would never do that.”

“Don’t ever say never,” Damon said. “You haven’t walked in tortured shoes. We cannot always be responsible for the decisions we make.”

“Have you? I know it’s a question. Forget about it,” she said.

“No. I have never done something like that. I would rather die than risk hurting someone I care about. Whoever helped the hunters was selfish,” Damon said. “I need to talk with your father to completely understand your situation.”

Fear ran down her spine. “You’re not going to ... force us to leave?”

“We’ll see what happens when we get to that point,” Damon said. “For now, relax.”

She found it impossible to relax, especially as they got close to town. The scent of the pack and humans mingled together.

Henry parked in the only available space in the town square. Damon got out first, holding out his hand to her.

She took it.

“Your pack is close, but they’re being careful.”

“Holly!” Her name was screamed by a young girl’s voice.

She turned to see Cathy, one of the girls whose parents were killed. She immediately bent down to pick her up.

“Hello, my sweet girl,” she said, kissing her neck. “I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you too. Where did you go? People are saying that you’re with a bad man. You won’t go with a bad man.” Cathy frowned.

Holly chuckled. “No, I’m not with a bad man. I’m staying with a

friend. Damon, I'd like you to meet my very special friend, Cathy."

The young girl tilted her head to look at Damon and giggled. "He's pretty."

Holly laughed, and Damon's cheeks went a bright shade of red.

"Yes, he's very handsome, but he's also my very good friend. Nothing bad about him. Promise. Do you know where my daddy is?"

"He's holding a conference at the hall." She pointed toward the large building.

"Thank you, darling."

Holly saw Natalie, a heavily pregnant woman, quickly rushing toward them.

"I am so sorry," Natalie said. "She just saw you and ran."

Holly smiled. "It's fine. Natalie, I'd like you to meet Damon. Damon, this is Natalie."

The other woman held up her hand while the other went to her stomach.

"Still no signs of giving birth?"

"No, this baby does not want to leave. Not that I blame him or her." Natalie had been calling her child a him or her for the entirety of her pregnancy. She refused to find out the sex. She took Cathy from her. "Your dad is waiting for you."

Damon took her hand now that she was without a child, and she missed the kids.

With Henry following behind them, they walked past the small building claiming to be a nursery. All the kids ran to the window and knocked on it,

waving at her, calling her name.

“You’re very popular,” Damon said.

“I love kids.”

She sighed, waving back at them. She hoped they would have time for her to visit them. Being with Damon the past few weeks, she was starting to feel pack sick.

They walked toward the town hall.

“Are there a lot of humans here?” she asked.

“No. Not enough to worry about,” Damon said.

“That’s good.” The pack wouldn’t be able to settle if there were loads of humans around.

They entered the town hall, and Holly was immediately greeted by friends and family. All of them pack.

Benjamin rushed forward and pulled her into a hug. He’d been a close friend at one point. During their first transition, he’d cried so hard and complained, begging for her to end it for him. He’d fought being a wolf for so long that the first change had been excruciating. It also didn’t help that he thought he found a remedy to stop him from turning. She stayed with him the entire night.

Her change had been peaceful, without any kind of pain.

Damon released a growl, and Benjamin immediately backed off.

“I’m sorry.” He bowed his head, submitting to Damon, which surprised her.

“No one touches her,” Damon said.

Holly looked at Damon, grabbing his hand. “Please,” she said. “They

mean no harm. They're more than just pack. They are my family and I want to ... feel them. Please."

He glared at her. "No."

"You have everything else. It has been a couple of weeks. I've never been apart from my pack. I'm struggling. Please."

He continued to glare at her. She was about to give up, but he took her hand. "So long as I'm holding part of you."

It was a compromise.

She didn't understand his possessive need for her. It wasn't like she loved any of these men and women in an intimate way.

On the way to the front of the hall, men and women hugged her, asking her if she was okay. Some told her she smelled funny. She figured that was because of Damon. The scent of the pack wouldn't be so embedded into her flesh seeing as she'd been with him.

The moment she saw her father, she tried to let go of Damon's hand, but he held her tight.

Her father moved toward her, as did her mother.

"Holly," he said.

"Sweetheart," her mother said.

They held her even as Damon had her hand within his. This had to be awkward for all of them.

"I'm so pleased you're okay."

"How is everyone?" Holly asked. "How are they settling in?"

"Enough of this," Damon said. "I need you to talk to me about what exactly went down that night."

Damon hated this.

Random men and women coming close to his woman, touching her, sniffing her. She smelled like him, not like the pack.

Holly belonged to him. His wolf didn't like her being close to anyone but him.

He made sure every single man and woman was aware of his annoyance. Several bowed away. Others looked him right in the eye, disrespecting him. It was a big mistake allowing a pack to get so close.

Now as he stared at her father, he saw the same anger. They were both alphas, but their scents were not the same.

There was power in her father.

"We do not have to talk about what happened that night," he said.

"It is best for everyone to express their feelings, and to move on," her mother said.

Damon looked at the two and shook his head. "You need to understand you could have brought danger here." He spoke loud and clear so everyone could hear him.

"Do not do that," her father said.

"What is your name?" Damon asked.

"Alpha."

Damon growled. "You are on my land. You will now be called Meek." It was his last name, and if he refused to give him his first, it was only his fault.

"Damon, please," Holly said.

He still held her hand, refusing to let go.

The room was filled with angry men and women. They didn't like him taking control.

"I want you all to listen to me, including you." He turned to her father. "If you think you escaped danger, you're mistaken. Hunters do not give up easily."

"We ran for days," Meek said. "There was no sign of him when we came here."

"What about tracking? You think they don't have someone on their team that can track you?" Damon asked. "Holly told me what happened. She said how your watchman was gutted. Hunters do not attack unless they are sure of victory, and human men, human hunters, they are patient. They will spend time watching, checking your patterns, knowing where you go, who you do it with. They will have watched you for weeks, if not months. A full-scale attack like that wasn't just a run-of-the-mill hunt." He'd already figured this out as Holly told him what happened. "You're wolves. You're stronger and faster than any human. You can kill them with a swipe of the arm or the snap of a neck." He turned to look at the room. "This isn't over."

"Damon, you're scaring them."

"They need to be scared." Finally, he looked at Meek. "Now, I know this is hard for you to think about, but you need to face a reality check. You can rant about peace and being kind. I don't care, but you're not in your own little world. You're in my world, and they're coming whether you like it or not."

Her father glanced down. "My name is Christopher." He held out his hand.

Damon looked at it, tempted to ignore the gesture, but thought better of it. He shook the man's hand. "Damon Barasic. We need to talk." He pulled Holly in front of him. "Why don't you go and spend some time with the kids? I'm sure they're going to want to see you."

"Are you trying to get rid of me?" she asked.

"When I'm done, we'll go."

"Who are you to order her around?" Benjamin asked.

He held her stare.

"It's fine. I want to go." Holly tugged on her hand for him to let go, and even that action was tough. He hated seeing her walk away.

Why do you think that is?

What is she to you?

She's more than just a plaything.

Damon shoved all those thoughts to the back of his mind. He wasn't in the mood to think about what Holly meant to him. She was just a willing fuck.

With Holly out of the room, the men and women glared at him. Their angry growls filled the air, and he grew even more annoyed.

"This will not work on me. We all know I'm stronger than you."

"We can take you," a man to his left said.

Damon laughed and kept his attention on Christopher. "You want to fight me? We can go for it, right here, right now, but I will still keep Holly. She will not leave my side. Do you want to risk making her life miserable?"

"Chris, don't. This man has offered to help," Holly's mother said.

“He is only helping for a price.”

“Holly wouldn’t want this.”

“She is not alpha here.”

“Chris!” the woman said with a bark.

Finally, he looked away, and the tension in the room melted away.

“I’m Lidia, Holly’s mother,” she said, holding her hand out for him to take.

He shook her hand, and Christopher growled deep in his chest.

“What is it you need to know?” Lidia asked.

“I need all the details. Any of you see anything suspicious. I also want to know your last known location.”

“Why?”

“I need to go back to see what they left behind.”

“They were burning,” Christopher said. “I saw enough to know there is nothing left of our home.”

Damon sighed. “Maybe not, but you guys were a target. I don’t want hungry hunters coming to give me trouble. That’s not how I roll.”

“There’s nothing you can do to stop them when they come,” Benjamin said. “They have guns. They can take us down easily.”

“We’re stronger and faster than all of them. A gun will stun us, and if they hit us right, we can die, but we can still heal.” He returned his attention to Christopher. “You’re not a fighting pack, are you?”

“We know how to take care of ourselves,” he said.

“That’s not what I meant.”

Lidia stepped forward. “We never have to. We don’t believe in war or violence. There is always a peaceful answer.”

“It’s going to get you killed. It’s fine to read about that shit in storybooks, but there are real people out there, human and wolf, who will hunt us down and kill us. I want you to come with me tomorrow,” he said. “Stop by my house. We’ll head out at first light and get as close to your old home as possible. I need to get a scent of the men involved.”

“Why?”

“In case you didn’t notice, a lot of tourists and travelers pass through this town every single day. I want to be able to detect the same smell. You’re on my turf. You’re not my responsibility, but I sure as hell don’t want you all to die.”

“He’ll be there,” Lidia said.

He nodded. “We’re done here.”

“I want our daughter back. I can smell her on you. She’s not yours,” Christopher said.

“A deal’s a deal. You want her back, you can pack your shit up and leave. She’s mine until I’m bored.”

“No wonder you don’t have a pack.”

“You’re still here out of the goodness of my heart, so I suggest you keep the insults to yourself. A wolf I may be, but I don’t have time for packs. I can’t abide by them. You carry a wretched stink.”

He lied. This pack didn’t smell like any of the others.

It was strange; other than Henry, all other wolves had smelled the same. At times acrid to his sense, but also like something was missing. When

he was younger, he'd searched for a home, only to not be able to find it. No one but Henry had been able to match him. Christopher and his pack, they had no vile stench coming from them. They smelled free and wild. They were pure.

He didn't know why he thought that, but he did.

Henry followed close behind him as he left the town hall and went straight to the nursery.

Rather than barge in, he opened the door quietly.

He entered the room with Henry at his back to watch Holly as she was surrounded by children. In her arms was a baby. He wondered if that was the son she'd told him about.

Another girl pulled at her arm, demanding a hug.

Natalie took the baby from her, and Holly picked the girl up.

He was so mesmerized by her. She loved those children, and they adored her. From the moment he saw her, he'd known she was special. Her loving nature shone through.

Someone pulled on his pants leg, and he saw it was a little boy. He crouched down to get to eye level with him.

"What's the matter, little guy?" he asked.

"Are you the big, nasty wolf that is hurting Holly?"

"No. Holly and I are good friends."

"She's everyone's friend." He glanced back toward Holly.

"I'll take care of her."

"Please. She's really nice. We all love her."

He got the feeling everyone did. Holly glanced at him with a smile. She held her hand up for five more minutes. He didn't want to share her for another second, but seeing the kids around her as well as her overall love, he couldn't bring himself to tear her away from them.

CHAPTER SIX

The following day, Holly slammed her hand on the door, stopping her father and Damon from leaving. “No!”

“Do you think you’re in a position to tell me what to do?”

“You’re not going. You’re not going to put my father or yourself at risk.”

“Do you care about me now?”

“It’s suicide.”

“We’re going to be careful.”

“You have no reason to go back. There is nothing good that can come from seeing ... that. Are you just doing it to make my father miserable?” The accusation was out of her mouth before she could stop it. The moment she spoke it, she felt ashamed.

“I have no reason to make your family miserable, Holly. If you actually thought clearly rather than emotionally, you’d understand how important this is.”

Holly got it, which was why he was so annoying for being right. “It’s dangerous. I’m coming with you.”

Damon grabbed her arm. “No.”

“If something was to happen to the two of you, I wouldn’t forgive myself. I’m not letting either of you go. You’re going to need someone there.”

“We’re going to check it out. We’re not staying long. I want to see the damage, smell the area, and leave. That’s all.”

She shook her head. “No.”

“I will take care of your dad.”

“Who will take care of you?”

He fell silent, and she slowly lifted her head to look at him, expecting to see a smirk. Instead, he looked confused. His brow was puckered as if deep in thought.

“Do you care?”

“Yes,” she said. “Don’t ask me why. That I have no answer for, but the last thing I want is for either of you to end up dead.” She looked past his shoulder, and he cupped her cheek.

“I know what I’m doing. I’m not going to die.”

“Then take me with you. You’ve got nothing to lose here.” She covered her hand with his. “Please. I’m a good tracker.”

If they didn’t take her, she’d only follow them.

Damon sighed. “Fine. You will do as you’re told.”

“It’s all you do, tell.” She was in jeans and a shirt with a pair of boots. Ready to go hiking at a moment’s notice.

After she followed Damon out to the car, her father climbed out and shook his head. “Not happening. You go back inside.”

“No. I’m a grown woman.”

“I’m your alpha.”

“And I’m your daughter. I’m not going to let anything happen to you. I’m sticking around, and that is final.” She climbed into the back of the car.

Her father and Damon were up front, and Henry lingered outside the

car.

“I’ll call you when we’re on our way back. Go into town. I don’t want you to be alone. Help out where you can. Let them know where we are.”

Henry nodded. “Be careful.”

“Always am.” Damon closed the door.

Her father started up the car, and away they were on the journey. She sat back, aware of her father’s looks in the rearview mirror.

“You can stop being angry at me.”

“Holly, it was a nightmare that night. I didn’t even know if you had made it and now you’re going back with me.”

“I’m doing what I need to do. Both of you are going back. Someone needs to be watching your backs.” She breathed out a sigh of relief. Sitting back in the car, she glanced up at the ceiling.

She hated cars. They were a necessary evil, but she much preferred walking. There was nothing better than feeling the earth beneath her feet. Shoes were another problem for her as well.

Back home, she’d often be found wandering the streets with nothing on her feet. The kids used to always giggle about that fact. There was so much she missed about the love and comfort of home.

No one talked.

She watched Damon and her father in between staring out the window.

“How long have you been without a pack, son?” her father asked.

“I’m not your son. We’re the same age.”

“Ah, so you’re nearly seventy years old?”

Holly smiled.

“You’re seventy?” Damon asked.

“I’ve got good genes. Part of being a happily mated alpha and wolf, we age slowly. It’s another reason I avoid war and violence. Hurting others will guarantee bringing enemies to your front door. I’m a peaceful man. My pack values peace. We have no interest in all that other nasty business.”

“You do know that makes you rare, right?”

“I’m guessing you came from a violent pack. One where the alpha was challenged in a fight. Am I right?”

“Have you ever been challenged?” Damon asked.

“Several times.”

“And you’ve killed your competition? And here I thought you were a peaceful man.”

Her father chuckled. “You’re not a very trusting man, are you? I have fought. I said I don’t like to fight, not that I haven’t ever fought. I do not harm any of the men or women who have tried to take my place within the pack. Of course there has to be a fight. A challenge is handed out, and it must be met. What I don’t do is kill them or hurt them. I disarm them. There is more to fighting than the kill, and there is a lot of power in mercy.”

Damon snorted. “You’re going to die one day. You’re too forgiving.”

“This coming from a forty-year-old lonely wolf against a seventy-plus alpha of a large pack. I believe I’m the one with the experience here, son.”

She tried not to laugh, but it was so hard not to. Damon sounded so cocky and sure of himself. It wasn’t attractive, but knowing what she did, the packs he’d met before, they had hurt him deeply. The scars he carried were in

mind and body. They consumed him and stopped him from trusting anyone else.

One day, she hoped he would be able to find the peace and love of a pack. Even if he didn't accept hers.

They drove well into the night, stopping to fill the car with gas and to sleep. She knew they'd been running for a long time. The journey in total took three days. They were getting closer to the full moon, and her wolf was itching to get out. After everything that happened in a short space of time, her nerves were shot.

Her father finally pulled over onto the side of the road.

The forests that surrounded them was home. The smells were familiar. Where they once brought her comfort, now she only saw pain.

"Home is ten miles that way," her dad said. "We need to go through the forest. We'll be able to sense any other people close by. The wind is in our favor."

Damon opened the car door, and Holly climbed out of the back, looking around. She closed the door quietly, feeling sickness swirling in the pit of her stomach. This wasn't good.

In the back of her mind, the screams of that night lingered.

She recognized the tension in her father's shoulders and immediately wanted to comfort him.

"Do you want to take the lead?" Damon asked.

If he sensed the discomfort, he didn't allow it to show. She didn't know if that made her happy or sad.

"Yes," her dad said.

Damon reached for her hand, and she slid hers into his, following behind him.

She kept looking around, listening closely. She heard the rustling of the trees from the wind and felt it on her cheeks. Up ahead, she heard scurrying of bunnies as they sensed predators. In all the years she'd been turning a wolf, she had never eaten a bunny. The key to not eating any wildlife prior to turning was eating lots. Sating your wolf before a run, which made no sense, seeing as anyone who ate a large snack would feel sick. It worked for her wolf. She never wanted to eat rabbit. The very thought of it made her feel sick.

Every couple of feet, her father would stop, tilt his head back, and inhale deeply. He was being cautious with each step they took, and she couldn't blame him.

They all froze when the old, disgusting scent of blood assailed them. She squeezed Damon's hand as fear filled her.

Had they left this smell?

The human hunters?

"We're close," her father said.

As far as Holly was concerned, a little too close.

Holly struggled. Damon held her hand tightly as they moved through the line of the forest. He knew the place was dead and burnt even before they got there. Buildings were down, black, smoke-tinged wood on any structure that appeared to still be standing.

In the middle of the square, he saw the pile of dead bodies, also burned.

Christopher gagged, covering his mouth with his hand, and Holly buried her head against his shoulder. He gripped the back of her neck, holding her close.

“I’ve got you,” he said.

“This is ... they’re so cruel. Why did they do this?”

Damon looked around him at the carnage. This was worse than he expected. He envisioned a small town, abandoned, some broken windows as if it had been ransacked. Before him was an annihilation, which instantly made him tense up. This was more than a bunch of hunters in a random attack. His early assessment was right. Christopher’s pack was being watched long before they were taken out.

“Have you seen enough?” Christopher asked.

“Not yet. You can both head back to the car. I will be along as soon as I know more.”

“No,” Holly said. “I’m not leaving you behind. I’ll help any way I can.” She lifted her head but he saw she didn’t look toward the dead bodies.

“Can you tell me what you need?” Christopher asked.

“Look around the perimeter. I can’t smell anyone here, but whoever was, this was not some lucky night. You need to look for spots where you can get the entire view of the town without your scent being caught at any point.”

“That’s nearly impossible.”

“It’s not. Not if you know what you’re hunting and what you’re dealing with.”

Christopher took off and Damon began at the houses. He bent down, lifting pieces of material. Wood. Brick. Inhaling deeply.

“What are you doing?” Holly asked.

“I can smell your pack, but there is something else here. I’m getting used to it so I can detect it.” He stood up, moving from house to house. The hunters all had the same smell. Lavender. Earthy. Damon stopped and checked out the forest. “They know what you are and they know they can be detected unless they mask themselves.”

“What?” Holly asked.

“You lived here all your life. You’d be used to the sudden wave of lavender or soil. The essence of the earth. You’re surrounded by a forest. They’re normal smells.”

“They covered themselves in it.”

“Yes, but it’s not commercial,” Damon said. “You can always tell the difference between an extract of something or the real thing.”

“Ah, kind of like lemon extract against lemon zest?”

He frowned.

“Lemon cake is my favorite,” Holly said.

He cupped the back of her neck, drawing her in close. “I know this is hard for you. I’m so proud you’re able to handle this.”

Christopher came into view across the forest line. “Here!”

Damon grabbed her hand, and they walked toward Christopher, who led them to the spot. “This is the only place where you see the whole town. The layout and even the people.” Right before them were bushes of lavender, blue bells, and even plain old soil.

“The perfect mask.” Damon looked up to the sky. “We need to leave.”

He held Holly’s hand tightly and without another word, they ran. She kept up with him, going pace-to-pace with Christopher coming to his side as

they ran the distance to the car.

They got to the car, and Damon cursed. The tires had been slashed.

“Shit!”

He didn't let Holly go. “We've got to keep running.”

He hadn't smelled them. Those bastards hadn't left. They were waiting for them to come back. They headed back into the forest, and he shoved Holly down to the ground when he heard the bullet coming.

She gasped, and he covered her mouth. Christopher went down as well.

Damon closed his eyes, listening to the sounds that surrounded him.

The hunters had been there the whole time.

Fuck.

Then he heard it. The static of the radio. Talking.

He stared down into Holly's eyes.

“It'll be okay.” He mouthed the words as he listened.

One of the men was close. Christopher lifted his head just slightly, and Damon held his hand out in front of him to tell him to stop.

They had to be silent.

One. Two. Three. The seconds ticked by.

“They're here,” the man said.

Damon gritted his teeth. Holly's eyes grew wide.

He kept her mouth covered. “Don't.” He didn't say a single word. Tears filled her eyes.

“Bring the dogs. I can't find them, but I know they're here. I saw them.”

The grass was high around them. If he made any movement, if the hunter saw him, he'd shoot at the grass.

Fuck. Shit. Fuck.

These men were not pack. They were trained hunters and knew what they were doing.

"Can you turn without the full moon?" Damon asked, mouthing the words.

Holly shook her head.

He looked at Christopher. "Can you?"

"Of course."

They were both alphas.

Damn it. Holly couldn't. "When I say, you start running." Damon put his hands to the ground, and they morphed into that of his wolf.

The wolf wanted to hurt the hunter. The bodies. The destruction. The pain in Holly's eyes. The fear oozing from her angered him. They would all suffer.

Mate.

The word echoed around his mind once more.

With his hands turned, his feet were next, his body slowly changing that it wouldn't be hard for the Hunter to spot him.

"Run."

He changed his hand and pounced to the left, spotting the hunter who drew the weapon.

Damon heard Holly's footfalls as she took off. He didn't give it a

second thought as the hunter lifted the gun ready to strike. He wrapped his teeth around the man's neck, snapping it.

In the distance, he heard more men, and in between his teeth, he took the walkie-talkie from the ground, taking off.

He found Christopher running behind Holly. She was fast, but outside of wolf form, she struggled to keep up.

Damon took the lead, keeping an eye with all his senses as they ran.

After an hour of running, Holly needed to rest. She was in human form, and she collapsed to her back, panting.

He turned back into human form. All of his clothes had been shredded, and he went to Holly, putting his hand on her chest. She panted, wheezing a little.

Panic took over.

"Holly, look at me," Damon said.

"She hasn't had a panic attack in years," her father said.

"I've got you."

Holly covered his hand with hers.

"In and out. No one is going to hurt you. I've got you."

She wasn't slowing down.

"Does she have any history of this? Does she need medication?" Damon asked. He'd never seen her in a panic attack. When wolves turned, they didn't need medicine. They healed naturally and with time, faster.

"She suffered panic attacks and night terrors as a kid. Ever since she became a teenager, they stopped. Even during her first change, she never experienced one. This is bad, Damon."

“I’ve got her,” he said.

Nothing he did helped. Perspiration dotted her brow and her lips turned blue.

He lifted her up, sat down, and placed her with her back against him. He put his hand on her chest and began to breathe deeply.

“I’m with you, Holly. You’re safe now. I’m here. Breathe with me. That’s it. In and out. Slowly. Take your time. In and out.”

He didn’t stop, talking slowly, giving her a chance to find the pace with him.

A few seconds passed, and he felt the change in her. She picked up his pace, breathing deeply.

The panic that consumed her began to lessen. Her hands gripped his legs, her nails sinking into the flesh.

He kissed her head and then he felt her collapse against him.

“Thank you,” she said.

He wrapped his arms around her, holding her close.

Christopher breathed a sigh of relief.

Damon struggled to accept what just happened. He looked toward her father and shook his head. “That shit isn’t quite right.”

“I didn’t smell them,” Christopher said.

“They did it on purpose,” Damon said. “They knew you’d come back.”

“I had no intention of coming back,” Christopher said. “We’d settled down in a new town. I knew we’d lost people, but I couldn’t go and retrieve them and risk the lives of my pack.”

Damon looked at Christopher. “They’ve got someone on the inside.”

Holly gasped. “No.”

“Yes. Someone within your pack is working with the hunters. They had no way of knowing we’d be there. That kind of damage was done with multiple men. The one I killed, he was on his own.” He looked toward the radio. Damon rubbed at his temple. “Do you have any ... new members?”

“None.”

“Our pack doesn’t work that way,” Holly said, sounding breathless. “We do accept new members, but ... it’s so very rare.”

“Who was your last new member?” Damon asked.

“Daniel was, and his wife,” Holly said. “The man I told you about.”

“Then we’re looking at someone who knows you.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

Three days later

Holly lay in Damon's bed, waiting for him to return. They had decided not to say anything to the pack about what they had discovered. Nerves filled Holly. All she wanted to do was advise everyone to leave, especially the ones with kids.

She rubbed at her temple just thinking about the death she'd seen. They were men and women she'd known.

"You're thinking," Damon said.

"Am I not allowed to think anymore?"

"You can think all you want. You know I won't stop you." Damon had already taken a shower.

"How is everyone?"

"They're fine. Your dad is going to be stopping by with your mom tomorrow. We've got to figure out how to narrow down the person responsible for outing you all."

He ran a hand down his face, and she watched him reveal his body to her.

"Why are you helping us?" she asked. "And don't claim that I need to pay you for that question. It's perfectly justified and is no way personal or trying to figure you out."

"It is personal, and why do you want to figure me out?"

"Anyone would want to figure out your motive for wanting to keep me around, Damon. It's human nature ... it's natural."

“Humans are not all bad, Holly. You can’t judge the whole world on a couple of bad actions.”

“True, but I can hate them because of it. I don’t want to talk about this.” She ran her hands over her face, trying to clear her mind. “Just tell me why.”

“We have a deal.”

“And is that all it is?” she asked. “You can have any woman you ever wanted, Damon. I’m nothing special.”

He closed the distance between them and cupped her cheek. “Now that is where you’re so very wrong.”

Before she had a chance to speak, he slammed his lips down on hers, silencing her. She cupped his face and melted against him as he pressed her against the bed. He moved the blanket out of the way and groaned.

“You’re wearing way too many clothes.”

She laughed. “I’m wearing a nightshirt. Nothing else.”

He tore it apart, shredding the fabric with ease.

“What if I liked that shirt?”

“You don’t.” He spread her legs open, and she whimpered as the length of his erection pressed against her core. “Tell me to stop.”

“No.”

“Do you want this?”

“Yes.”

“Then beg me for it.”

“Please, Damon.”

“What?”

“Fuck me.”

“You want my dick inside you?”

“Yes.”

“Tell me to put it in you. Beg for it.”

“Please, put your dick inside me. I want to feel you.”

He reached between them, sliding his cock up and down her slit before pressing against her entrance and inch by inch, filling her up.

She sank her teeth into her bottom lip. A whimper escaped her as he held her hip and slammed to the hilt inside her.

“Now, you’re going to be a very good, Holly. You’re going to spread those legs and you’re going to take my dick. I’m going to fill your pussy up with my cum, isn’t that right?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll make you come after.” He pulled out of her until only the tip remained before plunging inside. The force of his thrusts had the bed hitting the wall. “Look at my dick.”

He pulled back and she looked at him. His length was covered in her arousal.

“Does it feel good?”

“Yes.”

“Do you want more?”

“Yes!”

“Good.” He fucked her harder.

One. Two. Three. Four. He slammed in, going as deep as he could, and she kept her legs open as wide as she could to take him.

He was so big.

“That’s it, baby. Take it all. You have such a pretty cunt. So fucking tight. I love that my dick is the only one you’ve had. I’m going to make you mine. Make you crave my cock. Your body will only ever answer to my call.”

She moaned as he turned her on.

“Oh, fuck!” He slammed into her one final time, and his cock pulsed, sending his cum deep into her womb. His grip tightened on her hip as if he just couldn’t help himself.

She saw the vein throb at his neck.

Damon didn’t make her wait though. He pulled out of her pussy and then his face was against her, licking her clit. Back and forth, he worked her until she came, rubbing herself all over his face.

Panting.

Sated.

And still hungry for him.

Damon crawled up the bed, licking his lips.

“I can’t believe you do that after you’ve come inside me.”

“Your pussy is too tasty not to lick you.” He kissed her, and she cupped his face.

“What are we going to do?” she asked.

“Not tonight,” he said.

“Damon. We can’t just forget about it or ignore it.”

“We’re not going to, but tonight, we’re not going to talk about it.” He stroked her cheek. “We’re going to enjoy each other.”

“But—”

He kissed her.

“Stop it,” she said, breaking from the kiss.

“Tell me about what you want in life.”

“No.”

“Tell me.”

She glared at him. “I want a dog and lots of babies. I want to be a mother and a wife. I want to have a big family that makes lots of noise. I can only have all of that with a mate.”

“A big family?”

“I never want to be lonely, Damon.”

“And you think I’m lonely?”

“I don’t think it. I know it.” She sat up with a sigh. “I don’t want to argue.”

“We’re not arguing,” he said. “I asked you a question.”

“What do you want out of life?” she asked.

She looked at him, but his gaze went past her shoulder. He made no sound. From the stay in his house, she didn’t know what he wanted. There were no pictures or even a hint of the kind of man he was.

“It’s not important what I want.”

“Of course, it is.” She placed her hand on his chest. “I know there is

more to you than this cold person you portray.”

“And what makes you think that? Hope?”

“You’re helping,” she said. “If you didn’t care about us, you wouldn’t have put your life at risk today.”

“I wasn’t going to let anything happen to my investment.” He reached down and grabbed her ass. “You’re important.”

She chuckled. “You’re not hiding it well enough. Four days ago, before we left, I’d have believed you. Not today. Not now. You care. Talk to me.”

He shoved her off him and stood.

Holly sat up as he moved toward the door. “What are you so afraid of?”

“I’m not afraid of anything, Holly. You’re a good fuck, nothing more.” He left the bedroom and she sighed. There he went again, hiding. The man was so infuriating.

She refused to let him run and hide. After pushing the blankets off, she grabbed the nearest robe and made her way down the stairs. She went to the kitchen, only to find Henry standing at the stove.

“He’s gone for a run. I don’t know what you’ve done to him, but he needed some fresh air.”

“I didn’t do anything to him.”

“Of course, you did. You got under his skin. It happens. He needs to learn to let people in.”

“You and he are friends?”

“Yes. I’m the only person he allows to get close. No one else knows who he is. What he feels.” Henry looked up from stirring his pot of hot chocolate. “Be patient with him.”

“I am being patient.”

“He’s a giant pain in the ass, but what you’ve got to understand about him is he’s only ever known rejection when it comes to packs. No one has ever taken the time to see the real him or to know him.”

“No one?”

“Every single pack has hurt him in some way.” He shrugged. “After a lifetime of rejection, do you really expect him to accept some random pack with open arms? This is new to him. He doesn’t soften easily.”

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t pry. He has told me some of what he went through,” she said.

“Then consider yourself lucky. The moment we came here, he has never allowed another wolf or pack to get close, and those that come, he moves them out.”

She frowned. “Why did he allow us to stay?”

“Simple. You.”

“But how is that possible? I’m no one.”

Henry poured his hot chocolate into his mug. “Holly, he’s a man who controls his lands. Knows everything about them. Do you really think the day you met him was the first time he’d ever seen you? Damon would have been watching you for weeks. You’re here, so I’m guessing he’d been watching you very closely.”

“Why?”

“That’s for him to tell you, if he even knows.” He raised his cup. “Goodnight.”

Holly was pissed at him again. Not that he could blame her. He'd ignored her all day, only speaking to her father, but trying to get through to him about one of his people having a direct line of contact with the hunters was like talking to a brick wall. He refused to believe it.

Damon sat in his dining room. Henry always refused to sit and eat with him as he felt it wasn't appropriate. Made no sense to him. They were the closest of friends.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"In the garden. I believe she is attempting some deep breathing exercises so she doesn't try to kill you."

"Do you think I'm being unreasonable?"

"No. I have heard the evidence you've gotten. It makes complete sense for the hunters to be so prepared. There is no way they could have done a full-scale attack without having someone on the inside. It sucks."

"Thank you."

"But you're trying to tell a pack they were betrayed. I know you don't understand pack, and to be frank, I've never known the people like this one. After observing them, they are one big family. They take care of one another. Their pack is built on the basis of love and respect for one another. Any form or sense of betrayal would hit them all hard. You have to understand that."

He nodded his head. "I see your point." He rubbed at his temple. "I need to talk to her."

"She's hurting and confused. Try to reason with her."

"Easier said than done." He got to his feet, leaving his food behind. Walking through the kitchen, he went to the back door overlooking the

garden.

Sure enough, there was Holly, sitting on the ground. Her shoes once again gone. Her long, blonde hair fell around her shoulders.

The full moon was so close, only a matter of days, if not hours away. He stepped onto the ground, and Holly opened her eyes. The sparks of amber flashed in her gaze. Her wolf was so close.

Mine.

The thought had been happening more and more, and it was starting to drive him insane. He couldn't deny his need for her though.

“What do you want?” Holly asked.

He walked until he was right in front of her. Her gaze eye level with his dick, and he crouched down.

“Dinner is on the table.”

“I'll be there in a minute,” she said. “You can eat. I don't want to have dinner with you.”

“Holly, stop being a child.”

“Fuck you.”

This shocked him. In all the days he'd known her, she'd never once cursed him.

“You don't mean that.”

“Right now I do.”

He inhaled the air. “But your pussy says otherwise.”

Her attack took him by surprise, as she shoved him hard. He fell to his back with Holly straddling him.

“Stop being so crude.”

“But you like me like this.” He grabbed her ass, pulling her down so she had no choice but to feel how aroused he was. “Feel me. Feel what you do to me.”

She growled. “No.”

She tried to get off him, but he held her still and she tilted her head back, moaning.

“That’s right, baby. You know what you want, don’t you?” he asked.

“Damn it.” She rubbed against him. “No. I hate you.”

“You’ve always hated me, but it hasn’t stopped you from getting what you want. Tell me, Holly, what do you want?”

She opened her eyes, which had closed in ecstasy. “You.”

“Then take me.” He grabbed the edge of her jeans and tore them from her body. Her panties were the next to go. Turning a single finger into a claw, he shredded the material.

She moaned.

He did the same to his own pants. His cock was already hard as fucking rock.

Holly lifted up, gripped his cock, and aligned it with her entrance. He grabbed her neck, forcing her to look at him as she sank onto his cock.

With each inch, they both groaned deep. A meeting of their minds as she whimpered. Letting go of her neck to grasp her hips, he pulled her down hard, hitting the hilt inside her. Holly leaned over, slamming her lips down on his, plunging her tongue inside.

He held her still, feeling an answering pull deep in his balls.

Damon wanted to come, to flood her cunt with his cum, but he held off, loving the way she took charge, but he needed her naked. He grabbed her hair, tugging her head back, exposing her neck. Sitting up, he pressed his lips against the delicate flesh and sucked on her pulse.

In quick movements, he had her shirt and bra on the ground. Cupping her large tits, he ran his thumb across each mounded peak, drawing them together to bite down on them.

She moaned. The sounds filled the air as he fucked her.

Taking each tit in turn, he sucked on her large nipples, tasting her.

He returned his grip to her hips and pulled her off his cock, but he flipped her over, pressing her to her knees before he slid in behind her.

Spreading the cheeks of her ass, he tilted her at an angle so he could see as he plunged inside her, going deep.

Her cunt opened up to him. The tempting hole of her anus called to him. He fingered the puckered ring, and Holly tensed.

“I’m going to fuck this hole soon, baby. The night of the full moon, after our wolves have run, I’m going to claim this, and then I would have taken every single part of you. Nothing for you to hide. You’ll belong to me in every single way it counts.”

He pushed a single finger against her asshole, penetrating her tight body.

Her cunt tightened around him. Even as she whimpered, she pushed back, trying to get him to go deeper.

As a reward, he held her in place and slammed into her, once, twice, three times, fucking her harder than ever before. She took all of him, pushing

back to meet every single one of his thrusts.

His name spilled from her lips as he took her.

He let go of her hip to slide a hand between her thighs and stroke her clit. She came apart within a few seconds, and the pulsing cunt on his cock was too much for him. He had no control as he spilled his cum deep inside her pussy, filling her up. Wanting to be her mate. To claim her pussy for his own.

Damon wanted her womb to be full with his child. No other male should have the right to claim her.

Pressing his body against her back, he kissed her neck, licking over her pulse.

“Wow,” Holly said.

He was spent, but he refused to leave her alone. “Why are you outside?”

“I needed a break from you.”

“What did I do wrong?”

“Do you have all night?” she asked.

He chuckled. “Talk to me.”

“It’s easy for you to judge our pack. To tell us we’re idiots and we need to see the proof in front of our eyes, but it’s not that easy.” She sighed. “You know what we ran from. It would be hard for anyone to be able to cope with the knowledge one of us was capable of that. People died, Damon. Good people. I’m sorry. I know this bores you.”

“When it comes to you, it doesn’t bore me, Holly.”

“You don’t have to lie.”

“I’m not lying. I’m trying to prepare you all for the truth. Someone in your pack has betrayed you. I don’t know what their motive is. I’m not some kind of detective. We both know what we saw. You have to admit I’m right.”

He eased out of her pussy and Holly turned on the ground so she looked up at him. “I know you’re right.” Tears filled her eyes. “But I ... how can I accept that? I was hurt, Damon. Children were shot at. We were hunted like animals. That kind ... it’s so awful and it hurts more than anything I’ve ever experienced. I can’t stand the thought that we’re also helping the person who did this.” She covered her face. “And that makes me a bad person. My dad always said there is power in forgiveness.” She shook her head. “I can’t forgive this. I keep on seeing Daniel, and he ... he was one of us. He was so loving and kind. I was at his wedding to his mate. I watched him hold his baby.” She sobbed against his hand. “And I can’t accept someone who is responsible for that.”

He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her in close. She held on to him, her face pressed against his chest as she let go.

The wolf in him howled for vengeance. Anger filled every single part of his core. The need to commit destruction floored him.

“Holly, I promise you, whoever did this will never, and I mean ever, get away with it. I will go to war with your father if I have to. I will make sure they suffer greatly for putting you through this much pain.”

He had no choice. This was cutting him real deep.

CHAPTER EIGHT

“Will you be able to handle me running with you tonight?” Holly asked.

“Do you think you can keep up?” Damon asked, removing his clothes as he stared ahead at the forest.

She sensed the rest of her pack were already changed, ready to go for the run. The full moon was high up in the sky. She felt the energy. The power. It was intoxicating.

“I doubt I’ll keep up.”

“I’ll make sure you do.” He wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her close. His face pressed against her neck.

With the full moon, everything heightened around them. She ran her fingers up his back, touching him, wanting to get as close to him as physically possible.

Damon held the back of her neck, tilting her head so she had no choice but to look him in the eye. “You’re driving me crazy. Now is not that time to want me like this.”

She was wet.

He was hard.

Her pack was close.

He let her go and took a step back.

Holly took off into the forest, feeling the ground beneath her feet. She counted to ten as she ran and then, her wolf came forward. A natural alignment of souls. On the ground, blonde like her hair, she took off, feeling

the moon in the sky. The energy of the pack rushed through her.

This was freedom.

She ran wildly, taking it all in, not allowing a moment to stop.

Her feet hit the ground and she charged forward.

Howls filled the air.

She stopped, tilted her head back, and joined them, howling up at the moon.

“You’re so incredibly beautiful.”

Holly stopped and whirled around.

No one had ever spoken to her in her mind. Only mates had that ability, and there she saw him and knew who it was.

“You heard me?” he asked.

There was no way. It wasn’t possible.

“Holly.”

“Damon.”

They’d been together a month nearly and not once had she thought he was her mate. There had been a few times she’d hoped, when he was being nice to her and not a dick.

She stared at him.

“Do you know what this means?” he asked.

“Please, stop.”

“No!”

He took a step closer to her, and she held her ground. The wolf inside her wanted to charge forward.

Mate. Mate. He's our mate. Take him.

She ignored the call of her mate and stared at Damon. The moon was high in the sky, and she looked up.

Her mate was the same man she'd given her virginity to. The one who was helping her pack and also driving a wedge between all of them. This wasn't fair.

Looking back at him, she saw he'd stilled, watching her.

"Holly, don't fight this. You know you want me. Mates are hard to find and we've found each other. You're mine, as I'm yours."

Those words did it.

Her wolf wouldn't be contained a moment longer. She pounced, and Damon held her. They were both in wolf form as they fell to the ground, nipping at each other, rolling in the dirt.

Holly moved back with a smile and then took off with Damon chasing after her.

"You're not going to get far. I'm always going to catch you."

He went to pounce and she moved, avoiding him.

With a snort, she ran back, circling toward a hidden alcove she'd seen with a small river running through.

The moon was still high up in the sky, and with the run, she had more control.

She crouched on the ground and turned, becoming human once again. When Damon came around, he was already human.

They panted.

He came toward her.

She watched him.

He grabbed her neck the instant he was close and forced her head back, slamming his lips down on hers as she wrapped her arms around her neck.

This wasn't gentle.

Damon lifted her, and she wrapped her legs around his waist as he pressed her against the nearest tree. He slid his cock to her entrance and slammed inside. She was already so wet and swollen for him.

With her legs already around his waist, she held on to his shoulders as he began to fuck her. The bark dug into her back, but she didn't care. This was what she wanted.

He broke the kiss, trailing his lips to her neck as he bit down, marking her. Once he finished, she did the same, marking his flesh so all other wolves would know he was mated. No other woman would be able to go near him now, not unless Holly died, and she had no intention of doing that.

Damon took her hard, and she cried out, giving in to him and the pleasure. The moon was full, her mate was inside her. She felt so utterly complete. She didn't know how it was possible to be this lucky.

She loved and hated him with equal measure, but there was no denying she would never let him go. She'd fight to keep him, to hold on to him.

"Mine," Damon said, growling the word against her lips.

"Mine!"

He slammed inside her and came, his cum filling her pussy, and she knew all this month there was a chance she might already be pregnant as they hadn't used any precautions. As her mate, he had the power to impregnate her, and she didn't have a problem with that.

The moon had started to fall. Damon held his mate's hands, keeping her flush against his body.

"Do you have any idea what you do to me?" he asked.

"I feel what I do to you," she said, wriggling her ass against his hard dick.

He chuckled and bit down on her shoulder. They'd spent the entire night fucking. He wanted to make her pregnant. To have her completely full with his child.

"You're going to have to tell my dad."

"Why do I get to be the one to tell your powerful alpha that I've mated with his daughter?"

"So you admit my father is powerful, or are you just being nice?" She turned her head to look up at him.

"He's ... got power."

"You have to admit there is always power in being nice. It unnerves everyone else." She shrugged. "He's lasted this long."

"True." He kissed her shoulder. "Holly?"

"Yeah."

He didn't know if this was the right time to bring it up. "I'm an alpha."

"I know."

"My track record with other packs is not exactly great."

She let go of his hands and spun around. Resting her head on her palm, she looked up at him. "Meaning?"

“You’re going to have to make a choice.”

She shook her head. “Don’t do this now.”

“Your dad and I, he’s not going to accept me. They never do.”

She got to her feet and took a few steps away. “Don’t, Damon. Don’t assume to know who my dad is. He’s powerful, yes, but he’s not an asshole. Don’t judge him based on other people you know.”

He stepped toward her, taking her hand and placing it over his ink. “Feel that. Feel the lumps and bumps. The old scars. These are not willing war wounds, Holly. This is blood and betrayal, and pain.”

She placed her other hand over his heart. “I know. I believe you, and I need you to trust me. My dad isn’t like them. Give him a chance.”

Damon gritted his teeth.

“I know we’ve only just found each other and we’re ... bound to each other, but in time, I know I can love you,” she said. “I would never hurt you.” She cupped his face. “All I ask is you give him a chance. Don’t make me chose between you and my family.”

“What if you have no choice?”

She pressed her lips against his. “I won’t have to choose.”

He stroked her cheek. She was too innocent. Her father was a good man, but he’d seen alphas when their pack was threatened. Christopher hadn’t felt a real challenge yet. Damon had sensed other alpha males and females within the pack, but none were as strong as him.

Wrapping his arms around Holly, he pulled her close.

She may not love him yet, but he knew he loved her. Had been loving her since the moment he saw her, when she didn’t know she was being

watched.

He kissed her neck, then down to the tops of each of her breasts. He held her tits in his hands, offering them up to him as he slid his tongue across each nipple.

The scent of her arousal filled the air.

Their conversation lay between them, but he chose to ignore it.

She didn't have to make a choice. Her father would make it for her, and Damon would live with the consequences of that. Even if she picked her pack over him, he wouldn't let her go.

She belonged to him.

He never thought he'd have a mate of his own. Feeling her, taking her, owning her, he was not letting her go. She was everything to him. Even his wolf felt a connection with hers. They were powerful together, and there was no turning back for him.

Damon sank to his knees before her, sliding his hands up the insides of her thighs, cupping her pussy in his palm.

He slid a finger between her slit before plunging inside her. He'd already come inside her, but that wasn't what he wanted to do now.

Helping her to the ground, he spread her legs and began to lick at her pussy. Gliding his tongue across her slit, he circled the bud, sucking it into his mouth. He used his teeth to create just enough pain to make it almost too much for her to bear before letting go and stroking out the pain with his tongue.

Damon grabbed her ass, holding her against his mouth as he worked her pussy, driving her higher and higher above that peak, and when the time

came for her to go over, he guided her through her orgasm.

Her cream spilled from her cunt, dribbling down to her anus, coating her.

“Do you trust me?” he asked.

“Yes.”

He lifted her legs up. “Hold them.”

His cock was ready, but this time, he didn't want to take her pussy. Before morning truly came, he wanted to own every single part of her.

He held her still as he pressed the tip of his cock against her anus.

“Don't tense up. I'm going to make it good for you. I promise.”

“Damon?”

“If you want me to stop, tell me.”

“No, please, I want this,” she said. She was so aroused. The scent clung to her body.

He pushed past the tight ring of her muscles and took his time to sink into her asshole. She was tighter than he imagined. Holding her knees, he pushed himself deep until he was all the way inside her.

They were both panting, and he stared into her eyes.

Mate.

Mine.

Always.

He was not going to let her go.

She belonged to him. He felt the utter power of the claim right through to his soul.

“Are you ready?” he asked.

She nodded.

With slow strokes, he took her ass, working her body to find his own release. In and out, he thrust within her.

His balls tightened.

He alternated between looking at her eyes and then her ass as she was spread open to take him. She was so beautiful.

His perfect mate.

“It feels so good,” she said.

He growled in approval.

Unable to resist bringing her to another orgasm, he stroked his thumb across her clit. The flutters of her ass nearly had him spilling his seed inside her.

He held himself perfectly still as he worked her clit. She came hard, and after just a few thrusts, her orgasm consumed her, taking her by surprise by the sheer force of it.

Mine.

It was all he could think about as he held her.

CHAPTER NINE

Holly had never taken a boyfriend home to meet her parents. Damon wasn't just a random guy. He was her mate.

He held her hand as they walked toward the farm where her parents had begun to settle in.

"We don't have to go tonight," Holly said. "It's probably rude to invade their time. Don't you think?"

"You're nervous."

"Yes."

They stopped outside of her parents' house, and she bit her lip as she turned to look at him. "I don't know what to do."

"What do you mean?"

"What you said last night. I don't know why my father would reject you. He has no reason to but ... I won't choose him or the pack." She took a deep breath and cupped his face. Ever since she realized he was her mate, she couldn't resist touching him in some way. "I'll always pick you. Always."

He stroked her cheeks. "Thank you."

"I'm so sorry you experienced so much crap with other packs. I hope mine is different. I really do."

"I'm an alpha, Holly. There's no way I'm going to be able to take orders from him, even if I wanted to."

She kissed his lips. "I know, and I appreciate everything you're doing for me."

"I thought I heard you," Christopher said. "Your mother is cooking

spaghetti. Your favorite. She knows how hungry you get after a run.”

Holly smiled and moved toward her father, hugging him. Damon growled, and she immediately stepped back. They weren’t kidding about that alpha possessive gene.

Her father looked from her to Damon.

“Something is different.”

“I need to talk to you and Mom. It’s important.”

“I’ve got something to talk to Damon about. You go on ahead.”

Holly looked back at Damon, who winked at her. She didn’t want to leave him alone with her dad, but she saw no choice.

Stepping over the threshold, she smelled the onions and garlic, and her mouth watered. Without waiting for an invitation, she went straight to the kitchen where her mother was already serving up food.

Lidia gasped. “Really?”

Holly looked at her mother and then behind her. “What is it?”

“I see the mark, darling. Oh, my, you’re mated. Who is it?”

Holly touched the mark on her neck and smiled. “Mom, you know who it is. I’ve been changing in front of everyone in the pack. Think about it, there is only one man I’ve never turned in front of until last night.”

Lidia sighed. “Damon.”

“Why are you sad?”

“I’m not sad. Your father ... he ... voiced his thoughts.”

“He’s angry?”

“No. No. This was before last night. It was when he came to see you at

Damon's house, before you came to town. Your father said the way Damon was with you, he acted as if you were already mates. I didn't think it was possible because you can never know your true mate, but what he saw, he was convinced of it."

"Oh," Holly said. "How?"

Her mother shrugged. "It was all to do with the way he acted. How he constantly seemed to want to touch you. I have to say when you came to the town hall, I saw it. He watched your every move and his hand during the meeting kept opening and closing. I think he was trying to feel you even when you were gone. It was such a sweet gesture. Are you happy?" her mother asked.

"Yes, I am. I'm very happy. Damon has been through a lot. He hasn't had the best experiences when it comes to pack life. He doesn't trust easily."

"I get that sense too. I can't believe my little girl is all grown up and mated." Lidia rushed toward her and wrapped her in a big hug.

Holly laughed. "I'm not going to go anywhere. Dad's not going to hurt Damon, is he?"

"No. Of course not."

"Mom, Damon believes I'm going to have to make a choice between him or the pack. Will I?"

"Don't be silly."

"Mom, they're both alphas."

"That doesn't mean they can't work together. Your father will be able to show Damon another side of being an alpha." Her mother smiled and stroked her cheek. "Now, let's get this food ready. I'm starving and I've got

cheesy garlic bread.”

“Lots of cheese?”

“Is there any other way to eat garlic bread?” Her mother winked at her. “Come on, relax and enjoy.”

Holly tried to listen to her father and Damon, but she couldn’t hear a single thing. She set the table, and her mother disappeared to go find them.

Locking her fingers together, she waited to see who would come into the house.

Damon and her father came in together.

There were no bruises or blood. They looked happy together. She looked between them with a smile. “Is everything okay?” she asked.

“Never been better, honey,” Christopher said. He kissed her cheek.

Damon growled again, and her mother giggled.

“This is going to make family festivities interesting. Damon, I hope you brought your appetite with you.”

“I’m starved.”

Damon held out her chair for her and winked. She lowered herself into her chair and kept on looking between her dad and her mate. Neither of them gave anything away, and the not knowing was driving her insane.

How could they sit there without saying a word?

Her mother served them all huge piles of spaghetti. The sauce dripped from each strand, soaking the plate beneath, and they mopped it up with the cheesy garlic bread.

“Christopher, we need to start talking to the pack one by one.”

“Don’t you think that is going to alert them?” her father asked.

“We need to do something. With every day that passes, we run the risk of those hunters coming back here.”

“This is not a good dinnertime conversation,” Lidia said.

Her father put his hand over her mother’s. “I know, darling. We’ve got to get a handle on this.”

“I don’t like it one bit,” Lidia said, standing up. “I can’t believe that anyone in our pack would do such a thing. We’re all good people.”

“Good people snap,” Holly said. “I agree with my dad, though.” She looked at Damon. “It will be suspicious. Think about it. All of a sudden, we’re interviewing the entire pack about that night. Someone is going to figure it out and then there’s a chance of a rebellion and putting us in more danger. If the person feels threatened, they could call the hunters to us.”

“What if they’re watching us already?” Lidia asked, moving to the window near the kitchen and closing the curtains.

“They’re not. I’m doing sweeps every morning and night,” Damon said. “My guy is also on the lookout when he’s in town for any suspicious people. He has an eye for it. He’ll alert me.”

“And you can trust this guy?” her father asked.

“Don’t question my ability to protect your people. I wasn’t the one who sent the hunters your way,” Damon said.

Christopher slumped.

“What if you and I start heading into town?” Holly asked. She held Damon’s hand.

“Why would that make a difference?” Lidia asked. “Wouldn’t it make

it more suspicious?”

“It would if Holly and I weren’t mated,” Damon said. His gaze never averted from hers.

“You can use it as a disguise. We’d be able to go undetected,” Holly said. “Allow them to let their guard down.”

“I’m not following,” Lidia said.

“I can pretend to want to join the pack. I’m an alpha, so they’re going to know it’ll be difficult for me to even attempt to submit to another alpha. The very idea is ... unthinkable. I wouldn’t do it, but for a mate, there is a chance.”

“We’d have the perfect cover. You’ll be with me. People will feel ... secure. I offer them comfort.”

Damon nodded. “I like it.”

“I do not feel comfortable with this,” Christopher said. “We have agreed to an understanding, Damon. I will not act some part. We know how our wolves can be.”

“We’re not doing this for ourselves, Chris. We’re doing this for the pack, for our safety. Believe me, I don’t want those hunters coming close. I don’t just have myself and Henry to think about anymore. I’ve got my mate to protect. If I can come in this house, have dinner, and we can work things out like this, I can see us doing this for a long time.”

Holly smiled as tears filled her eyes.

“Sweetheart, what is wrong?” Lidia asked.

“Nothing. I’m just so happy right now.” She got to her feet and sat on Damon’s lap, kissing his lips. “Thank you.”

“No, thank you.”

“Pack life is boring,” Damon said.

Holly tapped him on the chest. “Don’t be mean.”

“Seriously, you’re living normal lives. You’ve got jobs and all that shit. What is up with that?”

She pressed her body against his. “You’ve got a job.”

“I work for myself. I don’t try to blend in.”

“Damon, we’re not animals. We’re a big family and work still needs to keep on working. Did you know besides caring for the babies of the pack, I also took a part-time job in a supermarket? I had to deal with real people passing through every single day.”

“No?”

“Yes.” She giggled. “It was fun.”

“But you love looking after kids more?”

“Yes.”

“You’re going to have a whole house full of them.”

“You think so?”

“How about this, I only come in your pussy until your pregnant?” he asked.

“I can’t believe you can talk that way so easily.”

He chuckled. “With you, Holly, I seem to be able to do a whole lot of things I didn’t think I was capable of.” He kissed the top of her head.

She sighed. “I wish we were back at your place.”

“You don’t like mingling with your pack?” he asked.

“It’s not that. I just ... this is hard. One of them is a traitor and is responsible for nearly wiping us out. I don’t think that kind of stuff is easy to forgive.” She blew out a breath.

He hated hearing her sound so defeated. “Don’t let it get to you.”

She laughed. “How could I not? I’m sorry. I’m trying to focus on the good.”

He tilted her head back with a finger beneath her chin. “I’m here for you, and I won’t let you do anything stupid.”

“Like gut the person the way those hunters did Daniel?” She growled. “See? Look what it is turning me into.”

Damon pulled her in close and kissed her neck. “People are looking at us. You’ve got to be careful what you say. We don’t know how clearly they can hear. You’re turning into a woman who wants to take care of her pack. There is nothing wrong with that.” He kissed the tip of her nose. “You should be happy.”

“I don’t know how this feeling can make anyone happy. I’m so angry.” She cupped his cheek and kissed him. “Thank you for not making me feel ... wrong.”

“You’re not wrong. You’re passionate. There is a difference.” He kissed her lips again, taking her hand. “But we’re not going to figure out the truth unless we talk to people. Can you handle that?”

“Yeah, I can handle it.”

They walked to the local café and took a seat. Her father had given them a bit of advice to be out in the open, so people would be more willing to

approach them. Damon had decided he'd be the one to ask the questions while Holly would appear to be the doting mate. They ordered coffees and a couple of sandwiches and waited.

"Don't keep glaring," Holly said.

"I'm not. It's fine."

"Try to look a little happier about being mated to me. It's a good thing."

He reached for her hand and drew her close. "I've got no problem being mated with you. What I don't like is someone thinking they can put my woman in danger." He kissed her inner wrist and saw the spark of arousal in her eyes.

"Please," she said. "I have to focus."

"When this is all over, I will demand that you don't have to focus for a really long time."

"You make me want to be bad," she said.

His cock ached. He wanted to take her home right now and bend her over the stairs as they were the closest thing in the house.

They were interrupted by one of the men. He held out his hand.

"Congratulations," he said.

"Thank you, Peter," Holly said.

She went to touch him and Damon growled.

Peter held his hands up. "I get it. You're mated and staking your claim. I just want to say you've got yourself one hell of a woman. You're going to be very happy. Holly's an amazing woman."

"I already know that," Damon said. He grabbed the back of her neck

and pulled her in close, kissing her hard. The wolf wanted to do a lot more than just kiss her. “So tell me a bit about you, Peter. Do you like to go hunting? Camping?”

He lured the man down a path, asking all the necessary questions until he had to leave.

“That wasn’t so bad,” Holly said.

“One down and a shitload to go.”

For the entirety of lunch, they were approached from men to women, to children. Each time, Damon asked a whole bunch of questions. How do you find pack life? What are your hobbies? Are there any tips for dealing with her dad? All innocent questions, but Damon knew that answered in a strange way, he’d be able to detect the hint of betrayal.

By the end of the day, he and Holly walked all the way back to the house.

“Anything?” Holly asked.

“Not a damn thing.” He growled.

Henry waited for them outside. “You’re not in a good mood,” Henry said.

Holly giggled. “He’ll be fine.”

“Fine? I’ve had to play nice with a pack I’m not sure I like,” Damon said.

“Hey!”

He pulled Holly against him. “It’s nothing personal. Someone in your pack betrayed you. I’ve got to find who it is.”

“Well, today, you got to meet ninety percent of the males and about

eighty percent of the females,” Holly said.

They entered his home and Henry closed the door.

“Really?” Damon asked.

“Yes. We spoke to a lot of people.”

Their stomachs growled and Henry chuckled. “I better go get some food on.”

He left them alone, and Damon pressed his head against Holly’s.

“Maybe it’s not one of the pack?” she said.

“Babe, I know you don’t want to think it, but it is.”

“Have you ever thought the men just got lucky?” she asked.

“I wish they could have, but this is personal. Please, trust me. I don’t want you to be alone with any of them.”

“I wish I could hunt those bastards down who hurt you,” Holly said.

Damon chuckled. Her hands were wrapped around his neck, and he pressed his face against her. “I love it when you get all protective.”

“I know. It’s a surprise to me because I started out hating you.” She pressed a kiss to his lips. “Now I can’t imagine a life without you. It’s all a little confusing.”

“For the both of us.” He nipped at her lips, trailing his down to her neck to lick at her pulse. “I want to fuck you.”

“Henry’s making food.”

“I won’t take long. I want to put my kid inside you, Holly.” He growled the words against her neck.

The moment she tensed up, Damon worried he’d said the wrong thing.

He looked at her. “Do you want kids? Did I say the wrong thing?”

“Pregnancy.”

Damon frowned. “You’ve lost me. Do you not want to get pregnant?”

“You said that you couldn’t smell any of the pack near where the men were hunting.”

“Babe, scents don’t always linger in the air.”

“But pregnant females don’t smell,” Holly said.

“What?”

“You heard me. It’s ... a mask. Some kind of protection or something, but pregnant females have no scent. I think it is supposed to help us protect our unborn child but also as a deterrent for rogue males. There is a whole big thing about it, but pregnant females don’t smell.”

Damon closed his eyes, rubbing at his temples. “I don’t understand what you’re saying to me.”

“Natalie.”

“The woman is huge. The hunters would have torn her apart in a heartbeat,” he said.

Holly glared. “Not if one of those hunters is the dad.”

“It has been a really long day, babe. I cannot think, and I don’t have a clue what you’re trying to get at.”

“Natalie smells.”

“You don’t think she’s pregnant.”

“She’s pregnant, but that’s the point. Human females smell during their pregnancy. They have a scent to them. It’s strong. They release hormones

where we don't. It's the difference between human and wolf."

"But Natalie's a mated wolf?"

"Who lost her mate. I think..." Holly pressed her lips together. "I think Natalie went to the human hunters to kill her mate. Her baby is not her mate's. It's one of the hunters."

"This is a huge stretch."

"No. Natalie always hated the fact she was a wolf. She was the first woman I knew who hated being mated. She wanted to do everything to stop it, and I think she wanted to rid the pack as well."

"You think she approached the hunters?"

"Think about it. She's the only person I can think of who would have a reason to want to leave the pack. It's the only thing that makes sense."

"And she's the only one that hasn't talked to us."

"We've got to call my father. Warn him," Holly said.

Damon was in agreement.

CHAPTER TEN

Holly stared at her father as he looked across the room, looking deeply hurt.

“But she ... she was happy,” her father said.

“No, she wasn’t. Think about it. She had nowhere else to go other than to be mated.”

“Then how did she meet these hunters?” he asked. Christopher looked from her to Damon. “It’s a giant leap from a member in this pack to a highly pregnant, mated female.”

“Her mate didn’t make it. She smells, Dad. You know it. I know it. That can only mean that the child she carries is not her mate’s.” Holly shrugged her shoulders. “You think I don’t find this all a little upsetting?”

Her father sighed. “I ... I should have known.”

“You can’t know everything,” Damon said. “These things happen.”

“Not in my pack. I pride myself on people finding happiness and peace.”

Holly went to her father, hugging him, ignoring the deep rumble of a growl Damon emitted. They’d called her father the moment she realized the person they were after was Natalie.

“Dad, you’re a good alpha.”

“I’m not feeling that way. Look at what happened to you. You were taken. Our entire town was destroyed. I lost good men and women. Now I’m being told the person responsible is a woman I’ve seen grow into a beautiful woman. A woman I thought...” He held his hands up and shook them. “No. I

can't."

"She did this," Holly said. "And if we're not careful, she's going to do it again."

"We need to take action." Damon not so subtly pulled her against him so her father had no choice but to let her go.

"What do you recommend?" Christopher asked.

She glanced back at Damon to see he looked surprised.

"You're asking me?"

"I need all the help I can get, Damon. If she is responsible for those hunters, it's only a matter of time before they come back. I can't have her hurting more of our people."

"Our people?"

Holly smiled, rubbing Damon's hands.

"You're one of us, Damon," Christopher said. "I get that you don't want to be part of a pack, and I accept that, but you're one of us. My daughter loves you. We're going to have to work together to make this work. I'm willing to do that if you are." Her father held out his hand. "What do you say?"

Damon didn't move.

"How about we decide this after we stop the hunters from showing up? Do you think we can do that?" Holly asked.

"We need to go tonight," Damon said. "If she believes there is a chance we know, she could run. We can't have that. We need to do this without the rest of the pack knowing what is going on."

"Then we go tonight," Christopher said.

“I think it best if Holly and I do this,” Damon said.

“Why?”

“Have you ever gone to her house late at night for any reason?”

“No.”

“Don’t you think that will set her suspicions off? She could phone her hunter,” Damon said.

Her father sighed. “You’re right. But I’m not going to be too far. You must alert me to deal with this. She is pack and until you make a decision about your future, some of the pack will not like me allowing you to make pack law.”

“I have no intention of doing that. You’ll deal with Natalie. We’re just going to make sure she doesn’t bring the hunters here.” Damon held out his hand. “Deal?”

Her father didn’t even hesitate.

“Looks like we’re heading out,” Holly said.

Within seconds, they were back in the car and Damon was already driving into town.

“How are you doing?” Damon asked.

“Awful. I liked Natalie. She was nice once.”

“She might still be nice.”

“She led a bunch of hunters to us. A lot of people died. You saw the bodies.” She released a shudder. The memory alone was scary.

Damon took her hand. “I’ve got you, okay? I’m not going to let anything bad happen to you.”

“Don’t make promises you can’t keep.”

“Who says I can’t keep them?” he asked.

“I don’t want to fight about this.” She gave his hand a squeeze and she tried to pull away, but he wouldn’t let her go. “Damon?”

“Not letting you go. I’m your mate.”

“Yes, and we’ve still got to decide what we’re going to do,” Holly said. “Are you willing to work with my dad’s pack?”

He sighed. “Why don’t we just focus on one problem at a time?”

Holly agreed.

He let go of her hand. She missed his touch and pressed her hands between her legs, clenching them together.

They hadn’t spoken about ... their feelings. They were mated and together, but it wasn’t the same as her parents.

Pushing those thoughts to one side, they arrived at Natalie’s apartment, which also happened to be above the daycare facility they’d set up.

She climbed out of the car and went to the door, giving it a knock.

Natalie opened it seconds later.

“Holly, hey, how are you?”

“I’m fine. I just came to see how you were doing,” she said. “You work way too hard.”

Natalie looked pale. There were dark rings around her eyes, and she seemed to have lost a little weight.

“Come in. Come in,” Natalie said.

They stepped over the threshold and there was the scent again. This

time, she recognized the smell. The hunters. Natalie stunk of them, or at least one of them.

Damon placed a hand on her back, making her aware he scented it too.

“A drink?”

“Please,” Holly said.

They entered Natalie’s apartment, and Holly noted the lack of personal touches. They’d only been there for a little over a month, but there was nothing to show for it in her place.

“Do you not like the place?” Holly asked.

“Ah, it’s great. I love it, but I’ve got the baby to consider.”

“Yeah. Are you thinking of a little place with a garden?”

Natalie chuckled. “How did you know?”

“Just a hunch.”

Natalie returned holding two mugs, and as she held them out, Holly saw the way her hands shook.

“You’re nervous,” Holly said.

“It’s nothing. I’ve been having some pains in my back.”

Holly stared at Natalie. They’d never been close like best friends, but she thought she knew her.

“Why?” Holly asked.

Damon grabbed her shoulders.

Natalie sighed. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Don’t lie.”

“Holly!” The warning came from Damon as Natalie took a step back.

“We know,” Holly said. “We know about your hunter. We know you organized the attack.”

This time, Natalie looked up and shook her head. “No. I didn’t organize the attack. You can hate me all you want and blame it all on me but ... I swear ... I had nothing to do with that.”

“Then why don’t you tell us what happened?” Damon asked. “You’re scared. We can all see that.”

Natalie started to cry. She put the cups down and shook her head. “Talking doesn’t resolve anything.”

“Tell us why,” Holly said.

“Do you love him?” Natalie asked, pointing at Damon. “Does he make you feel like you’re on top of the world?”

Holly didn’t look back at Damon. Her gaze stayed on Natalie. The pain in the woman’s face hit her hard. “Natalie?”

“That’s what mates are supposed to be like, right? Love each other. Take care of one another. Not ... hurt them?”

Tears filled her eyes. “He hurt you?”

Natalie pushed some of her hair off her face. “Holly, you have no idea the kind of man he was. I refuse to say his name. I can’t.” She put her hand to her stomach.

“That’s not *his*,” Holly said.

“No, but I ... I had no choice.”

“Did you go to the hunters?” Damon asked.

“No. I didn’t even want this.”

Holly was getting more confused by the second. “Natalie, what the hell

is going on?”

“From the moment we were mated and I accepted it, he changed. My mate. I can’t ... I won’t say his name.”

“We get it,” Damon said.

Holly wanted to go to Natalie and comfort her. She had sunk down onto the sofa. Hands clasped together, looking so broken.

“It started with him not being happy with the way I dressed. He would pick my clothes and tell me how to do my makeup. If I didn’t do it exactly how he wanted, he started to hit me. A slap here. He always brushed it off as playful but it escalated quickly until he punched me hard.” Natalie frowned. “He would be so kind and loving one moment and then he’d hit me. I wouldn’t see it coming. He felt that your dad shouldn’t be alpha, and when we finished at town meetings, he’d come home and take it all out on me. It was my fault that everything was going wrong. I was the bad person in his life. I didn’t want to be a wolf, Holly, but I love the pack.”

“You didn’t go to the hunters,” Damon said.

She shook her head. “No. He went to them. He told them every single detail. Even where he could hang out and...” Natalie shook her head.

“We know the baby isn’t his,” Holly said. “Did you ... fall in love?”

Natalie burst out laughing. “Love? You think this came from love? No. the leader wanted to know what it was like to be with a female wolf.” She snorted. “I had no choice. He held a gun to my head. My mate did. He forced me to have sex with another man.”

Holly had heard enough. She rushed to Natalie’s side and pulled her in for a hug. “I’ve got you.”

“I had no one to turn to. Who would believe me?” She started to sob, and Holly held her, feeling so helpless for the other woman.

Christopher grabbed the chair and threw it across the town hall where it shattered as it hit the wall.

“Dad?” Holly said.

“I should have known. There is no way a woman, a mated female in my pack, should have ever suffered, Holly. I’m a failure.”

“No one knew.”

“But I should have. He had alpha qualities. I knew he was always quick to temper, but I had no idea the true extent of his person. I failed Natalie.”

“She didn’t lure the hunters,” Damon said.

They’d taken Natalie to his home for Henry to keep an eye on her.

“No. She was used by her mate to bring the hunters. He was killed, right?” Christopher asked.

“Yes. He didn’t make it after the attack.”

Damon went to his mate’s side and gripped her shoulders tightly. “I’ve got you.” He felt her pain.

“We should have known,” Holly said. “We’re not the kind of pack that leaves people alone.”

He chuckled. “You’re stalkers?”

Holly smiled, but it didn’t reach her eyes. “You know what I mean.”

“I do, but you can’t blame yourself for what happened.” He pressed a kiss to her temple.

He hated seeing her like this. So lost and broken. It was up to him to bring her back, to repair her.

“What do we do now?” Christopher said.

This was the part he doubted his mate or the alpha was going to like.

“I’m going hunting,” Damon said. “Natalie said the person her husband forced her to be with was the leader. I’m guessing he’s not going to pass up the opportunity to have a wolf in his bed. Natalie already carries his child.”

“That’s insane,” Holly said. “There’s no way you can go hunting for him.”

“Why not? One day soon, he’s going to come here and I’m not willing to risk it. I’m not willing to risk you or anyone else. If it was my woman with my kid, I’d do whatever I could to make them safe again.”

“This is all a little too much,” Holly said, pulling away. “You can’t go.”

“You’re not going to stop me.”

“I’m your mate.”

“Exactly. It’s why I’m doing this.” He turned to Christopher. “I know you will take care of her if anything was to happen. The pack needs you. They don’t need me. I’m expendable.”

“This is insane!” Holly stamped her foot. “You’re not going.”

“I leave tomorrow,” Damon said.

He looked at the alpha, who eventually nodded.

“Dad!”

“I don’t like this, Holly, but we’ve got no choice. There’s no way I’m going to allow Natalie to be hurt again, or anyone else in the pack.”

She shook her head. “So sending my mate out to a bunch of hunters. That’s all fine, right?”

“No. It’s not fine, but we both know Damon can handle himself.”

“I’ll be coming back.”

Holly shook her head, spun on her heel, and left the town hall.

“Do you know what you’re doing?” Christopher asked.

“Yes.”

“She loves you,” he said.

“She hasn’t said anything,” Damon said.

“My daughter is a stubborn woman. It is going to take more than just a mating to admit her feelings.”

Damon smiled. “She was quick to tell me she hated me.”

“Most women are. Damon, I have no doubt you’re going to handle this, and for that, I will be in your debt. Anything you want, it is yours.”

Damon stared at his father-in-law. It wasn’t official yet, but one day he hoped to make it so.

“I don’t want to lose Holly. I’m in love with her. I can’t imagine a life without her in it, and to be frank, I don’t want to. She owns my heart. I know she’d leave the pack for me, but I don’t want to ask that of her. Her place is here. I ... I’ve only ever known pain and suffering within a pack, but I’d like to learn to be part of it. It has been a long time since I’ve ever bowed down to an alpha.”

“You won’t need to bow down to me, Damon. You want to join the pack to be with my daughter, then we will find a way to make it work. After this, the pack will be indebted to you, and you’d have earned your place by

my side. I will not betray your trust.” He held out his hand and Damon shook it.

They didn’t try to crush each other’s hands either. Just a mutual shake. Two men coming together.

“I better go to Holly.”

His mate waited for him inside the car.

Her arms were folded and she was royally pissed off.

Climbing behind the wheel, he turned over the ignition and began the journey up to his home.

“Holly?” he asked.

“Don’t speak to me. I’m not talking to you.”

“Baby, everything is going to be fine.”

“Fine! You think going hunting after a bunch of lunatics is going to be fine? You’re joking, right? There is no way you’re going to make it out alive. You saw the aftermath of what happened. Me? I saw what truly happened. I was there. They’re monsters, Damon. You could get hurt.”

“And you’re not happy with that.”

He parked the car as she slapped his chest, hard.

“That’s not funny.”

“Holly?”

“No! I’m not talking to you. I don’t think any part of you getting hurt or killed is funny.” She got out of the car and started to storm up to the house. Damon got out as a wave of scent hit him hard.

Something wasn’t right.

The door opened, and the stench got even worse.

He screamed her name, but in the next second, Holly was grabbed around the neck and pulled back.

Damon pounced as guns were trained on him.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Henry being shoved to the ground. The gun pointed at his friend's head. Natalie was with him, sobbing.

The coppery smell of blood filled the air, and he noticed the red stain between Natalie's thighs mixed with the blood.

Her water must have broken.

A scream filled the air as Natalie writhed in pain.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

And to top it all off, the leader had Holly. A blade pressed against her neck, right against her pulse.

"Well, well, well, look what we've got here," the man said.

He flicked his tongue against Holly's cheek, and his mate recoiled. The blade was too close to her flesh.

"I'd be careful, wild one. One wrong move, and I might plunge this blade right into your neck."

"Let her go," Damon said.

"And why would I do that?"

"Because if you do, I'll kill you quickly."

"You and what army? The cowardly pack is back in town, sleeping all warm and snug. Don't worry, I intend to finish what I've started. You've got the bitch here, but she's no good. She can't help you. My whore is pregnant

and once she has spat a kid out, she's going to die. Then you've got your human slave. There's just you."

The leader didn't realize Henry was wolf. The man didn't turn, but he had the strength. Damon hoped his friend had heard him.

Henry hated to be called a slave after the life he'd lived. Damon had set about his freedom from the packs, and there was no way anyone was ever going to make him like that again.

Damon stared at the leader, not saying a word.

This game was the same he'd played many times. The leader was exactly like the other alphas he'd been challenged by.

Staring at him, he waited. Not making a sound. Not begging for his mate. The wolf in him wanted to pounce, but he held himself perfectly still, keeping in constant control even though Holly was in danger. He couldn't live without her.

"Damon?" Holly asked. "I love you."

This drew his attention. "You're going to tell me this now?"

"I ... I think it's rather fitting, don't you?"

"You're not going to die," he said.

The leader laughed. "So full of false hope."

"Yeah, well I know something you don't," he said.

"And what is that?" the leader asked.

"I don't have a human slave."

Before anyone could react, the gun went off, and the man who'd been pointing it at Henry was dead on the ground. Henry wasn't in sight.

The hunters tensed. Their guns moving as they looked all around for a sighting of Henry.

Damon had learned early on how dangerous Henry was. How very close to the edge he could be if pushed.

He took care of him. At Henry's request, he never asked him to hurt people. Damon had realized Henry was never a threat until he was provoked in the worst possible way. A gun to the head was an extreme.

All he'd needed was to wait for Henry to be in the right place to strike.

Another male cry, and a body was thrown from the tree line, landing on the ground. Henry was pissed. The hunter didn't have a face. It looked like it had been hacked right off.

"What is this?" the leader asked.

"Well, you see, you kind of pissed off a very, very loyal friend. He has a bad history with hunters of any kind. Years and years of abuse and being kept on a tight leash have affected him, and well, you threatening him like that, you've kind of signed your own death warrant."

Another scream. Another body.

Damon kept his gaze on Holly as Natalie let out a scream.

"Something is happening here," one of the guards said. Seconds later, he was gone as well.

The bodies kept on piling up until all that remained was the one guard with the knife so close to Holly's neck.

Damon took a step toward him and another.

"You call him off before I take everything from you."

"You and what army?" Henry asked, suddenly appearing right behind

the lead hunter. The blade was snapped out of his hand and Holly was shoved forward.

Damon wrapped his arms around her as Henry pulled the man into the dark where he heard the screams and the shouts.

The body came out, followed by Henry. The angry glow of his eyes faded as he looked at Damon.

“Next time, I will let you handle it,” Henry said.

“I think you took care of that pretty well,” Damon said. He kissed Holly’s head, breathing her in as Natalie screamed.

Henry, back in control, rushed to Natalie’s side. “She’s giving birth. It appears she’s crowning.”

“You know how to deliver a baby?” Holly asked.

“Yes. I spend a lot of time reading.” Henry was already getting into position. “Right, you’re going to have to push, Natalie.”

“It hurts.”

“I know it does. But you’re going to have to give me one big push. You’ve got this. I’ve got you. Trust me. You’re safe now. No one is going to hurt you. I won’t let them.”

Natalie nodded and then, hands clenched, started to push.

He and Holly moved to her side, holding her hands, helping her as she started to push. The pain must have been excruciating.

Damon didn’t know how long it lasted, but after what seemed like hours, a baby’s cries filled the air.

Natalie had given birth to a girl.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A couple of nights later, Holly rubbed cream into her hands as she stepped into the bedroom. Natalie and her human baby girl lived with them. Henry was completely besotted with both of them. It was so clear to see.

“You know, I think Henry is in love with Natalie,” Holly said.

Damon closed his laptop. It had been resting on his knee as he typed. He hadn't gotten much work done as he, with Christopher and the pack, had taken care of the bodies. With the hunters gone, they were able to live in some peace.

“I think you're right.”

She turned the bathroom light off and walked toward the bed, moving around to Damon's side.

“Do you want to tell me what that was all about with Henry?” she asked.

“There's not much to tell. You saw it,” he said.

“What exactly did I see? Henry can't turn.”

“No. Over the years and with the amount of abuse he suffered, he has never been able to turn into a wolf. Not since I've known him, anyway. He told me he tried once, but ... his wolf is too badly scarred. He's never going to come out and I'm never going to force him to.”

“From what I saw, that man is strong.”

Damon laughed. He pulled her down so that she straddled his waist. Holly was more than happy to be there, gasping as she felt the hard ridge of his cock pressing against her.

“Do I need to be jealous of this man?” he asked, sinking his fingers into her hair and pulling her down for a kiss.

She released a gasp. “No.”

“But I think I do.” He chuckled.

“I want to understand. He’s your best friend.” She put her hand to his chest. “And I wasn’t lying to you. I love you, Damon.”

He hadn’t said the words right back to her, but she didn’t mind. They were still new. She hoped he at least had feelings for her. The thought of being in a mating like Natalie had been filled her with pain.

“Henry is strong. He has all the abilities of a wolf. He doesn’t turn but that strength never goes away. It has taken him years to master it. To keep it at bay. The hunters awakened it, but he’s not a threat to anyone. I promise.” He pulled her down, kissing her lips. “I spoke to your father today.” He said the words in between kisses.

Holly groaned. “Not the kind of subject I want to be discussing.” Not with how aroused she was. Talking about her dad really put a damper on her mood.

“I don’t want you to pick between me or your family. The pack is your family, which is why I agreed to join your father. We’re going to come to some arrangement that will benefit the both of us.”

“You’re going to become part of the pack?”

“Yes. Holly, I love you. I don’t want to live the rest of my life without you. I want to marry you. Have lots of kids and to be by your side for the rest of our lives. If you’ll have me,” he said.

She cupped his face and slammed her lips down on his.

He sank his fingers into her hair, pulling her close.

“I guess that means a yes?” he asked.

“Yes. A hundred percent yes.” She kissed him hard.

“I could get used to this,” he said.

“Me too.” She stroked his cheek and smiled. “Say it again.”

“I love you, Holly.”

Pressing her lips against his, she chuckled. “And again.”

“I love you. Now tell me.”

“I love you, Damon.”

“And again.”

“I love you.”

He pulled her to the bed, and she spread her thighs as he found her core. She released a gasp as he plunged inside her.

“And I’m going to love you for the rest of our lives.”

EPILOGUE

Five years later

Damon watched his son as he chased Natalie's daughter, Belle. The young girl was the only female within the pack, but she had been accepted by all with a loving embrace. He glanced toward Natalie and Henry. Both had found a love that was so sweet and precious, people would mistake them for actual mates.

As for his son, his eldest, Elijah, was an absolute terror, while his little baby girl, Rose, was a sweetheart. She liked to sit and read, while his son was an adventurer. Even now, he watched as Holly picked Elijah up, stopping him from running into a lamppost. She pressed a kiss to his cheek, which he wiped off and took off running again.

The moment Holly was close, Damon pulled her in close.

"I give up with that boy."

"He's fine."

"I know, but I worry he's going to hurt himself."

He slammed his lips down on hers, and Holly melted against him. "I missed you."

She chuckled. "I was only serving beverages."

"And I needed you by my side. The pack keeps on approaching." He groaned. "I just want to spend some time with my wife." He pressed his face against her neck.

She chuckled. "You're lying. You love that the pack comes to you for advice. You love them."

“And I love you.”

The past five years had been the best of his life so far. He found his mate. Fallen in love, and finally found his place within the pack. Christopher was the best damn alpha he'd ever had the pleasure of meeting.

His life was complete.

“Do you think we can sneak away?” Damon asked.

With two kids constantly keeping them on their toes, it was rare for them to ever have a moment to call their own.

“Natalie already said she's keeping an eye on them. What do you think?”

“I think it's time I took you home and played with you.”

Holly released a gasp, wrapping her arms around his neck. “Then take me home, mate, and have your way with me.”

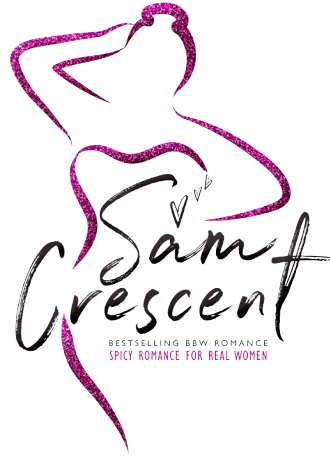
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BONUS SAMPLE CHAPTER

THE BEAST'S NANNY

The Nannies, 7

Sam Crescent

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Sample Chapter

To most, being a nanny for the notorious Caleb Raine would be the dream job. You got to live in a beautiful house, food, no money worries, and when your charge was fast asleep, you had time to yourself. It sounded so amazing.

Grace Page continued to think about how lucky she was compared to most, but the truth was, no matter how amazing this job might be, she'd been kidnapped. She put a hand on her stomach in an attempt to control the sudden need to throw up.

At the sound of James stirring, she glanced behind her at the sofa in the

library where he'd decided to finally fall asleep. He looked so incredibly sweet, and compared to his monster of an uncle, he really was.

Caleb Raine.

Until two weeks ago, she'd never heard of the man.

She'd seen him once as he'd walked into the coffee shop where she'd worked. He'd seemed exhausted, and she'd served him coffee and a sweet cinnamon bun. Then, of course, she'd been nice to him and made sure he got a nice, full breakfast because it looked like he hadn't eaten. He didn't pay. She'd paid for his food out of her salary, not that she could afford it. She'd been doing a good deed, and seeing as she couldn't walk away from those in need, she hadn't given the money a thought. Most of the time, it ended with her short on money and having to work extra shifts or find a second job. Still, helping people made her happy.

When he'd tried to pay, she'd refused, telling him she hoped he had a good day and to take care of himself. The rest of the day had gone by without a single incident. Her life had changed that night, though.

She didn't have a car, and on the walk home, she'd been attacked from behind, shoved into the back of a van. The fear still clung to her. The horrible smell in the back of the van, it had been urine, she just knew it. From there, she'd been thrown into a cell along with ten other women. They had all been in different states of undress. Bruises adorned their flesh and with the stories they'd told her about what happened to them, Grace couldn't recall ever being so scared.

She didn't like to be scared. It was why she always tried to avoid watching horror movies or anything that would make her afraid.

For three days, she'd watch as girls were taken, kicking, screaming,

being beaten, knowing she couldn't do anything to save them. On the third day, she'd recognized Caleb. He'd come into the room, glanced over the women, and without speaking any words, he'd grabbed her arm, pulled out a gun, shot the three men, and told the women to get the fuck out and to keep what happened to them to themselves.

He hadn't let her go.

She'd been shoved into his car, driven to his home, and told if she tried to leave, he'd kill her. If she thought of calling the cops, he'd hurt her. There had been a lot of threats, which she blurred out. He'd then dumped her with James and told her to take care of him. The little boy was three years old and so talkative. Everything she'd learned about her captor had come from him and the few conversations she'd heard from Caleb's men when they didn't realize she was there.

Working her fingers, she pinched herself, hoping to wake up in her apartment. She'd give anything to be back there now and not here. This place, with all of its beauty, held so much sin and fear.

James let out a moan and she turned toward him, bending down and smiling. He opened his eyes and he let out a chuckle. He was such a good boy. Lifting him up in her arms as he wrapped his arms around her neck, she picked him up, hiking him onto her hip as they left the library.

"I'm hungry," he said, still sleepy.

"I know. You're always hungry." It seemed every couple of hours she was feeding him. Caleb had a very extravagant cook, but he refused to do anything for a young boy's palate. James didn't want to eat garlic-drenched scallops, or lamb, or whatever the hell kind of fancy stuff he thought was suitable.

When she'd tried to make James something, the chef had gone mad, throwing knives and threatening to gut her. He'd been so loud, Caleb had come, and then she'd been even more scared as Caleb had taken one of the knives and slammed it right through the chef's hand.

With the chef screaming in agony, he'd turned to her and asked what the hell was going on. She'd stumbled over her words, but the following day, one of the guards had told her she could cook whenever she liked.

Now, when she entered the kitchen, whoever was in there left.

She hadn't meant to cause such a scene, but at least James actually ate now. Until then, he'd been nibbling on what he could stomach.

After dropping him into a chair, she moved toward the fridge. "What would you like, sweetie?" she asked.

"Grace, are you my mommy?"

She paused as she reached in to grab some cheese. James loved anything with cheese. She'd make him some pasta.

Spinning around, she offered him a smile. "No, sweetheart. I'm not. I'm your ... nanny." That was what you called a person who took care of kids. That or a babysitter. A nanny made this feel less like a kidnapping. Now she was just going plain crazy. Nothing could ever make her feel better about being taken against her will.

At night, she lived in fear of those men coming back, which was so stupid because Caleb had killed them all. He was a monster and what was more, even monsters feared him.

She ran her fingers over James's head and grabbed a pan. Once she'd filled it with water, she placed it on the stove and found the pasta she knew he'd love. He liked to slurp up anything.

Finding the salt, she seasoned the water and got the pasta in to cook as she poured some milk into another pan.

James was more than happy to play with the spoon she'd given him. He wasn't such a bad child, not really. He was content in his own world, and she was happy with him. Her life hadn't been filled with pain.

The one time she tried to leave, the guard had escorted her back to her bedroom, which was a beautiful room. Her life was perfect. Only, she'd been stolen, and this wasn't her life.

After grating up the cheese, she added it to the milk, with a little black pepper. She had a taste, finding something missing. She returned to the fridge and took out some cream cheese. Once she'd added in a couple of tablespoons, she gave it a stir and another taste, and drained the pasta. Stirring the cheese sauce into the pasta, she served them both up and sat next to James at the counter. They started to eat.

Every now and then, James would make a noise. The sound of contentment made her smile. It meant she'd done good.

Twirling her fork in the spaghetti, she slurped it up. She was so focused on eating, she didn't hear *him* enter until James alerted her with a squeal.

She tensed up. Couldn't help it. In a matter of hours, this man had turned her perfectly organized world into chaos. She'd seen him kill and that alone scared the crap out of her.

Caleb nodded at James. He moved forward, rustled his head, and then snapped an instruction. One of his guards came into the room.

"I want you to take James for bath time while I speak with Miss Page," he said.

She looked toward the guard then at Caleb. “I don’t mind taking him for a bath.” The very last thing she wanted was to be alone with this ... horrible person.

He was a monster.

“You’re not going anywhere,” he said. He nodded at the man, and then just like that, the small semblance of peace she’d been able to find shattered. Her hunger vanished. She put her fork down and looked toward the exits.

Being alone with this man was never good.

Gritting her teeth, she clasped her hands together, hoping she had the strength for whatever was going to come.

Fear traveled up her spine, threatening to make her vomit.

Caleb put his hand down on the counter and started to drum his fingers as he stared at her. She licked her lips, keeping her gaze averted.

For two weeks, this man had changed her life and she had yet to decide if it was for the better.

He kidnapped you. None of this is ever going to be okay.

Whatever happened, she needed to keep her wits about herself.

Caleb stared at the woman who’d turned his life upside down.

She was scared. It didn’t take a genius to figure that one out. He didn’t blame her either.

From the moment she’d paid for him to be fed that awful breakfast and refused his money, he’d needed to have her. In his world, he was used to having women at his beck and call.

Grace Page didn’t come from his world. From the moment he left her

until he picked her up, he'd learned everything there was to know about her life. Twenty-one years old, parents died in a car crash when she was eighteen. A good student and a kind soul. She volunteered at the animal shelter on her days off. Took extra work to help pay for her kind heart.

There wasn't a bad bone in this woman's body. She was kind through and through.

He didn't think it was possible to find someone like her, but yet, here she sat. Now, he didn't know what the fuck to do with her. He'd tainted her sweet little heart with enough darkness, but he couldn't bring himself to let her go. The past two weeks, he'd tried to do just that. To pass her off to someone else, but each time he picked up his cell phone, the thought of anyone else touching her filled him with a violent rage. No one deserved her, least of all him.

Now he had a woman he wanted, simple as that.

The only woman who'd taken the time to care about him, not herself.

What the fuck did he do with that?

Running a hand down his face, he stared at her. She shook from fear, and it pissed him off. He hadn't raised a hand to her, but she'd seen so much.

"You don't have to be afraid."

She looked up, a frown on her face.

He took a seat. "Eat."

"I'm not hungry."

"I'm not going to hurt you."

She snorted and then covered her mouth. "I watched you kill people."

He sighed. "They had it coming."

“What about the police?”

This time, *he* snorted. “Believe me, they’re useless in situations like this.”

She shook her head. “Let me go.” Her voice was so soft. He could listen to her all day.

“No.”

Her shoulders slumped.

“Do you not like looking after James?” he asked.

“He’s a great kid, but I’ve got a job and a life. What ... what you’re doing is wrong and it’s not fair.”

Fair.

“Life’s not fair, sweetheart,” he said.

She pressed her hands flat on the kitchen counter and shook her head. “I don’t get this. I’ve done nothing to you. Why are you being so mean?”

He raised a brow. “You think this is me being mean?” He burst out laughing, slamming his hand to the counter. “You don’t want to see me get mean. I saved your ass.”

“Why? How?”

“Why and how what?” He kind of expected gratitude. Sure, he’d been the one to hire her, but once they discovered her virginity, they’d tried to blackmail him for more money, and that pissed him off.

“Why did they take me?”

He stayed silent.

“It’s because of you, isn’t it? They took me because of you.”

Again, he didn't say a word.

"I don't know you." She got to her feet, pushing the chair back.

He'd been so pissed off when his chef, Bernaldo, had threatened her. Walking in and seeing her cowering had filled him with rage. Bernaldo was lucky to leave with his life and just a stab wound in the hand. He'd been tempted to cause a lot more damage. Hearing people scream in pain didn't affect him. It was why Grace was so fascinating.

She was the first woman to ever get under his skin.

"I suggest you sit down!"

"No. I want to go back to my life. You can't kidnap me."

He stood up, towering over her. She shrank back. He refused to repeat himself. She was truly safe with him, but if she kept on testing him, he'd have to at least spank her ass. Sure, he'd fucked up big time, but in his world, all he had to do was snap his fingers to get what he wanted, and Grace was at the top of the list.

"I suggest you sit down before I lose my temper."

"You're ... horrible! You can't do this. I want my life back. What do I have to do to get my life back?"

Ah, there it was.

He didn't smile on his face, but inside, he couldn't help it.

Everyone had a price. Grace had given him the key to how to get her.

He grabbed her arm, none too gently, and began to walk her toward his office. When she started to fight him, he turned, lifted her up over his shoulder, and slapped her ass for good measure, walking her all the way to his office. Guards stepped out of his way, and as he dumped her on the edge

of his desk, he didn't give her any space, invading hers.

With the way he'd put her, her legs were spread with him pressed against her core. He wanted to do a whole lot more to her, but for now, playing with her sounded like a lot of fun.

"What the hell are you doing?" she asked. She wriggled, and he saw the moment she became aware of his obvious erection pressing against her pussy. She paused, eyes wide, and he smiled at her.

"I'm a businessman, Grace. I'm not a complete monster, I can negotiate." A total lie. Everyone feared him. It was how he'd built up his reputation around fear.

"What?"

"You want your freedom, and there's something I want from you," he said.

She frowned. "I have no idea what you could want from me."

He pressed his cock against her. "I know you're a virgin, sweet Grace."

"How? What? No!" She tried to pull away, but he wouldn't let her. He didn't like the tension within her body, so he stepped back. The door to his office had already been shut, and there would be no escape.

"I ... I've done nothing wrong. I'm a good person. Just let me go. I promise I won't tell anyone. I just want to go home."

She wanted to go home and he couldn't allow that to happen.

"You know, it's good to be kind, but when you show that kindness to someone who is only used to pain and misery, well, it makes people aware of you, Grace."

"You did all of this, didn't you?" she asked.

Rather than answer, he went to his drinks table, pouring them both a shot of whiskey. Picking up her glass, he moved toward her. “Have a drink?”

“I don’t drink.”

He raised a brow.

“I don’t.”

“Then humor me. This is going to help you to relax.”

She took the shot glass from him, downed the shot, and then coughed, pressing a hand to her chest.

“There, that wasn’t so bad, was it?” he asked.

“I want to leave.”

“Not happening. You see, Grace, I want to fuck you, and that is going to be your price.”

“You’re crazy. I would never do something like that.”

“Not even for your freedom?”

She opened her mouth, closed it, and he saw her trying to decide. Her face an open book, so easy to read.

“I just have to ... sleep with you?” she asked.

“No. You have to fuck me, Grace, and before you start wondering, this wouldn’t be a one-time deal.”

“But you just said—”

He lifted a finger and shook it left to right. “No, I didn’t say fucking me once would be enough. For one year, you’ll belong to me, no questions asked.”

“A year? You’ve got to be crazy. I’ve got my job. My apartment.”

“All of them are gone.”

“What!” She shook her head. “No, that’s not possible. No. I ... no.”

“Yes, yes, and yes. I can do and have whatever I want, Grace. No price is too high.”

“Why would I even agree to this? You’ve taken everything.”

“Not yet, but how about this? Give me everything I ask for, and in return, I’ll give you your life back. You can go right back to work, your apartment, and a small fortune. All you have to do is keep everything you’ve seen to yourself. The moment you think of telling a single soul, I’ll kill everyone and everything you love, making you watch before I take your life.”

He put his glass down. “And to help you decide, think of this.” To finish his pitch, he sank his fingers into her hair, tilted her head back, and claimed her lips in a kiss he’d been craving since the moment he’d seen her.

He’d been fucking exhausted after spending over twenty-four hours awake, handling some delicate business, mainly his sister’s death. James hadn’t been with him for long, but one look at Grace, and he’d fucking wanted her, craved her, and now, he wasn’t going to let her go until he had his fill.

End of sample chapter

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