



RIVAL LOVE

CHRISTINE DEPETRILLO

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Moon Valley Packs

Christine DePetrillo

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Dedication

To my pack ...

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Chapter One

Selena

I walked into the house to the sounds of someone getting pleased. Pleasured well. Very well. A gaspy sigh chased a deep grunt then both were followed by a stream of obscenities, punctuated by quick panting.

“Oh, God ... I ...” Moans mixed with a loud knocking sound, and I giggled.

“Vince, what in the hell are you watching, babe?”

I rounded the wall dividing the kitchen and the living room and skidded to a halt at the scene that assaulted me.

Two things hit me instantly.

One: my husband, Vince, was buried to the hilt in some blond chick he had pressed against the bookcases in our living room.

Two: that blond chick was my twin sister.

“Vera? What the fuck?” I stormed into the living room as the two of them jumped apart.

Vince was bare-chested with his jeans and boxers around his thighs. He struggled to yank them up, but it was far too late. I’d never be able to erase the image of my husband, my fated mate, humping my goddamn sister.

Especially when Vera’s dress was still hiked up around her waist, and she sent me a smug grin that I’d love to shake loose from her face with a baseball bat.

“Home already?” Vera arched an eyebrow at me. “We weren’t quite expecting you yet.”

“Clearly.” I paced the length of the couch. Back and forth, back and forth, trying to comprehend how Vince and Vera could do this to me. I’d been happy with Vince. So happy. We’d been together for five years now. Ever since Lunai, the Moon Goddess, had deemed us mates. My family’s pack, the Romeros, were dying out, a stream of infertiles in the

bloodline halting the creation of new werewolves. The ones who were fertile, like my mother, rarely survived giving birth to their firstborns, never mind getting pregnant a second time. Twins were even rarer. Fraternal twins like Vera and I were almost unheard of among the wolves.

But here we were. Two fertile females born into the pack with the potential to carry on the Romero bloodline. Vince's pack, the Morellis, was known for its fruitful genetic makeup. They saw no risk in taking me on as their Alpha's mate because surely Vince could get the job done.

Fun fact: To date, the job had not been done.

Not that we hadn't tried. Oh, how we'd tried. In every single room of this house. On every single surface available. Vince had an insatiable appetite for sex, which normally I loved.

Tonight? Not so much.

And you know what? We had *not* tried up against the bookcases. He apparently reserved that spot for having affairs.

"I thought we had something special here, something fated." I gestured between myself and Vince, doing my best to ignore Vera as she righted her dress and finger-combed her hair.

"We did." Vince cringed and shook his head. "We *do*, baby. You know I love you." He gestured toward Vera. "This was a mistake."

"Speak for yourself," Vera said. "That was everything I hoped it would be and more."

This was the point where I could have probably forgiven Vince and blamed the affair entirely on my sister. Unfortunately, instead of telling my sister to get out, instead of falling to his knees and begging for my forgiveness, instead of making me believe our marriage meant everything to him, Vince grinned at Vera over her compliment.

Fucking *grinned*.

A red haze instantly filled my vision, a key signal that I was about to lose my ever-loving shit in ten seconds. My sister and I were Omegas, second-tier werewolves, not in the running to ever lead a pack and pretty much zero threat to anyone.

But there was something about finding one's husband with one's twin sister that flicked a switch in one's soul. My claws extended from my fingertips at the same time my canines lengthened from my gums. The familiar body tingle vibrated through me as all my senses focused on the two traitors in front of me.

"Selena, cut the shit." Vince's Alpha 'tude was turned up to eleven, but I wasn't having any of that crap. Not tonight.

"I've given you five solid years of loyalty," I said through clenched teeth, my voice getting lower and gravelly. "I thought we were in this marriage together. I believed we were *mates*." I blinked back tears. "But our bond apparently meant little to you."

"What am I supposed to do?" Vince threw his hands out to his sides. "You're not getting pregnant. As the Alpha of the Morelli pack, I have to produce heirs, Selena. You know this."

"And you're blaming me?" My breathing and heart rate had changed to the faster pace of my werewolf form, but I was still human enough to understand Vince's insinuation. "We've already established that the problem is most likely *not* me, Vince."

"You're suggesting an Alpha is shooting blanks?" Vera let out a laugh. "The very definition of Alpha means the ability and the drive to procreate." She gave Vince a heated once-over that made me crave that baseball bat again. "And *this* Alpha certainly has the skills." She slid her hand across Vince's bare back and drew in a deep breath, her nose mere inches from his neck. "He smells ready to make babies to me."

"So you thought you'd volunteer to help him out?" My clawed hands fisted and released, fisted and released. In another few moments, I'd shift completely, which was ridiculous. All Vince had to do was shift and I'd be bowing

down before him because I'd have no other choice. Being an Omega wolf meant submission. I couldn't physically fight him. I'd never win.

“Hey, it's in the best interest of both the Romero and the Morelli packs to make babies.” Vera's hand still rested on *my* husband's back. “Does it really matter if they come from your womb or mine?”

Vince shot me a she's-got-a-point look that made my insides go supernova.

“I'm done with both of you,” I managed to growl before I shifted into my wolf form and burst through the sliding glass door onto the patio in our backyard.

I had no idea where I'd go, I only knew I had to leave.

Shaking off shards of glass and managing to ignore Vince, who was demanding I return to him, I jumped the fence and bolted into the woods. A light rain fell, dampening my black fur and chilling me slightly. Perhaps it wasn't the rain that chilled me though. Maybe it was something that hit me deeper, under the skin, beyond my organs. Something that blew out the fire in my spirit. My anger was red hot, but my hopes and dreams for a future with Vince and the Morelli pack were ground to a fine powder and scattered to the four winds. I couldn't rely on my mate or my sister. They'd both betrayed me in a way that had left scars. Ones that would never heal.

The worst part, however, was that I was now an Omega without the protection of a pack, without an Alpha. I was smaller than other wolves and completely alone.

How long would I last?

Chapter Two

Archer

My hands were bound with what felt like barbed wire around my wrists. Every movement, no matter how slight, brought burning pain. Normally, I wouldn't be affected. As a werewolf, flesh wounds such as these would heal before they ever caused any ache. My bindings, however, were pure silver, and the longer they encircled my wrists, the more damage they did. I also couldn't shift into werewolf form and go all animal on restraints made of silver. Whoever had captured me knew a thing or two about werewolves, and that by itself was concerning. It meant either another pack had me or worse, some human had gotten wind of our existence and thought it'd be fun to play zookeeper. Neither scenario was ideal.

To make matters suck shit even more, I wasn't the only one captive here. My father, Pearce Sinclaire, Alpha of the Sinclaire pack, was chained beside me.

And he hadn't moved in at least twenty minutes.

"Dad." I nudged him for the nine billionth time, but I didn't get a response. Not a grunt or a moan. Nothing. He was beat up worse than I was because our attackers had known he was the Alpha. It wasn't hard to determine my father was our pack's leader. At sixty years old, he was still a force to be reckoned with. He had a . . . presence. One that undeniably marked him as the wolf in charge.

At least that was how he'd looked *before* our asses had landed here. Now, blood matted his silver hair and beard. His entire face had a droopy quality to it, and with his eyes closed, I couldn't see his intense, steel-blue gaze—a gaze that usually had even the most formidable of men and wolves shaking in their boots.

At this moment, Pearce Sinclaire looked . . . old.

"Dad." I elbowed him again at the expense of jostling my bound hands, causing those silver bindings to dig in deeper. "Fuck."

“Yes, you are. Fucked, that is.”

I turned my head to the right toward the voice. “I gathered that. You going to show yourself or hide in the shadows like a coward?”

“Coward?” A low laugh sounded from a dim corner of the cement room I’d been trapped in for the Goddess only knows how long now. “We managed to orchestrate the abduction of the Sinclaire Alpha and his only heir. That takes brass balls, buddy.”

“Well, then, I should think you’d want to show your face and get the recognition you deserve for accomplishing such a feat.” I wanted to see who I was eventually going to have to kill if I got free.

When I got free.

“We’d rather negotiate from a position of anonymity for now.” The voice didn’t sound familiar, but it was a little muffled. I couldn’t tell if that was intentional or if the silver trying to poison me was affecting my hearing.

“Negotiate? And what are we negotiating?” If playing this douche’s game allowed me to get my father some help, I’d play. His death would hit the Sinclaire pack like a sword blade to the chest. He had to live.

Otherwise I’d be in charge.

“Your territory,” the voice said. “We want it.” His words had been few and simple, but they gut-punched me.

“Excuse me?” These bindings really were doing a number on my body. I had to be tripping on searing werewolf flesh fumes or something.

“The Sinclaire pack has all the best parts of Moon Valley, Vermont. You’ve got Rodgers Lake, acres and acres of lush woods, several mountains, and the most prosperous business district in this small town. Of course, you and Pops over here don’t know how to profit from all those riches, but we do.”

My mind flipped through all the local packs in or near Moon Valley. The Romeros weren’t a threat. They were

mostly Omegas with poor leadership. No way they had anyone among them who could pull off capturing one Sinclair wolf, never mind two of us.

Unless they hired someone else to kidnap us.

I put that thought on the back burner as I ran through the other packs. The Fergusons were too busy partying all the time to make a bold move like this. Ninety percent of that pack was continuously drunk, and the remaining ten percent had the IQ of an ice cube. If they'd managed to get the jump on Dad and me, I'd be turning in my werewolf card before dying of humiliation.

The Morellis usually had their snouts buried under the hood of a car at their pack's body shop over on Hillcrest Street. They were a powerful pack, equal in size and strength to the Sinclaires. They could be hotheads and often thought with their dicks because pheromones ran high in that bunch. Their Alpha was young, not even thirty if I remembered correctly. He was mated already though. Some pretty Omega from the Romero pack he'd claimed to have rescued.

Such a white knight. But was he also a dark knight, seeking to steal my pack's lands?

The only other pack in the area was the Leona pack. They were an average pack and had never struck me as outwardly hostile, but anything was possible as indicated by the fact that my father and I had been caught unaware.

Truthfully, I assumed any of those packs could be behind our abduction. The first rule of werewolving was to only trust your own pack. Everyone else was suspect.

"We're not giving you our land." My father and I might not make it out alive, but our pack would never hand over our territory. Not without one hell of a fight.

"I thought you might say that," the voice said. "So we are prepared to sacrifice you two. That will leave the Sinclair pack without an Alpha. A pack without an Alpha is like a house without a foundation. One powerful storm and the whole thing tumbles."

He was right of course. Taking out the Alpha of a pack could fatally wound that pack. Taking out the Alpha and leaving it without an heir to assume leadership could destroy the Sinclaires. I had to bet on enough of them having clear heads and taking control. Many of the males in our pack had the qualities of an Alpha. Some of the women did too. One of them would step up.

Right?

“Maybe if you’d approached my father in a more dignified manner,” I said, “he would have been inclined to listen to your desires.” I gestured to my restraints with my chin then at my father who still hadn’t stirred. “Treating us like this doesn’t win you any fans or favors.”

“We don’t want fans or favors,” the voice said. “We want compliance.”

“I guess today isn’t your lucky day then, asshole.”

“Guess we’ve got a green light on the sacrifice phase of our plans then.”

Before those words finished processing in my ears and brain, three gunshots blasted into the otherwise quiet of the room. My father’s head sagged forward next to me. In the next instant, the metallic tang of blood reached my nose. A heartbeat later and my gaze tracked a trio of red streams of blood flowing down my father’s chest.

His chest that no longer rose and fell with the rhythm of breathing.

“Shoot him next?” another male voice said from somewhere in the room that now spun before my eyes.

I barely saw the barrel of a gun pointed at me. Goddess, if I could shift right now, I’d tear these bastards to shreds. As a part of our pack, I felt deep within my core that our Alpha, my father and a fucking wonderful one at that, was dead. Something rippled through me, and I knew the Alpha responsibilities had transferred to me.

Too bad they’d also die with me.

Chapter Three

Selena

Rage was not something I felt often, but it coursed through my wolf body now as I pictured Vince and Vera half-naked and humping. The vision was on a constant loop through my brain as I ran through the woods, my paws clawing at damp earth. The drizzle had changed to a downpour now, fat raindrops pelting my fur and soaking me.

Still, I kept running. Not having a destination was a new thing for me. I was the sort of person who always had a direction, a purpose. My future had been neatly planned.

Be happily married to my fated mate.

Produce beautiful heirs that benefitted both the Romero and Morelli packs.

Work at my museum guide job where I enjoyed teaching others about history.

Live my longer-than-normal werewolf life, growing old surrounded by my birth pack and my mated pack.

Not once had I considered taking the path of the lone wolf.

I slowed my pace, letting rainwater roll into my eyes and hoping it would wash away the last hour of my life. The last hour that had changed everything.

I sank to the wet ground, autumn leaves cushioning my belly. My tears mixed with the rain, and I let out a guttural, soul-weary howl. A few crows flew from their treetop perches at the sound of my misery, cawing their irritation at my disturbance. Coyotes answered my lament, but they had no words of comfort either.

Life sucks, they seemed to say.

Yeah, it did.

Mates sucked. Marriage sucked. Twin sisters sucked. Everything sucked.

Somewhere during my breakdown, I fell asleep in the leaves. When I awoke, the sky was dark but clear, the full moon casting silvery light on everything around me. A chilly night breeze whistled through the trees, and soaked as I was, I shivered. I needed to find a place to get dry and figure out some shit.

I rose to all fours and bounded through the woods until I reached a residential section of Moon Valley. After scoping out a few backyards, I lucked out with finding one where the homeowners had left some clothes in their unlocked all-season room. With a glance around and not seeing anyone, I shifted back to human. My long black hair was drenched so I quickly braided it then shrugged into a pair of jeans, a T-shirt, and a soft flannel shirt that was the hug I needed right then. Two backyards from that one, I located a pair of sneakers that I slipped on. They were a little big, but they were better than going barefoot on the wet ground.

I felt a little better now that I was dressed, but with that goal accomplished, now what? Should I go back home and kick Vince out of the house? That was laughable. I couldn't kick anyone out of anywhere, let alone the Alpha. Sometimes—okay, *most* of the time—being an Omega made me want to scream. Not having any power among other wolves made being a werewolf less cool. At least as the Alpha's wife, I'd earned some respect.

That respect was now out the window. I couldn't show my face around those wolves again. Not with them knowing I'd rejected the mating bond because my husband and sister hooked up. First of all, no one ever rejected the mating bond because Lunai didn't make mistakes. The Moon Goddess had been pairing wolves since our kind took its first breath. She never got it wrong.

Except this time she had.

I mentally flipped through all the stories my family had told of werewolf history, and I couldn't recall one in which fated mates weren't forever.

“Leave it to me,” I mumbled in the dark as I leaned against a telephone pole and contemplated where to go. Though technically, this wasn’t my fault. I wasn’t the one who had engaged in an affair. I’d simply come home from work to find my life as the Alpha’s wife was over.

And when something ended, something else could begin.

Embroider that on a pillow.

But what did I want to begin? I hadn’t thought beyond being married to Vince, having babies, and working at the museum. I still wanted to work at the museum. I loved leading people on tours and talking to them about all the fabulous pieces we had on display there. I enjoyed the challenge of getting even the most disinterested adolescent to show some spark of curiosity about something they’d seen on their trip to the museum. Conversations with guests filled my well, and I’d never give that up.

Plus, I now needed the money from that job more than ever to support myself.

Pushing off the telephone pole, I jogged down the street toward the museum. I had some snacks stashed in my office, and after running like I had, my body definitely needed a refuel. When I arrived, the nighttime security guard raised an eyebrow at me, but he opened the main entrance door.

“Aren’t you a bit early for your shift, Selena?” He checked his wristwatch. “It’s only two o’clock in the morning.”

“Stupidest thing,” I said. “I think I left my teapot on in my office. I woke up in a sweat about it, you know? I gotta check, Milton.”

Milton let out a chuckle. “I’ve been there.” He stepped aside and let me pass into the foyer. “How much you want to bet it’s not even on?”

“I dragged my ass here,” I said. “It’d better be on.”

Another laugh rumbled out of Milton as he locked the main door again.

I eyed his keys. “Hey, I didn’t bring my keys because I threw on clothes and ran over here. Can you let me into my office?”

“Sure.”

I followed Milton upstairs to the offices, pausing at my door while he found the right key. When he unlocked the door for me and threw it open with a flourish, I said, “You know what, Milton? I might get a few things done while I’m here and wide awake now. Do you mind?”

“Not at all.” He gave me a warm smile. “But you have to tell me one thing first?”

I froze on my route to my desk and slowly turned around. Milton was an ordinary human, but was I giving off some vibe that I’d been made a fool of by my mate? Something universally recognized by all species on the planet?

“What one thing do you need to know?”

He gestured to my teapot. “Is it on?”

“Oh.” My heartbeat settled. Barely. I hated lying. Apparently that was another thing Omega wolves weren’t good at.

Alphas, however, were skilled liars. I’d learned that tonight.

I went over to the teapot and slapped a hand to my forehead. “It’s not on.” I held up the cord which was not plugged in.

“Told ya.” Milton offered me a sympathetic smile though. “Sorry you came all the way over here. Next time, give me a call. I would have checked for you.”

“You’re a sweetheart, Milton.” I laid a hand on his shoulder then gently guided him to my door. “Next time, I will call instead.”

“Here’s hoping you get some work done while the museum is all quiet.” He stepped into the hallway. “At least then, your trip won’t be wasted.”

I bid him farewell then locked myself in my office. Attacking my snacks, I actually did work on a few things. It settled my mind a bit to complete some manageable tasks. Of course, that meant I was avoiding the unmanageable task of organizing a completely new life without my mate and either of my packs. I'd lost my sister too. We'd been tight as children. Ever since my father had picked me to marry Vince, however, Vera had been acting wild. She was a bartender at Pine Mill Tavern, and over the last few years, she'd basically brought a different customer home every night. Guy, girl, it didn't matter as long as they were willing.

At first I'd seen it as her just being free. She hadn't been chosen to make sure the Romero bloodline continued. She was without responsibilities. Now I realized, however, she was trying to fuck a worthless feeling away.

Could I fuck a betrayed feeling away?

Of course if I could, I'd need to find someone to fuck because my usual partner for that activity was a douchebag cheater.

I spent two hours in my office, but when Milton came to check on me, I figured I'd better move along. To where, I had no idea.

Back on the streets of Moon Valley, I ambled along, moonlight and streetlight guiding me to Rodgers Lake. Typically, Romeros and Morellis didn't make a habit of visiting this part of our small town. The area was technically Sinclair pack territory. The Sinclaires were the largest and most powerful pack in Vermont. In all of New England. Vince had griped about them on more than one occasion, saying how he didn't think it was fair for them to have all the advantages. I usually tuned him out when he got all werewolf politics on me. Omegas didn't worry about shit like that. We just worried about not getting our asses kicked.

Still, the pull to the lake was so strong that I found myself standing on its shore before I was consciously aware of having walked there. The water's surface was motionless, like a black mirror, shimmering where the moonlight reflected off it.

Wait. Something was moving out there. Something shrouded in colors like the aurora borealis but growing whiter as it drew nearer.

I stood rooted to my spot on the shore, not able to move if I tried. I hadn't believed this night could get any worse, but apparently, I'd been wrong. Whatever this was coming at me would probably zap me out of existence.

Just as well, I supposed.

“Child, all is not lost.”

I recognized the voice instantly and dropped to my knees. “My Goddess.”

Lunai hovered in front of me, her white robes flowing around her and her red hair streaming about her flawless face. This was only the second time I'd seen her, the first being when she'd approved the mating of Vince and me. Most wolves only saw the Moon Goddess once in their lives because the mating bond was forever.

“Rise, child, and let me speak to you.” Her voice was melodic and . . . soothing. Listening to it was the best I'd felt all night. “I have an offer for you.”

Chapter Four

Archer

I was not accustomed to feeling this useless. Normally, my father and I handled all threats to the Sinclaire pack with speed, efficiency, and force if necessary. Although I was the new Alpha with my father's passing, my current situation was still dire. More strength filled my body though, and the silver bindings hurt less around my wrists.

Or perhaps I'd gotten used to the pain.

"One Alpha down," the voice in the shadows said. "One to go. Unless you wish to change your mind and surrender Sinclaire territory to us."

"I don't make deals with people who won't reveal their identities," I growled. "Besides, you've given me no reason to care what happens next. You killed the person who meant the most to me." I angled my head toward my father's lifeless body beside me. It hurt so much that this was the way my father, my Alpha, had met his end. Bound like a criminal. Shot in an unfair fight. Cut down when he had so many more years to lead our pack. Even if I escaped this situation, how would I ever live up to my father's legacy as Alpha?

"I know how you Sinclaires are," the voice said. "You care about every member of your pack. I know you don't want to leave them without an Alpha to lead them."

"Someone else will step forward." I ran through the potentials in my mind. I had three male cousins, none of which had my father's cool head in conflict, but maybe if the pack was a little more feral, a rival pack wouldn't have been able to abduct my father and me.

Whoever had us now had been crafty. I had to give them credit for that. From what I could piece together, someone must have tainted the whiskey at Lunar Falls Pub. My father and I had met up for a quick drink to celebrate me being made lieutenant at the Moon Valley Fire Department. I absolutely loved firefighting, and my werewolf DNA gave me some

advantages. I could take bigger risks than the human firefighters and that led to more lives saved. My captain was thrilled with my performance, and best of all, my father had been so proud.

“To one hell of a son.” He’d smiled and raised his glass to me at the bar.

“To one kickass role model.” I’d clinked my glass to his, and we’d both tossed the whiskey back. Something had tasted a little off, and both my father and I took sniffs at our empty glasses. It was too late by then though. Whatever had been in the whiskey was already inside us.

Thirty minutes later we left the pub, neither of us feeling quite right. My eyesight was blurry and my head buzzed, two symptoms of drinking I never felt because it took a lot to get a werewolf drunk.

As we’d walked toward my father’s truck, we were ambushed, thrown into a van, and driven off to wherever the fuck we were now.

“And if you think, for one moment, that whoever assumes the Alpha role will give you a different answer than my father and I have given you about turning over our territory,” I said, “you’re a Grade A dumbass.”

A whip cracked behind me, and suddenly pain exploded across my back. I was only wearing a Moon Valley Fire Department T-shirt, and the sting of the hit reverberated through my already weakened body. Another crack, and I let out a howl, my body warring with itself to shift and not being able to. Under normal circumstances, a physical assault like this would trigger a shift, and I’d deal with the threat as a werewolf. That would protect me and make mincemeat out of my attacker.

The silver at my wrists, however, forced me to stay human and take the whip hits, pulling sounds from me I’d never made.

“Silver in the whip too,” the voice said. “I ran into a great Buy One, Get One sale. Buy the silver bindings, get the silver

whip free. Excellent deal.” A raspy chuckle sounded. “I’m going to guess if those tattoos on your arms continue onto your back, they ain’t gonna look right after a whipping with silver.”

I roared through clenched teeth, a failed attempt to keep the pain from affecting me, but *fuck*, it hurt.

And, yeah, I did have tattoos on my back that were going to be destroyed.

“You have the power to make it stop, Alpha,” the voice taunted. “All you have to do is agree to our terms. Quit now and those tattoos might be salvageable.”

“Fuck. You.” Why didn’t he just kill me? Did he need me alive for some reason?

A rapid fire series of whip strikes rained down on my back, shredding my T-shirt and my flesh. Still chained, I hunched on all fours, my kneecaps and hands grinding into the hard, cement floor below me. In one respect, I was glad my father was dead. I wouldn’t want him to see me cower like this. To see me bleed like this. To see me disgrace the Sinclair name like this.

Blood dripped from my back along my sides. It soaked what remained of my MVFD shirt and stained the cement around me. The sharp, metallic tang of my own blood made my stomach heave, but I refused to puke. Not in front of this asshole. No fucking way.

“Change your mind yet?” the voice asked.

“Not even a little,” I bit out, bracing for the next whip hit.

But it didn’t come. A woman’s voice echoed in the room instead.

“That’s enough, Geo.” Her voice stirred something in my chest.

And my pants.

“What are you doing here?” the male who had been in charge asked.

“The Alpha sent me,” she said, authority in her tone. “There’s been a change in plans. You are to go to him now. All of you.”

How many douchebags were here anyway? It would have taken at least a few guys to get my father and me here.

“Yes, at once.” Reverence now laced the male’s words. “What shall we do with them?”

“Leave them to me.”

A shuffling of feet sounded, and thank fuck the whipping stopped. I crumpled to my stomach, letting the cement cool my sweaty cheek. I could hardly keep my eyes open, but I got glimpses of sneakers heading toward me. With each step those sneakers took, the more the stirring in my chest ... stirred. I was surprised I could feel anything besides the inferno happening on my back, but by the time long, black hair and a gorgeous face came into my field of view, I only felt one thing.

Mine.

But that couldn’t be because ...

“Aren’t you—?”

“Selena, Vince Morelli’s wife,” the woman interrupted. “I am.” She frowned. “Or I was. Until a few hours ago when I caught his dick shoved up into my twin sister’s pussy.”

I recoiled as if she’d slapped me. “You rejected your mate bond to him?”

“Hell, yeah. I might be physically weaker as an Omega wolf, but no one treats me as if I’m second best.” Her words came out firm, but the slight slump of her shoulders told me maybe she didn’t exactly believe she was worth first place.

She walked away for a moment, and I instantly wanted her back in my vicinity. Why was that? She was my rival’s wife, for shit’s sake. Her affiliation with the Morelli pack should have made her undesirable to me.

But the exact opposite was happening.

Furthermore, I was in no condition for anything my dick was currently planning. My body was battered, silver poisoned my bloodstream, and I'd just lost my father.

And yet ...

Selena's scent filled my nose. I could hear her steady heartbeat in my ears. It was a comforting sound, one that released the tension in most of my body.

Except for one spot.

When she returned, a set of keys jingled in her hands. She fit a key into the bindings on my wrists and made a move to touch them.

"Don't." I jerked my hands away from her. "They're silver. They'll burn you." Instead, I shook off the now unlocked restraints, letting them clank to the floor between us.

"That looks terrible." She surveyed the bloody gouges encircling my wrists then peeked at my back and winced. "But not as terrible as your back. Good Goddess, what is wrong with Vince?"

"We don't have time for that conversation," I said. "We need to get out of here."

"We do. Geo and the others thought I was still the Alpha's wife so they listened to me, but once they get to Vince, they'll know the truth."

The Morelli pack's Alpha couldn't even torture me himself. He'd sent a yes-man of his to do it instead. I might have been offended, but then Selena was helping me to my feet, and all my thoughts and senses tuned to her. She was petite, and to lean on her felt weird, as if I might break her or something, but she didn't falter. Her arm came around my waist as she fit herself under my left arm. She didn't take a step until I was steady on my feet, which took a couple of moments of us standing in the dimness of the room.

She gestured to my dad, crumpled on the ground. "That's your father, isn't it?"

I nodded. "You know who we are?"

“Yes, Archer Sinclair, I know who you are.” A small smile formed on her full lips that tempted me like none other had before. “I also know that you are Alpha of your pack now.”

I nodded again, too choked up to speak.

Her small hand rubbed a circle on my chest over my heart. The touch soothed my entire body somehow. Like from the inside out.

“It looks as if Vince Morelli has committed grave crimes against both of us, Archer,” Selena said. “What do you say we plan a little payback?”

I met her beautiful brown eyes as she gazed up at me. “I say count me in.”

Chapter Five

Selena

Sinclair wolves were heavy. After I'd helped Archer out of the spare garage Vince used for truck rebuilds—and torturing his rivals apparently—I went back inside to drag Pearce Sinclair out as well. Archer was in no shape to help me with his injuries, so I'd used one of Vince's mechanic's creepers to roll Pearce out of the garage. It was by no means an honorable way to transport the body of a pack Alpha, but desperate times, you know?

“I'm assuming you and your father don't have phones on you, right?” I asked as we stood in the alley between Vince's garage and the storage facility next door.

Archer absently ran his hands over the front and back pockets of his jeans. Jeans that covered long, muscular legs. Now that he was standing upright at what had to be a six-foot-three height and I wasn't wedged under his arm in support, I got a better look at Archer Sinclair. Of course I'd seen him before, but never at close proximity and not for any substantial length of time. All I really knew about him was that he was an important member of a rival pack. Not someone for me to mix company with.

Until today.

I still didn't know a ton about him, but what I *felt* in his presence told me all I needed to know.

Mine.

It was insane. I'd only just rejected my former mate mere hours ago, and now a bond was forming with a new one?

And with rival pack Alpha *Archer Sinclair*?

Absolute madness, but Lunai had granted me the opportunity to become another Alpha's mate. She'd seen what Vince and Vera had done, had not approved, and had taken pity on me as the victim in this shitty situation.

“You don’t make mistakes,” I’d pointed out to the Moon Goddess.

“And I haven’t yet,” she’d said. “Your mate and your sister made mistakes. I only set up fated mates. I don’t have any control over the other choices wolves make.” She’d given me an appraising eye. “And apparently Vincent Morelli doesn’t know what an amazing gift you were to him. I know someone who will, but you must save him first.”

“Save him?” I’d gestured down to my stolen clothes. “I’m barely saving myself tonight.”

Lunai had waved a hand as if to say she didn’t have any doubts I’d be up for the task of saving a new mate. “Vincent has made more than one mistake tonight. Not only has he betrayed you by sleeping with your twin, he’s also made arrangements to have Archer Sinclaire and his father abducted. He wants their pack’s territory and thinks torture is the way to get it.”

I’d gasped and put my hands to my mouth. Why hadn’t I ever seen that Vince was capable of this kind of behavior? He’d only been nice to me.

Until he wasn’t.

“One of your former mate’s best qualities is his drive,” Lunai had said. “It’s also his worst quality.” She’d floated closer to me and rested her hands on my shoulders. I’d tingled all over at her touch. “What I offer you tonight is simple, my little Omega. Save Archer Sinclaire and he is yours. A new mate, a new pack, a new life. All for you.”

“Seems as if I’m getting quite a lot for just saving a wolf’s life,” I’d said hesitantly. “What’s the catch?”

“No catch. The Sinclaires are an important pack. They need to survive, but they won’t without their Alpha.”

“Isn’t Archer’s father the Alpha?”

Lunai had nodded, her face full of sorrow. “Alas, he passed on from this life only moments ago. Archer is the Alpha now, but you must make haste in your decision, Omega, or he will also perish. He needs you.”

Well, when she'd put it that way, I'd had to accept. "Where can I find him?"

I'd raced to Vince's garage and had found the situation exactly as Lunai had described to me. I'd also felt the mate bond stitch itself between Archer and me the moment I'd laid eyes on him.

The bulge at his groin right now told me he felt the bond too.

"We need a safe place to go first," I said to Archer now.

He didn't reply right away, his woodsy hazel gaze locked on my face. My core trembled at the heat in his stare. It was as if he was branding me as his before we did anything else.

I got caught up in tracing the lines of the tattoos on his toned forearms. What remained of his T-shirt played a peek-a-boo game with me, revealing glimpses of his pecs and abs through the rips.

When I finally realized I was blatantly ogling him, I gave myself a shake and focused back on his face. His strong jaw. The black stubble that shadowed that strong jaw and tempting mouth.

Damn. I didn't remember the first time I felt the mate bond with Vince being this . . . this consuming.

"Archer? A safe place?" I had to concentrate on actually saving Archer or I'd be out of a second mate. I highly doubted Lunai would give me a third.

Archer blinked slowly then shook his head. "Sorry. I'm having trouble focusing. Must be all the blood I lost." But his gaze raked up and down my body and that same hunger clawed at my insides too.

I touched his arm and sucked in a breath at the contact, immediately releasing him.

"We'll have time to figure this out." I gestured between the two of us, certain he knew we were a mated pair. "Right now we need to see to your wounds and figure out what to do next."

Nodding, Archer rubbed his temples. “My cousin, Phil. He’ll come and get us.”

I let him back into Vince’s garage to use the phone in the office. When Archer reemerged, I released the breath I’d been holding since he’d left. Standing guard over a dead Alpha’s body in a darkened alley was not a job an Omega should be left to do. It had stressed me out the entire time Archer had been gone.

“Phil will be here in ten,” Archer said. “He’ll take us to our packhouse.”

“Okay.” I’d been to both the Romero and Morelli packhouses many times. It was like a motorcycle gang’s clubhouse where they hung out and conducted werewolf business. No humans were allowed inside and they were in secret locations. The fact that Archer was willingly going to let me inside the Sinclaire packhouse confirmed his knowledge of our mate bond.

Ten minutes later, an all-black SUV pulled up to the alley, and a guy only slightly smaller than Archer jumped out of the driver’s seat. He instantly fell to his knees at Pearce’s body still on the mechanic’s creeper.

“Oh, Goddess, no.” Phil put his hand to Pearce’s chest then rested his forehead there as well. When he lifted his head, he scanned Archer’s injuries, his jaw muscles twitching. “Who did this?” The words barely slid past his teeth as he stood.

“It was on Morelli’s order,” Archer said.

At the mention of Vince’s last name, Phil’s gaze flicked to me, but Archer put his hand on his cousin’s arm when a low growl rumbled out of Phil.

“She’s not with him anymore,” Archer said. “He fucked up. She saved me from ending up like my father.” He waited until his cousin looked at him. “Selena is mine now, and I am hers.”

“Mates?” Phil’s dark eyebrows crinkled. “But how?”

“A deal with Lunai.” I glanced back to the garage. “We really should get out of here. Vince and his crew could come

here at any moment.” I motioned to Archer. “Plus, we should see to his injuries. They are severe.”

Archer removed what remained of his T-shirt, and the peep show I’d enjoyed earlier was nothing compared to the full program.

Oh my Goddess ...

Archer Sinclaire was a chiseled masterpiece. Ink coursed over his gorgeous chest and along his ribs as well as his arms. I could make a career out of sweeping my gaze over the contours of his form.

Unfortunately, streaks of blood marred the perfection, and when he turned, the view of his back made my eyes tear up.

That sight snapped Phil out of his paralysis too. “Right. Yeah. Of course. Let’s go.” He bent and scooped up Pearce as if the man wasn’t a full-grown Alpha werewolf.

Archer and I settled in the middle seats of the SUV while Phil laid Pearce in the seats behind us. It was a quiet ride to the Sinclaire packhouse, but I could tell Archer was in a great deal of pain. He didn’t sit back on the seat. No doubt because his back was raw. It had the look of ground beef in some spots, and I was certain he’d be left with scars.

Scars from my former mate’s greed and deception.

My hands fisted in my lap.

“Hey.” Archer’s voice was low and hoarse. When his massive hand rested over both of mine, I nearly melted under the heat of his palms, the strength of his fingers, the possessive stroke of his thumb across my knuckles. “Are you okay?”

“Me? I should be asking you that.” I gestured to the seat. “You can’t even sit back. I’m so sorry Vince had this done to you.” I glanced to Pearce. “And for your father.”

Archer’s hand tightened over mine for a moment then he released me and looked over his shoulder at his father. “We were out celebrating. Celebrating me.” He sifted out a long, slow breath. “I can’t believe he’s gone now.”

I slid my hand to rest on Archer's thigh, which was rock hard under the denim of his jeans. "We'll avenge his death."

Something deadly flared in Archer's eyes. "You better believe we will."

Chapter Six

Archer

Phil brought the SUV around to the back of the packhouse, and I silently thanked my cousin for being discreet. When I slid out from the back seat, however, I was greeted with nearly ninety percent of the Sinclaire pack. All of them were on their knees before me, giving me the low grunts werewolves gave when accepting a new Alpha. I'd always felt connected to all of them, but now that I was officially their Alpha, it was as if an invisible thread bound us all together. The instinct to protect each and every one of them exploded inside of me.

“Whoa.” Selena put a steadying hand on my arm before I realized I was wavering on my feet.

Phil sidled up on my other side. “Reggie, Franc, get Pearce from the back and prepare him.”

I drew some comfort from knowing my father was now among the pack and would get the Alpha's burial he deserved. It was even better that fucking Morelli had been denied the chance to dispose of my father—and me—himself.

Selena and Phil guided me into the packhouse, Phil navigating us to the game room.

“You got him for a minute?” he asked Selena.

She nodded and wrapped her arms around my waist, bracing her legs. It had to look ridiculous for someone of her petite size to be supporting me, but I didn't care. Instead, I relished the closeness of her, the strength I felt pouring from her to me, the heat. With as much pain as I was in, I shouldn't have been able to think about anything besides that, but a significant part of me thought solely about peeling the clothes from Selena's body. About worshipping every inch of her. About plunging my needy cock deep into her.

“Oh . . .” Selena's eyes fluttered closed, her mouth forming an O-shape and her cheeks pinking. “How did you do that?”

“Do what?”

“Make me nearly orgasm.” She let go of me and swiped a hand across her forehead, which I now realized had beads of sweat dotting it.

I shrugged because I honestly didn’t know how I’d done that, but my lips still curled up in satisfaction that I had managed the feat.

Selena swatted my arm, careful not to touch anything that was injured. “Cocky much?”

“Alphas are cocky. We can’t help it.”

“Tell me about it.” She rolled her eyes, and even looking exasperated she was breathtaking. “I must be out of mind to get involved with another Alpha.”

“Then why are you?”

Selena studied her sneakers for a quiet moment, her shoulders slightly hunched. “Because Omegas don’t last long on their own.”

This was common knowledge, but Selena didn’t strike me as your average Omega.

“You managed to save me.” I tipped her chin up so she’d meet my gaze. “You probably deserve more credit than you’re giving yourself.” Chances were, however, that as an Omega, she’d grown up having the fact that she was weak and submissive drilled into her, that she was a follower, never a leader.

Pretty sure Morelli cheating on her with her sister took a big chunk out of her confidence too.

Fucking tool.

“Okay, lie down over here.” I turned my attention to Phil who had put a couple sheets of plywood over the top of a pool table and was covering them with a fleece blanket. “Then we can get a better look at those wounds and see what we’re dealing with.”

Selena helped me over to the table and I rolled myself onto it. Twin groans from Selena and Phil echoed in the game room.

“That bad, huh?” I glanced over my shoulder, but I couldn’t see my own back. Just as well probably. Looking at my wrists made me cringe. I could only imagine the mess on my back after being whipped with silver.

“What do you have for medical supplies around here?” Selena asked Phil.

“Not much,” Phil said. “Werewolves don’t normally need medical attention.”

“Go to my truck,” I told Phil. “I have an extensive first aid kit in there for work. I’m sure there’s some shit in there that’s useful.”

“On it!”

I heard Phil’s quick steps as he ran out of the game room, then Selena moved closer to my head so I could see her.

I liked being able to see her.

“What do you do for work?” She reached a hand out and stroked my cheek. The touch was so simple, but it felt familiar and comforting and like everything I needed at this very moment.

“I’m a firefighter,” I said. “Just made lieutenant. That’s why my father and I went out for a drink.” My throat tightened at the realization that I’d never go for a drink with my father again. I was steps away from blubbering like a newborn pup.

“I work at the museum.” Selena distracted me from my grief as if she knew that was exactly what I needed. “I do tours, set up exhibits, and other assorted nerd tasks.”

That pulled a laugh out of me. “You don’t look like a nerd.”

“That’s because I don’t currently have random pencils and pens poking out of a messy ponytail and you haven’t heard me blather on about Ancient Egyptian burial customs.”

“Even then, I don’t believe you’re a nerd.”

“Give it time. I’ll prove it to you.” Her hand had traveled to massage my scalp and my neck. Everywhere she touched

felt instantly improved.

“I guess we’ll have time together,” I said. “Being fated mates now and all.”

“I’d love to believe we’ll have forever together,” she said, “but I now have experience that suggests that might not be the case.”

“Don’t let Morelli sour you on the idea of fated mates,” I said, a strange desperation growing inside me. I hadn’t given fated mates all that much consideration myself. I kept busy fighting fires and helping my father with pack business. I scratched an itch with a willing partner here and there, but as far as finding my one and only? Nope. Hadn’t thought much about it at all.

But I definitely didn’t want Selena to believe that all Alphas were like her ex-mate. “He’s a fool to have betrayed you.”

“You haven’t seen my sister, Vera.” She frowned. “We’re twins, but we’re not identical. She definitely has some assets I do not.”

“And she must also have some serious character flaws if she’d sleep with her sister’s husband.”

“Vince and Vera probably deserve each other,” Selena mumbled as Phil returned.

“Okay, got the kit,” my cousin said. “Tell us what to do, Archer, and we’ll get you all patched up.”

It’d be fairly easy to address my wounds that Vince Morelli was responsible for. It’d be a lot harder to heal the ones he’d caused Selena.

But I was putting that at the top of my to-do list.

Chapter Seven

Selena

“We need to rinse him off first.” I looked over Archer’s decimated back. I couldn’t determine where one wound ended and the next began. Clearly, my new mate was a bona fide badass because any other wolf would have been howling in pain with injuries this extensive.

“There are showers in the rec area,” Phil said. “I can take him.”

I bit back the growl wanting to slip from my throat at the idea of anyone taking Archer anywhere. That mate bond was growing stronger by the second, and he became more and more mine.

“Or you can take him.” Phil put up his hands, a small smile on his face.

My cheeks heated. “Was that growl out loud?”

“Indeed, it was.” Phil lowered his hands. “Not to worry. I get it.” He pointed to a door at the far end of the game room. “The rec area is right through there then take your first left and you’ll be at the showers.” He looked at Archer who had grown quiet lying on his stomach on the pool table. His eyes were closed, but the steady rise and fall of his back let me know he was still with us.

“Do you need help getting him in there?” Phil asked.

“We’re good, Phil,” Archer said, his eyes opening. Though he had to be weary from the day he’d had, those hazel eyes had a fire in them when he looked at me.

Another orgasm built in my core, and Archer grinned.

Phil angled his head back, sniffing the air. “Good Goddess. Those are some powerful pheromones, people.” He backed away from the pool table, away from Archer and me. “I’ll help Reggie and Franc.” He looked at me. “Give me a howl if you need help.”

I nodded and turned my attention right back to Archer who was easing up to sitting on the pool table. He brought his wrists up closer to his face, studying them.

“There is silver still in there,” he said. “My back too because I’ve actually been trying to shift while I was lying here.”

“And you can’t?”

He shook his head.

“C’mon.” I came to stand in front of him. I took each of his hands in mine and tugged ever so gently so he’d slide off the table to his feet. I paused for a moment, making sure Archer was stable. When he gave me a slight nod, I led him to the door Phil had pointed out.

Sure enough, a bank of locker-room-style showers lined one tiled wall, sinks and mirrors another, and toilet stalls another.

No one else was in there, and Archer reached around me to lock the door to the entire area.

“We shouldn’t be disturbed.” The words came out on a low rumble that resonated through me.

Instead of replying, I pressed a palm to his chest, his heated flesh meeting mine, and the mate bond exploded between us.

We let out twin growls and the next thing I knew, I was going for the button and zipper on Archer’s jeans. I clawed at the waistband of the jeans and his underwear and raked both down his legs. His erection nearly pulled a gleeful squeal from me. Knowing that was all for me, that he wanted me that much, that I’d soon be wrapped around that length sent shivers through my entire body.

I lowered and untied Archer’s boots. After resting his hands on the wall above me, he toed off the boots. I pulled off his jeans, boxers, and socks, taking a moment to look up at his naked, well-sculpted body.

I sighed. “Remind me to send Lunai a fruit basket or something.”

Archer smiled and pulled me to my feet. “I’ll go half with you.” He slid his hand along my cheek and nudged me closer. “I’m not sure what I did to make her look so favorably upon me.” He lowered his head and pressed kisses along my neck and jaw, his beard pleasantly scratching at my skin.

“She said the Sinclaires were an important pack.”

“We’re an old pack,” he said. “My ancestors were among the original werewolves.”

My eyes widened. “Really?”

Archer nodded. “I can tell you all about my family. *Your* family now. Later.” He peeled my borrowed flannel shirt from my shoulders and down my arms.

I shimmied out of it and the T-shirt I wore underneath the flannel.

Archer groaned at the sight of my bare breasts, his hands immediately cupping them.

“I couldn’t find a bra to steal.” I relished the feel of his rough fingertips on my sensitive nipples.

“Steal?” He arched an eyebrow at me.

“When I found Vince and Vera together, I rage-shifted and blew through my sliding glass door.” I pressed my breasts more fully into his hands, wanting him to touch more of me. “Didn’t have time to pack a bag of my own things.”

“We’ll buy you all new things.” Archer nosed around in my hair, his hands traveling down to my jeans. With a few quick moves, he had them free of me, and we were both naked now. “Rage-shifting means you’re not as Omega wolf as you think.” He caressed me simply with his gaze raking over me, head to toe and back up to my head. “You are lovely, Selena. Truly lovely.” He coasted his hands to my hips. “I’ve always thought Morelli was a fucking moron. It’s even truer now that I know he gave up the chance to be with you always.”

My eyes pricked. Not because I felt betrayed by Vince—though I did—but because no one had said something that beautiful to me before.

I backed Archer up toward the showers and turned on one of the heads. Letting the water run over my fingers, I waited for it to warm up. “This is probably going to hurt like hell.”

“That’s why you’re going to kiss me while that shower water hits my back,” Archer said. “You’re going to kiss me and make me forget everything that happened today.” He traced my lips with his fingertip. “Everything except the incredible gift Lunai gave me.”

I edged him closer to the spray. I slid my hands over the tattoos on his chest and rested them on his broad shoulders. I pressed my body against his, feeling the tension in his body relax a little.

“Are you sure the bond with Morelli is broken?” His mouth was mere inches away from mine. “Because I can’t do this if I don’t get to keep you, Selena.”

“I’m sure.” And I was too. Totally certain. What had bound Vince and me together had been completely severed by his infidelity.

“Good.” Archer’s hands clamped on my waist, pulling me closer.

When he lowered his head, I met him, our lips fusing as I backed him into the water. His hands tightened on me, and a raspy moan sounded from his throat, but I couldn’t tell if it was from the pain or from the fire sparking between our joined mouths. All I knew was that I wanted more of Archer Sinclair.

He slid a hand to the back of my left leg, lifting it so he could bring me closer still. My core—already at volcanic temperatures—grew hotter still at having his arousal pressed up against me. When he ground his hips against mine, I wrapped my arms around his waist, my hands palming an ass that had to have been carved of granite.

Archer let out a few low growls, breaking the kiss to nip at my shoulder, my neck, my ear. He flipped me around so my front faced the shower wall then corralled all my hair to my left shoulder. In the next moment, he sunk his teeth into the back of my neck, performing a ritual mating bond bite without causing me an ounce of pain. Vince had done the same, but he'd taken too deep a bite, and I'd yelped.

This bite though—Archer's bite—oh, this was perfection, stroking my insides in just the right way so as to heighten my senses even more. To make me crave his touch. To make me want no one but him.

Archer's warm tongue ran over the bite, then his full lips pressed kiss after kiss to the spot. "Your turn," he whispered in my ear.

Slowly, I turned to face him. "Are you sure? You might not be able to heal with everything you went through today." My every instinct was to bite him, to finish the pair bond, to make him my mate, but I didn't want to add to his injuries which were already pretty serious.

"I have this gut feeling that you biting me might be the secret to erasing the damage done to me today." Archer dropped a quick kiss on my lips. "Do it."

I switched places with him, taking a moment to look at his back now that much of the blood had been washed away. It still looked bad, but at least I could see individual wounds now. There were many of them, crisscrossing the wide expanse of his tattooed back. They had jagged edges of ruined skin lining deep gouges, destroying the inked artwork, and my teeth clenched thinking about how this carnage was fucking Vince's doing.

"Let it go." Archer rested head against the tiled wall. "For now."

Careful not to touch his back, I stepped a bit to the side of his huge body, silently wishing for a step stool or something. At five-feet-four-inches tall, I was nearly a foot shorter than Archer. Reaching the back of his neck to give him a proper mate bite was going to be challenging.

As if sensing my predicament, Archer lowered to his knees in front of me.

I nearly giggled aloud at the sight of an Alpha in this position. In front of me. An Omega. Unheard of.

Not wanting Archer to spend too much time with his knees on hard tile, I ran my fingers over his short hair, letting my nails scratch along his scalp. He groaned, his fingers curling where he rested them against the shower wall. Starting at his temple, I kissed a line along the side of his face to his jaw, pausing at his neck to lick beads of water off his flesh. I delighted in the goosebumps that rose on his skin then let my canines extend a bit.

With my nose full of his woody, masculine, Alpha scent, I buried my teeth into the back of his neck as he'd done to me. He tasted like strength and wisdom and responsibility.

He tasted like protection.

I retracted my teeth, licked away the blood, and kissed the bite until it completely disappeared under my lips. A moment later, some of the more superficial cuts on Archer's back disappeared, and the others didn't look as deep.

"You were right," I said. "You're healing."

Rising to his feet, Archer turned to face me, letting the shower water hit his back. "I'm not doing anything. It's you." He cupped my cheek. "My Alpha wife."

Being Vince's wife had never, ever felt like this. As if I'd been awarded the greatest prize in the history of prizes.

As if I'd been handed a love that was true and eternal. One that would never betray me.

I reached for a bottle of foaming soap behind Archer and took one pump into my hand. Slicking the soap over both of my palms, I wrapped one hand around Archer's erection while the other massaged his balls.

Archer's eyes closed, and he instinctively thrust himself into my hands while his lips consumed mine again. His kisses

were full of promises and vows. Ones I knew he would always uphold as long as there was breath in his lungs.

I had great fun driving him mad with my hands on him, but when he wrapped his strong arms around me and lifted me onto his length, I finally understood what fun really was. He filled me completely, stroking every single spot that needed stroking and some mystery bonus spots I didn't even know I had.

Alphas are notoriously good lovers, but this? Shit, this was like sending my body on a thrill ride that got my adrenaline pumping. Strangely, it was also like setting me adrift on a tranquil sea at sunset. I liked both feelings in equal measure.

Pressure built up between us as we rocked each other to earth-shattering orgasms. Tremors rippled through me, bringing as much pleasure as the initial blast.

I rested my forehead on Archer's shoulder, both of our chests heaving, our hearts beating wildly. "That was . . ." I didn't have the right words.

"It was." Archer released my legs, and I slid off him in one slow glide that pulled moans from both of us.

"How are you feeling?" I studied his face, noting his sated gaze, flushed cheeks, and kiss-plumped lips.

"Fucking amazing." He flashed me a smile, revealing a dimple in his right cheek almost invisible under his short beard.

I pressed my finger into it then kissed him. "Me too." I took his hands in mine and surveyed his wrists. The gouges there didn't look as deep anymore, but they were still red and angry. "We should get some aloe vera or turmeric on these wounds and cover them."

"Is my mate a little witchy with herb magic for healing wounds?" Archer tugged on the end of my wet hair, a grin tilting up his lips.

"Maybe. That shit works on humans. We don't usually need such treatments, but you could use all the help you can get with these injuries."

“I think you’re the only help I need.” Archer grabbed a dab of shampoo and washed my hair, his fingers giving me one hell of a massage as he lathered, rinsed, and repeated.

I did the same to him—after he leaned down so I could reach—then after a final rinse, Archer shut off the water and led me over to shelves where towels were neatly stacked. He stood there dripping while he wiped me down, and that told me so much about the type of man—and wolf—he was.

After we were both dry, I made a move to shrug back into my stolen clothes, but Archer chose a pair of gray sweatpants and a black T-shirt from a stash of clothes for me.

“My mate—my wife—doesn’t wear clothes she had to steal because some dick didn’t know how to appreciate her.” He shook his head then took a pair of matching gray sweatpants for himself, foregoing the T-shirt so we could give his back the attention it still needed.

I put on the clothes he’d given me and braided my wet hair. Before we left the rec area, Archer pressed me against the door and gave me a kiss that effectively scrambled my brain.

“I’m not going to ever get tired of doing that.” He opened the door and stepped out.

Even my scrambled brain knew it was a good idea to follow him.

Chapter Eight

Archer

Physically, I should have been ready to sleep for a few days. I'd lost my father and had my ass kicked in the span of a handful of hours, but after being with Selena, I felt as if I had all the energy in the world.

Yes, my back and wrists stung, but those wounds were healing. As I led Selena back toward the pool table, I tried to shift, knowing the sweats I'd put on would be toast, but I couldn't shift yet. It'd probably take some time for the silver to leave my system.

"I can see it," Selena said behind me.

I stopped walking and turned to face her. "See what?"

"The silver. It's like . . . glistening in those back wounds." She shuddered. "How much pain are you in?"

I shrugged, the movement irritating my tender back. "Trust me, it's nothing compared to what it would have been if you hadn't shown up to rescue me."

Her cheeks pinked, and it was the most adorable thing I'd ever seen. I wasn't aware how much I liked adorable until I'd seen it on Selena. God, she was fucking perfect.

And mine now.

Exchanging mating bites and making love with her had seemed like the most natural actions in the world. No part of me doubted we were supposed to be together. Our bodies—despite our size difference—were made to join and bring each other pleasure.

Not able to resist, I hooked my hand on the back of her neck now and drew her in for a kiss, her lips instantly parting for me. I stroked her tongue with my own, wishing we could both shift right now and solidify our bond by mating as wolves. There would be time for that though because Selena wasn't going anywhere.

I ended the kiss—reluctantly—and fished around in the first aid kit, pulling out some sterile gauze. “We don’t have any aloe vera or turmeric lying around this place, but we can at least cover up the worst of the wounds with this.”

“I can go out and get what we need,” Selena said. “I’ll just need to borrow a vehicle.”

I put the gauze down and took her hands in mine. Her hands were small, especially in comparison to my big mitts, but her fingers were long and delicate. I loved how they could make my body feel.

“First of all, everything that’s mine is now yours,” I said. “So you never have to *borrow* anything. Secondly, you’re not leaving my side. Not until I figure out what we’re going to do about Morelli. I don’t trust that he won’t come after you. An Alpha isn’t going to take his mate breaking the pair bond lightly, and if he knows you’re with me now, he could use you to get to me.” The thought of something happening to Selena because Morelli wanted to hurt me made a growl rumble from deep in my chest.

Selena wiggled free of my grasp. Probably because thinking of Morelli had made me tighten my grip. She put her hands on my pec ink, smoothing her palms over the designs. Instantly, the fury in my body settled.

I put my hands over hers and closed my eyes. “You’re like a magnificent drug. Good for every ailment.”

“With none of the nasty side effects.” She grinned up at me, and a laugh rasped out of my throat.

“Pretty and funny.” I tapped her on the nose. “Tell me you like heavy metal and bourbon and I’ll know with every degree of certainty you’re the right woman for me.”

Selena made a pair of devil horns with her hand and waved them above her head. “I love bourbon *while* listening to heavy metal. How’s that?”

“Perfect.”

A knock sounded at the open doorway. Phil stood there with his hand over his eyes. “Is everyone decent?” He peeked

through his fingers, lowering his hand when he saw that we were. Angling his head up, he sniffed. "But those pheromones are still flying high though." He waved his hand in front of his nose as if he couldn't take the smell. "You're mated?"

"We are," I said.

"Congratulations." Phil stepped into the room and gave Selena a hug. "Welcome to the Sinclaire pack, my dear."

"Thank you." She hugged him back. "I'll try to be worthy of the membership."

"You saved Archer," Phil said. "You don't have to do another damn thing. We'd be in a real pickle right now if Morelli got Pearce *and* Archer."

"Which is something we should have planned for," I said. "We need a succession list should something happen to me." I rested my hands on my cousin's shoulders. "Guess what? You're at the top of the list."

Phil's mouth flapped open and closed a few times before he shook his head, his blue eyes wide. "Dude. I'm honored." He swallowed loudly. "Kinda freaked, but honored."

I slapped his shoulder then handed the gauze to Selena. "Let's think about a Number Two and Three to be on the safe side."

"Do you expect Morelli to continue with his pursuit of our territory now that he's failed once?"

"I do," Selena and I said at the same time.

"Fuck." Phil paced away. "Why is he doing this now? We've all co-existed in Moon Valley without any major problems. What's so urgent all of a sudden?" He looked at Selena, but she shrugged.

"All I know is that he's complained about your pack frequently. He definitely considers you rivals. Why he made a move like this now is anyone's guess." She rummaged around in the first aid kit and produced a small pair of scissors to cut the gauze. "I do know why he fucked my sister though. He thinks she can give him heirs."

The word *heirs* echoed in the room as Phil and I gave each other wide eyes.

“Because . . . you can’t?” Phil’s panic was another person in the room.

I had to admit to being curious about the answer to that question. An Alpha werewolf needed heirs. A definite must-have. Especially in a pack as old as mine.

“I wasn’t the problem in that equation,” Selena said, making Phil and I wordlessly blink at her.

Several moments of silence hung in the room until Phil gave himself a shake.

“Wait. A. Minute.” He put both of his hands up. “Are you saying that Vince Morelli, Alpha of the Morelli pack, is shooting blanks?”

“That appears to be the case.” Selena’s dark gaze met mine. “Although, I should be honest and tell you that the Romero pack does have a problem with infertiles. My mother wasn’t one though, giving birth to twins and surviving. I’ve also been checked out. There are no indications that I can’t grow a pup in here.” She cradled her stomach, and the urge to put a pup in there right now nearly knocked me off my feet.

Pace yourself. I’d already become Alpha and met my fated mate today. Had to save some excitement for tomorrow, right?

“Whew.” Phil swiped a hand across his brow. “Heart attack averted.”

“Who’s having a heart attack?”

I turned to find Dominic, Phil’s mate, in the doorway.

“No one,” I said.

“Good. This pack has had enough tragedy for one day.” Dominic put a gentle hand on my forearm. “I’m so sorry about your father, Archer.”

I nodded at his condolences, not able to say anything around the sting in my throat.

“Reggie and Franc have begun the preparations for a proper send off,” Dominic said. “You let us all know when you’re ready.” He did a double take at Selena.

“Yeah, that’s who you think it is,” Phil said. “She is Archer’s mate now.”

Dominic instantly bowed his head at Selena as was custom upon formally meeting an Alpha’s mate then he glanced at me, a sly smile tilting up his lips. “Stealing Morelli’s mate is quite the revenge plan.”

“Selena isn’t a revenge plan,” I said, not liking he’d consider her that.

“Vince was unfaithful,” Selena said. “With my sister.”

Dominic let out a noise as if he’d taken a soccer ball to the gut. “Wow. Okay.” He looked at Phil. “Hetero relationships get so messy sometimes.”

“Truth.” Phil drew Dominic to his side and pressed a kiss to his cheek then he nudged me around so he could see my back. “Well, this looks somewhat better.”

“I’ll bet a nice juicy steak would help that heal up in no time,” Dominic said.

“That sounds fantastic,” I said, realizing that I was, in fact, extremely hungry.

“It really does,” Selena said.

“We’ll make that happen.” Dominic tugged on Phil’s arm. “C’mon, baby. Let’s get barbecuing.”

“Don’t overcook it,” I said to their retreating forms.

Phil gave me a thumbs-up, and the two of them left as Selena motioned for me to stretch out on the pool table again so she could tend to my back.

“They seem nice.”

“Yeah. I might be biased, but the Sinclaire pack is full of nice people.” I looked over my shoulder at her after lying down on my stomach. “And it increased its nice people collection by one today.”

“You only think I’m nice because I saved you,” she said. “You won’t think I’m so nice when I don’t share my steak with you.”

“You don’t have to share your steak with me. Phil and Dominic are known for making an abundance of food. They are experts at keeping a pack well fed.” I sucked in a breath when Selena laid gauze over a particularly raw spot.

“Sorry. I’m trying to figure out the optimal way to cover these.”

“Do the best you can.” I rested my head on my overlapped arms.

I let her work for a few moments, my eyes finally growing heavy as that energy boost I’d felt after being with Selena waned a bit. I’d worked a stretch of days at the firehouse this week, not having a day off. Add to that the fact that I’d never made it home last night, having been abducted from the pub with my dad, and I was ready to sleep for a week.

But I couldn’t do that. Vince Morelli needed to be dealt with. I just wasn’t sure *how* to deal with him yet. He’d sent his wolves after my father and me. He’d killed my father, an Alpha. He’d fucking betrayed Selena. Each one of these were grave offenses in my book. Put them all together and I didn’t see how I could let the dick live. Werewolf rules were pretty simple.

First, protection of the pack was of utmost importance.

Second, territory equaled power.

Third, love your fated mate with everything you’ve got.

I was kinda excited about that last one now. I’d been with other female werewolves but what Selena and I had done in the shower earlier was on a whole other level. I couldn’t wait to have her wrapped around me again.

I must have fallen asleep because the next thing I knew a scream made me spring off the pool table, claws extended and canines lowering automatically.

Guess shifting is back online.

I scanned the room, but I was alone. My emergency kit was still on the table, but all the supplies were neatly packed back inside.

Another scream tore through the air, and I shot through the door to find flames engulfing the Sinclair packhouse.

Chapter Nine

Selena

I wasn't known for being a screamer, but when fire licked at me from all directions, screaming came naturally. Archer had fallen asleep while I'd been covering his wounds. He'd looked so peaceful that I'd decided to let him rest. After returning supplies to his first aid kit, I'd wandered out to the main part of the packhouse. A few people were strewn about and the moment they saw me, they sniffed the air, knowing I was now Archer's mate.

"My lady." A man with bushy gray eyebrows and a wild gray beard had gotten up from his spot at a card table and had bowed to me. He'd then gestured to the others—two men and a woman—sitting with him. "We'd like to thank you for coming to our Alpha's aid today."

"I wish I could have gotten there sooner to keep your first Alpha from harm," I'd said.

"What has come to pass was meant to happen," the woman had said. She had short brown hair that framed her round face, and large hoop earrings hung from her earlobes. "While we definitely mourn Pearce's death, Archer is more than ready to lead."

Her belief in Archer, *my* Archer, filled me with pride. I barely knew the man, but his pack's faith in him said so much.

"I'm Walt," the man who had bowed had said then he'd pointed to the man to his left who had salt-and-pepper hair and kind brown eyes. The man sitting next to him had messy blond hair and a welcoming smile. They all appeared to be in their late sixties I'd guessed. "This is Simon. Next to him is Clark, and that beautiful wolf is my mate, Mara."

"It's lovely to meet all of you," I'd said. "I'm Selena."

I'd expected some questions about Vince and what the hell I was doing becoming Archer's new mate, but instead Walt had said, "Would you care to join us? We're playing for fun. No wagers or nothing."

“I’d love to.” I’d sat in the seat Walt had pulled out for me. “Thank you. Archer fell asleep while I was tending to him.”

“Sleep is healing,” Mara had said with a firm nod. “That boy will be all right. I once saw him fall from a roof. Heard the bones crack and everything. He popped right back up to his feet after landing on the ground. Like nothing ever happened.”

“Under normal circumstances, that sounds about right for a werewolf of his status,” I’d said, “but he’s got silver in him right now.”

All four of them had hissed and recoiled at the mention of silver.

“Yeah, my ex-mate is a real bastard apparently.” I’d puffed out a breath, wondering for the thousandth time since finding Vince with Vera how I’d missed the clues that my former Alpha was a first rate asshole.

“Some wolves do that sheep’s clothing thing really well,” Clark had said.

“But the true wolf always reveals itself,” Mara had added. “And I have to say that getting paired with Archer is a significant upgrade, honey.”

“No argument there.” One thought of what Archer had done to me in the shower was more than enough proof that he far exceeded Vince in *all* important areas.

Walt had taken his seat and gathered all the cards to shuffle, but a loud blast outside the packhouse had us all on our feet again.

“What the hell was that?” Clark had raced for the main doors, but they’d burst open, sending the man reeling back.

That had been the first time I’d screamed. The second time I’d let loose, werewolves only half transformed so they still got around on two legs came pouring into the Sinclair packhouse. They had literal torches in their clawed hands and touched them to everything they passed.

Soon the packhouse was consumed by flames.

Cue scream number three.

Now I stood with fire on all sides of me with no clear exit. That wasn't my main problem though because I could run through those, risking a few burns that would heal within moments.

No, the actual threat was Vince Morelli's voice rising above the roar of the flames.

"I know you're here, Selena!" he shouted. "I can smell you!"

Oddly enough, I couldn't smell him. Not anymore. Bonding with Archer must have erased my ability to sense Vince, which was a shame because it certainly would have been beneficial to know he was on his way here.

And how the hell had he even found here? The Sinclaire packhouse was a well-hidden secret, as *all* packhouses were.

"If you come out now," Vince yelled, "I'll let these other wolves go."

Fuck.

I couldn't be the reason these Sinclaire wolves—*my* wolves—died. What kind of an Alpha mate would I be if I let that happen? As Alpha, Archer was bound by duty to protect these wolves.

As his mate, so was I.

I made a move to step through the flames in front of me and reveal myself to Vince, but strong arms wrapped around me from behind. They pulled me through the flames at my back and to a window where the glass had been knocked out.

Archer's hazel eyes were glowing as he looked at me. His canines were extended, his hands clawed as they rested on my shoulders. "There's a path in the woods out there." He gestured to the broken window. "It leads to my house. Follow it and wait for me there while I deal with Morelli."

I immediately shook my head. "No. I'm not going to hide away, Archer. I have a whole supply of rage for Vince. Let me use it."

For a moment, Archer looked as if he might argue with me. Then the right side of his mouth turned up, revealing that dimple.

And a set of Alpha-grade teeth that could no doubt rip flesh from bone without the slightest struggle.

“You’re no Omega, my queen.” He bent his clawed finger and used his knuckle to lift my chin. “You’re a badass Alpha.”

He certainly made me feel like one.

“Selena Morelli!” Vince hollered. “Get your ass out here or they all die. I fucking mean it. Your little running away scene last night was cute and all, but now it’s time to come home. You belong to me.”

Archer let out a growl that would have had a lion fleeing. He bolted through the fire again so I followed him, patting out flames that had jumped to my T-shirt.

Though the fire was reducing the packhouse to ash around us, I got great pleasure out of watching Vince stumble backward when Archer charged toward him.

“First of all, it’s Selena *Sinclaire* now, you fucking waste of a werewolf gene,” Archer said. “Secondly, Selena doesn’t *belong* to anyone. She’s her own damn wolf, more than capable of making the very good decision to leave your cheating ass.”

Walt, Clark, Simon, and Mara had semi-shifted as well and were forming a line of defense behind Archer. Phil, Dominic, Reggie, and Franc joined, and little by little, more Sinclaire wolves appeared through the fire. The fact that they would walk through literal fire for their Alpha—for *me*—showed me what a real pack was all about.

Unfortunately, Vince’s crew was all lined up toward the front wall of the packhouse where the flames were less intense. He had brought a fair amount of the Morelli pack with him. They were all half-wolfed out, and I was the only one still in full human form other than Vince.

Well, fuck that.

Summoning my anger toward what Vince had done to me by sleeping with Vera, what he'd done to Archer and his father, and what he was trying to do right now, I had plenty to fuel me.

My wolf form exploded in a way it had never done before, as if my human flesh had been a plastic bag, stuffed too full of my wolf and unable to contain her. The Sinclair wolves all turned to look at me, but it was the grin on Archer's face and the heat in his hazel eyes that made me believe what he'd said about me being a badass Alpha.

I jumped forward, landing on black paws that were definitely bigger and broader than they used to be. When I lunged for Vince, I didn't have to reach up so high. I was no longer that petite black wolf that trotted by Vince's side.

I was something more.

Something powerful.

Deadly.

You are what you were always meant to be, Lunai's voice echoed between my ears. Born Omega, but destined to be Alpha.

Well, okay. Sign me up.

I advanced on Vince again, but he backed up, and Geo and another one of Vince's goons, Anthony, both stepped in front of him. They were his top two guys so it wasn't any surprise that they were willing to protect him with their lives.

Hell, they were willing to murder Pearce and Archer for him.

"Selena?" Vince angled his head at me then sniffed the air between us. "Is that really you?"

I couldn't answer him in my wolf form. Not with words anyway. Instead, I snapped my jaws, first at Geo and then at Anthony. Both of them put up their clawed hands, shielding their faces as they backed away. It delighted me to smell the fear coming off all three of them.

It delighted me even more when a regal, all-white wolf appeared beside me. I knew in an instant that it was Archer with those glowing hazel eyes and muscles flexing under that snowy hide. I pushed my nose into his neck, loving how he let out a low rumble in response.

Then we both turned our attention to Vince and company.

Chapter Ten

Archer

I didn't think it was possible for Selena to get more beautiful, but seeing her in wolf form took my breath away. Her hide was as black as a moonless night and silky against my nose when I pushed it into her neck in response to her doing the same to me. Though her human form was much smaller than me, her wolf was larger than I would have thought possible. I'd seen a few Omega wolves in my time, and they always looked a little scraggly and were twitchy as shit.

But Selena was neither of those things. She stood on four solid legs, her broad paws claiming the space. A confident tilt to her head let everyone in the room know she was not about to take Morelli's shit.

As if communicating telepathically, Selena and I stalked toward Morelli together. The heat from the fire in the packhouse was intense, and it wouldn't be long before the building caved in on itself. The firefighter in me wanted to take this fight outside so I moved forward, Selena by my side and my pack behind us, ready to launch if need be.

We backed Morelli and his packmates to the front wall which had the least amount of damage. They filed outside then immediately fanned out, defensive positions taken, but Selena and I were ready.

The rest of my pack had shifted to full wolf as well, and soon Morelli was the only human.

Though, in my opinion, he made a pretty crappy human.

"Look," he said, focusing on me, "you can't expect me to let you have my mate."

I let out a low growl and bared my teeth at him. That was the only warning I gave before pouncing. I knocked Morelli off his feet, and the moment he hit the ground, he shifted into a brown wolf a bit smaller than me.

He pushed me off him, and I skidded back a few feet. I shot forward again, but Morelli dodged my strike. He

attempted to get behind me for a rear attack, failing when Selena blocked him. A snarl ripped out of me when Morelli pinned Selena to the ground.

You don't touch her, bastard.

As my pack fought Morelli's and my packhouse burned behind us, Morelli and I tumbled around the field, growling and biting. I seriously wanted to pulverize this fucker. He was the reason my father was dead. He may not have been the one who'd pulled the trigger, but the prick who had was following Morelli's orders. My father's blood was certainly on Morelli's goddamn paws.

Selena yelped as a gray wolf tackled her to the ground. In that moment of distraction, Morelli flipped me onto my back. He fit his jaws over my neck, but before he could close them, before he could pierce my hide, I got my hind legs between us. Using every ounce of power I had in my wolf body, I jammed my legs into Morelli's chest. I heard ribs crack under the force of my kick.

Morelli howled in pain as he staggered back then fell to the ground. It wouldn't take long for his bones to start healing so I instantly rose to all fours, Morelli's neck my only target.

He shifted back to human and writhed in the dirt. "She's *my* fucking wife, Sinclair!" Morelli slapped a palm to the ground. "Lunai paired us."

"I also paired them." Suddenly, the Moon Goddess, Lunai, wafted toward us from the woods surrounding my burning packhouse. She came to a stop near Morelli and me. "You made some less-than-brilliant moves, Vincent Morelli." Lunai shook her head, her long red hair swishing about her shoulders. "You know as well as I do that infidelity breaks a pair bond. Some mates decide to forgive and stay together. They move past the incident, and many times their bond grows stronger afterwards." She gestured to Selena. "In this case, however, Selena has chosen to accept the new mate I offered her. Your rival. The one you attempted to steal territory from. The one you committed a grave act against in killing his

father, the Alpha of his pack. The one you tortured with silver.”

Selena let out a growl, her glowing amber eyes laser-focused on Morelli as if she wanted to tear him to bits.

One hundred percent on board with that plan, my queen.

Lunai’s gaze shifted to me. “You are well within your rights as the new Alpha of the Sinclaire pack to punish the Morelli Alpha in any way you see fit.”

I’d forgotten that Lunai could tap into werewolf brains any time she felt like it.

“But,” she continued, “perhaps you can take the high ground here, Archer Sinclaire.”

Selena sat back on her haunches, indicating she was willing to listen to what Lunai was suggesting.

Every fiber in my being wanted to pummel Morelli’s body to get back at him for what he’d done to mine, but honestly, those wounds were healing pretty quickly now that I’d shifted. I credited bonding with Selena for that, and I’d be feeling back up to full power in no time.

I was, however, willing to listen to Lunai so I sat as well. I made a big show of nuzzling up to Selena’s side, however, loving the fury that flared in Morelli’s eyes. Especially when Selena nuzzled me back.

Now that I wasn’t poised to kill him, Morelli stood and took a few stumbling steps toward us, but Lunai held up her hand, halting him.

“You can try,” she said, “but even in your wolf form with your pack at your side, you are no match for the two of them joined together.” She motioned to Selena and me. “They are both Alphas now.”

Cradling his midsection where I’d kicked him, Morelli’s dark eyebrows lowered. “How can that be? Selena comes from a pack of almost all Omegas. She’s been an Omega her entire life.”

“True,” Lunai said, “but lesser wolves all have the *potential* to be Alphas. They merely need someone to draw it out of them.” She gave Morelli a disapproving glance. “I’d hoped you would be that catalyst for Selena, but you were no better than her original pack. You never saw her as an equal or someone who could even surpass you and your strength. You oppressed her then you disrespected her by bedding her sister.”

“Being with Vera was wrong,” Morelli said. “I see that.” He looked around Lunai at Selena. “I’m sorry, baby. I can do better. I promise. Just come home with me.”

Selena let out a disinterested huff and sunk to her belly beside me. Her indifference to his apology pleased me. A moment later, she shifted back to human, her naked form absolutely stunning. She looked over her shoulder at the still-burning packhouse then back at Lunai.

“Is there something you can do about that fire?” She arched a thumb over her shoulder. Making a request of the Moon Goddess was further proof that Selena was an Alpha now.

“Certainly.” Lunai waved a hand, and the flames dissipated into the ground, nothing but wisps of gray smoke rising up from the charred remains.

“Thank you.” Selena nodded at Lunai then looked at Morelli. “First of all, tell me how you found the Sinclaire packhouse.”

Morelli looked to the ground, a tortured expression on his face.

“Vince,” Selena said. “Tell me.”

“Those earrings.” He pointed to her. “They have trackers in them.”

Selena fingered the small diamond studs in her earlobes, her mouth slightly ajar as if she couldn’t believe what Morelli had said.

I believed it. The guy was a dick. Of course he’d monitor his mate’s whereabouts.

A disgusted growl sifted from Selena's throat as she removed the earrings, fisting the fingers of her left hand over them.

"Selena, I'm so sorry," Morelli said. "I just—"

Selena held up her right hand to silence him. "I do believe you are actually sorry for cheating on me, Vince."

The tension in his face relaxed, but now my body was tensed. Was she actually going to forgive him? Go back to him? Cast me aside? Had Lunai given me the chance at having a mate only to have her leave me? It would have been better to never have known what it could be like between two wolves than to have that heaven taken away.

My chest hurt. I couldn't take a deep breath. The urge to howl mournfully nearly overwhelmed me.

No doubt sensing the change in my emotional state, Selena ran her right hand along the top of my head. She leaned her naked body against me then tugged on my ear before dropping a kiss to my furry cheek.

"I'm with you, Archer," she whispered. "Always."

Suddenly, I could draw oxygen into my lungs again.

"You and Vera deserve each other, Vince." Selena casually rested against my side.

"I'm glad you think so."

A blond woman emerged from the Morelli pack standing behind their Alpha. She was beautiful in her own way, but nowhere near as lovely as Selena.

"Go away, Vera." Morelli's face was stern, but he was able to stand fully upright now, his broken ribs no longer a problem.

They're easy enough to break again.

"She's not going to take you back." Vera motioned to Selena. "Look at her. Can't you tell how different she is now? Something has been unleashed inside her, Vince. Something

that can't be bottled again. She'll never serve you. Not like I will."

Serve? Is that how Morelli viewed fated mates? I'd always believed fated mates should be partners. Equals. Wolves who looked out for one another. Even if Selena had stayed an Omega, I would have done what I could to make sure she felt as if she had power in the Sinclaire pack. She wasn't my mate to serve me. She was my mate to journey through this life *with* me. To accomplish goals together.

And now that she was an Alpha too, we would be unstoppable.

"She's right," Selena said. "I'm not going to take you back, Vince. Maybe I could have forgiven you for cheating on me." She looked at me. "But I can't forgive you for having Archer and his father abducted. For having Archer's father killed. For the wounds you ordered to be inflicted upon Archer. For making a play to get Sinclaire pack territory." She waved her fisted hand with the earrings at him. "For monitoring me like a fucking pet. I don't know what possessed you to think any of those moves were good ideas. They weren't, so we're through." She threw the earrings at him, and they landed in the dirt at his feet.

Morelli's hands curled into fists at his sides, and his gaze zoomed in on me. "You can't have all that territory *and* Selena." He shook his head. "It makes your pack too powerful and a threat to the other packs living in Moon Valley."

"Well, that is easily solved then," Lunai said. "I propose you take your pack elsewhere, Vincent. There are unclaimed areas in Maine that would be perfect for the Morelli pack. That way you don't have to be burdened by seeing your former mate with her new mate, nor do you have to feel as if the packs have unequal power. You'd be the only pack if you picked a new area, making yours the only one with power there."

At the mention of him having power, Morelli's eyes flared. "I'd have more territory than I have now?"

“Sure.” Lunai shrugged as if it was no big deal to give him more territory in another area. “I can make it so you have the most territory in whatever area you choose. You can be top dog there, but you have to stay there.”

Those words *top dog* appeared to stroke Morelli’s ego just right. He turned to face his wolves.

“What do you say, pack? Do the woods of Maine sound good to you?” he asked.

Howls erupted from his wolves that sounded like agreement to me.

He spun back around to face Lunai. “We’re in.” Morelli then spent a long moment looking at Selena and me before glancing Vera’s way. “What about you? You coming with me?”

“Do you *want* me to come with you?” She at least had enough self-esteem to sound a little jerked off at his tone.

Morelli looked back at Selena again, and I could tell he really wanted her.

Too fucking bad.

But why wouldn’t he want her? He’d probably regret his decision to fuck around with Vera for the rest of his pathetic life.

I kinda liked that punishment.

His gaze slid back to Vera. “Yeah, sure, I want you to come.”

Not the most heartfelt answer if you ask me, but Vera’s eyes brightened, and she ran to him, throwing her arms around him and shooting Selena a glance. The look was probably supposed to be an I-got-him victory look, but Selena leaned against me again as if she couldn’t care less where Vera or Morelli went.

God, I love her.

Lunai smiled broadly at me, approval clear in her eyes. *I knew you would.* She bowed her head at me then said to

Morelli, “Take the week to get organized, and I will show you and your pack to your new territory.”

Morelli nodded, then with a final look at Selena, he kissed Vera as if he was going to swallow her whole. The display was tasteless and immature, but Vera kissed him back with the same exhibitionist quality.

I looked at Selena, and she rolled her pretty brown eyes. Had I been in human form, I would have laughed. Instead, I settled for playfully nipping at her hip, making her laugh.

She lowered her face to my right ear, stroking it until a satisfied buzz vibrated in my throat. “That looks like bad porn,” she whispered. “Not at all like what you and I did in the shower.” She kissed right below my ear. “Not at all like what we’ll do again later.”

I pushed my nose right into her cleavage, reveling in the sound of her laughter again. With my wounds more healed now, I was eager to show her the full power of my love-making skills.

“One condition, Vincent,” Lunai said as his wolves vacated Sinclaire land.

He tore his mouth from Vera’s to look at the Moon Goddess, an eyebrow raised in a silent question.

Lunai motioned to my decimated packhouse. “You will pay for the rebuilding of what you’ve damaged here. You will also find a way to compensate Archer for the untimely loss of his father by your order.”

Morelli opened his mouth, no doubt to argue, but dark clouds suddenly filled the sky above us and a wild breeze whipped through the trees. Lunai’s dress flapped around her, the slapping sounding much like a cracking whip. The noise made me flinch as I remembered the silver whip’s sting against my flesh.

Selena circled her arms around my neck though, and that anxiety sifted right out of me.

“You will do as I command, wolf!” Lunai’s voice was low and, honestly, scary as shit. “Or I will command the Sinclaire

pack to obliterate yours, and your blood will become a permanent stain on this land!”

Morelli threw his hands up. “I’m sorry, Goddess. I will do as you say. Forgive me for my insolence.”

I was surprised Morelli knew a fancy word like *insolence*, but his submission appeased Lunai. The sun reappeared, and the wind calmed.

“Now go,” she ordered.

Morelli slung his arm around Vera and walked off in the direction his wolves had gone.

Vera, however, stooped and picked up the diamond earrings, pocketing them. She looked over her shoulder at Selena, a smug tilt to her lips, before wrapping her arm around Morelli’s waist and leaving with him. She honestly thought she was winning here. Morelli certainly didn’t seem like a great prize to me.

Or to Selena.

Lunai turned to us. “Your willingness to allow Vincent Morelli to live in the face of multiple attacks from him is a testament to your leadership, Archer Sinclair. You represent werewolves in the best light, and I know you will continue to do so.” She floated over and put her hand to Selena’s cheek. “Especially with a mate such as Selena at your side.”

I shifted to human, but it pulled a groan from me when pain from my back and wrist injuries flared up again. My wrists looked improved though, as I was sure my back did as well. I’d most likely be fine by nightfall.

“Thank you, Lunai.” I drew Selena to my side, loving the feel of her bare flesh against mine. “I’m not sure I deserve such a gift as this wolf right here, but I will enjoy every moment of having her as my mate.”

“And I’ll enjoy every moment of being your mate.” Selena pressed a kiss to my shoulder.

Lunai floated back toward the woods. “Enjoy being the top dogs of Moon Valley.” She disappeared in a mist that hung in

the treetops for a moment before dissipating completely.

I motioned to my wolves to come in close. After checking that they were all unharmed by the fire and fighting, we made a plan to assemble at my house to say a proper goodbye to my father. Thankfully, he had been taken to my house already, escaping the wrath of the fire at the packhouse.

As the group meandered to the path that led to my place, I nudged Selena into a walk behind them.

And I knew how I wanted to spend the hours after saying farewell to my father for good.

Chapter Eleven

Selena

Watching Archer and his packmates say goodbye to Pearce Sinclaire was just about the saddest thing I'd ever witnessed. Every person who approached the former Alpha where he rested on a bed of branches and leaves in Archer's backyard had tears in their eyes and many kind words to say about their heroic Alpha. I wished I'd had the chance to know the man and the wolf.

When it was Archer's turn at his father's side, he stood for several quiet moments, his hand tightly wrapped around mine. I didn't complain about the grip though. He needed someone to anchor him, and I was honored to be the person he'd chosen for the job.

"It's been just my father and me for the last twenty-five years," Archer said in a low, solemn voice. "As you know, my mother was called from this life when I was a pup. She went out protecting me from an angry bear, not hesitating to go up against something much bigger than her. She had the bravery that is characteristic of a Sinclaire pack member."

My free hand came to rest over our joined hands, and Archer looked down at me, his hazel eyes glistening in the light from the candles his pack held.

"My father had that same bravery," Archer said, "and though I know he would have preferred to meet his end in a more epic way and definitely not until he was at least over a hundred years old, his final moments were marked by the calm, level-headedness we've all come to expect from our Alpha." He took several steps closer to his father, tugging me along beside him. Leaning down, he pressed a kiss to his father's forehead, a single tear dropping from his eye and landing in the leaves. "I will do my very best to lead in a way that makes you proud, Dad."

On Archer's howl, everyone gathered around Pearce and threw their candles onto the branches and leaves. It didn't take

long for the pyre to go up in a blaze, surrounding Pearce and officially ending his time here on Earth.

In the next moment, all of Archer's packmates shifted and released howls into the fading daylight. The song was haunting, and though I'd been to a werewolf funeral before, I'd never felt the anguish of the attendees quite like I did right now. They'd lost their beloved Alpha, and though Archer was ready to lead and would be an amazing Alpha, Pearce was such a part of the Sinclaire pack that his presence would be missed forever.

Archer and I shifted as well, adding our howls to the pack's. When the funeral song was done, wolves took to the woods, returning to their own homes for the night. Archer and I sat by Pearce until the flames died out to nothing but glowing embers and ash. Then we shifted back to human and sat a little longer, huddled together for warmth in the crisp October night.

Soon the sun had gone completely, and the moon kissed the tops of the trees. Darkness surrounded us save for the one floodlight at the back of Archer's house behind us.

"Is it just me or was today the longest day in history?" Archer asked.

I puffed out a breath. "It certainly felt that way. A lot has happened in less than twenty-four hours."

Archer slid his arm along my bare shoulders and tucked me in closer. "You are by far the best thing that's happened to me in less than twenty-four hours." He kissed my temple, and that quick press of his lips to my skin heated me all over.

"Likewise." I turned my head and brushed my lips against his. "And you know, if you decide in the final week Vince and his pack have here in Moon Valley that you don't want to take the high road, I know where their packhouse is. I also know it was Anthony who had the whip in his hand when I came for you."

Archer contemplated my offer then he stood and pulled me to my feet. "That is all very tempting, but I'm ready to get

started on our future together. Let me show you to your new home and properly welcome you to it, my queen.”

I followed him to his house, loving the log cabin style of it. The thick logs lining the walls and the wide, hardwood planks on the floor made me feel as if we were still outside in the forest.

“This is beautiful, Archer.” I ran my fingers along the live edge countertop on the kitchen island.

He stood in front of me, completely naked, a true masterpiece of the male form. “I’ve always loved my home, but I love it even more with you inside it.”

“But will you feel the same when you have to make room in your closet for my clothes?”

Grinning, Archer grabbed my hand and pulled me down a long hallway to the master bedroom where a huge, king-sized bed conjured up images of all the things I wanted to do to Archer. He didn’t stop at the bed though. Instead, he led me to a set of double doors at the far end of the room. Opening them, he gestured for me to walk inside.

It was his closet. His closet where his clothes only took up a third of the massive space.

“As you can see,” he said, coming up behind me so his erection rubbed along my backside, “making room for you in my life will be absolutely no trouble at all.” He turned me to face him. “I’ve been waiting for you, Selena, my fated mate, my queen, my love. I didn’t realize it, but I have.” He cupped my cheek then slid his hand up into my hair, fisting some of it and craning my head back a bit so he could nip at my neck.

I let out a raspy sigh, letting my hands roam over the ridges of his abs as I backed him toward the bed. Halfway there, he picked me up and carried me the rest of the way, setting me down as if I was a special treasure he didn’t want to break.

After he turned on a bedside lamp, I pulled him down on top of me, happy we didn’t have to waste time getting out of

our clothes. His skin rubbing against mine was a glorious sensation, and we both let out needy moans.

“I don’t know how it’s possible to love someone so immediately,” Archer said, “but I do love you, Selena. So much.”

I ran my fingers through his short hair, scraping my nails along his scalp and loving how his eyes closed. “I love you too, Archer. This mating bond with you makes me feel as if a missing piece of my soul has finally been put in place.”

He lowered his head to my stomach, pressing a kiss to my navel. “I feel the same.”

I lifted my head to see his back. “Holy shit. All the wounds are closed on your back now. They’ll probably leave scars though. You’ll need to get those tattoos fixed.”

Archer shrugged one shoulder then took a gander at his wrists that appeared to be in the same stages of healing. “I hope you don’t mind a slightly-damaged mate.” He ran his nose along my hip, stopping to take little bites here and there then soothing the spot with his tongue.

I reached down and tilted his head so he’d look at me. “You’re hot no matter what.” I ran my fingers over the intact tattoos on his chest. “Maybe I need some of these too.”

Archer let out a low groan as he smoothed his hand along my side. “A tattoo would look so sexy on this flawless canvas. Let’s get matching ones.” His hazel eyes sparkled in the dim lamplight, making them look like sunshine filtered through green leaves.

“I would love matching tattoos.”

Then the time for talking was over, and Archer took my breast into his mouth, his tongue circling the sensitive flesh there until I ached all over for him. He gave my other breast the same attention while his roaming fingers found my core and tested its hot, wet depths.

On a groan, he slid down my body until his mouth was between my legs, licking me to the edge of control. I thrashed

beneath him, my moans mixing with my growls and low rumbles of approval sounding from him.

“Archer ...” I angled my hips up, seeking to have him plunge that skilled tongue deeper. “I need you inside me. Now.”

He crawled up the length of my body, letting his arousal chart its own trail along my skin. Capturing my mouth in an all-consuming kiss, he thrust into me and it was pure heaven, extreme bliss, everything I’d always wanted and so much more.

Archer slid in and out of me, sometimes increasing his pace and other times slowing down so it was sweet, sweet torture. He brought me to the edge, then held still, giving me the chance to recover slightly before going through the cycle again. I was insane with desire, and I loved every damn moment of it.

I panted Archer’s name over and over as he brought my body more pleasure than I thought was possible. As I spasmed around his length, he let out the sexiest growls. Right when we were both about ready to explode, I let my canines extend and sunk them into Archer’s shoulder.

He let out a ragged breath then his teeth pierced the curve of my neck, and with our jaws locked on each other, we erupted together. I swear I felt Archer’s very life force coursing through me as the orgasm stretched on.

And on.

And on.

With a hoarse, semi-howl of my name, Archer collapsed on top of me.

I wrapped my arms around him, laughing when he burrowed his head between my breasts, his short beard scraping pleasantly along my hyper-sensitive skin.

“My Alpha,” I whispered, squeezing him closer.

He kissed my collar bone then grinned up at me. “My queen.”

We held each other for a few quiet moments as we let our bodies come down from the high of our lovemaking. Archer slid off me, but he hooked his strong arm around my waist and pulled me into his side.

I cozied into the space. “This is where I’ve always belonged.”

“I’m glad you’re here,” Archer said. “But now that you’re an Alpha, you don’t actually need my protection anymore.”

I rested my hand on his cheek, letting my thumb coast over his tempting lips. “No. But I need *you*.”

Archer rose to his elbow then leaned over to capture my mouth in a kiss that made my time with Vince seem like an absolute joke. I’d been happy with Vince. I had.

But I hadn’t known that it could be like *this*. Like being so plugged into another person—another wolf—that our very heartbeats were in sync.

“I need you too,” Archer said when we came up for air. “I need you like I need oxygen in my lungs.” He popped off the bed, moving so gracefully for a man of his size, and waved a hand toward a set of French doors across the room. “And there’s no better oxygen than what those trees out there are making for us.” He tugged me off the bed then walked me over to the doors. Opening one, he said, “C’mon. Let’s wolf out and seal this pair bond for good, my queen.”

We both shifted and slipped out into the night.

I never expected to fall in love with a rival Alpha wolf, but Archer Sinclair’s love was the best thing that had ever happened to me.

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First Love

Chapter One

Amelia

Blood. Splattered everywhere. Normally, it didn't make me squeamish. Werewolves were no strangers to blood soaking their fur after a hunt. This blood, however, was the blood of my family, my friends, my pack. It flowed from their lifeless bodies in crimson streams that stained absolutely everything in range. It smelled of death, destruction . . . grief.

I stepped over the bodies of my fallen kin and companions, shuddering at the merciless slaughter they'd endured.

And I was to blame.

As a Scouter wolf, my job in the pack was to warn of any threats to our safety. I was good at my job too. Or I had been. Until today. I'd saved our pack, the Vanner pack, from rogue wolves, attempts to steal our territory, and challenges to Noah Vanner, our Alpha and my uncle. I'd received commendations for my expert handling of these threats, and Uncle Noah had come to rely on me.

Now I've let him down.

Let him down and cost him and our entire pack their lives. One missed threat and they were all gone. I was the only member of the Vanner pack that had survived the invasion from a nomad pack that had been wandering throughout the country. I'd heard the stories of their ruthlessness, seen images of the carnage they unleashed, but I'd had no indications we were this psycho-pack's next target.

I should have seen them coming.

What the fuck good was I as a Scouter if I hadn't been able to spare my pack—my beloved wolf brethren—from complete annihilation?

My job among the humans was with a landscape design company. I was the lead architect, creating landscape plans for homeowners and businesses. I loved this work, as evidenced by the long hours I spent at it. If I wasn't on a site, my own hands plunged into the soil or wielding a shovel, I was at my

house on my laptop, using various programs to assemble my designs. I lived and breathed flowers, bushes, trees, ornamental grasses, patio stone . . . I couldn't get enough of the endless combinations for creating outdoor beauty.

Sometimes, I let my obsession with work draw me away from werewolf business. I kept my eyes and ears and werewolf intuition tuned in so I could identify any threats to the pack.

Usually.

This last project, however, was a huge one. I'd been put in charge of landscaping for a new resort in Montana where I lived. It was the perfect job for me as I had infinite knowledge of the native plants of the area and knew exactly which ones would be both eye-catching and promote the relaxing energy the resort owners desired. There had been countless meetings and several reiterations of my designs. I did little else but work on this project.

Clearly, it had commandeered too much of my attention. I'd gotten wrapped up in human affairs too completely. I'd abandoned my duties, and my pack had paid for my neglect with their lives.

My paws were coated in their blood now as I searched for any sign that someone had survived. My nose told me no one had lived through this massacre though. I stopped at the body of Uncle Noah. His enormous black wolf form was draped over my cousin, Talia. He'd no doubt died trying to protect her.

Because I hadn't protected any of them.

Where had I been during this fatal battle? Knee-deep in soil, planting hydrangeas and waxing poetic about sustainable gardening. Meanwhile, the people—the wolves—who were most precious to me were being butchered.

I shifted to human and fell to my knees at Uncle Noah's body. I leaned over him, tears streaming down my cheeks. "I'm so sorry, Uncle Noah. So sorry."

I cried until howls erupted from the woods behind my uncle's house. That gypsy pack of wolves were claiming this

land as theirs. With no one to fight with me, I didn't stand a chance of surviving here in my Montana home anymore. Maybe I deserved to die with my pack though. It would be a fitting punishment. How could I move on without all of them?

More howls echoed, and my wolf survival instincts kicked in. My uncle wouldn't want me to bare my neck and let these other wolves take my life. I was positive he didn't go out that way. He went down fighting and protecting and being the fierce Alpha he'd always been. I had to live for him and all the other wolves that had fallen here today.

Grabbing a blanket off Uncle Noah's couch to cover my naked body, I made my way out of my uncle's house and dashed for my own next door. I dressed, packed a few essentials, and loaded my car. I spared some precious moments to set my uncle's house on fire. It wasn't the Alpha's funeral he had earned, but it would have to do.

With the howls of the invading pack growing louder, nearer, I hopped into my car and drove directly to the airport. I scanned the available flights and randomly chose one to Vermont. Still woodsy but far enough away from Montana that I'd be safe. I found my seat after stowing my bag. I immediately threw earbuds into my ears and plugged them into my phone. Hoping I'd established the international sign for *Don't Bug Me*, I pulled up the map of werewolf lands only werewolves had access to. I tapped Vermont and waited for the page to load while other passengers filled the plane.

I lucked out with an empty seat beside me and an old lady sitting in the aisle seat of my row. She'd only nodded at me so far. I took that to mean she understood my desire to be left the fuck alone.

On my phone, several names of werewolf packs filled the screen.

Romeros

Fergusons

Leonas

Sinclaires

I studied the numbers of each and determined the Sinclair pack was the largest in Vermont. Actually, it was the largest in New England. That was exactly the protection I needed right now. I'd seek out their Alpha, explain my situation. With any luck, he'd agree to take me in. It wouldn't be the same as having my family pack, but it was better than going the way of the lone wolf. I wasn't cut out for that shit. I needed a pack.

Glancing out the plane's window, I bid a silent farewell to the only home I'd ever known. My heart would always be in the Montana woods with all of my packmates. I hoped the land that wandering pack stole from my family was overrun in poisonous plants and hungry predators that would decimate those greedy wolves. The death of each of those asshole wolves, however, couldn't make up for what I'd lost today.

I rested my head on the back of the seat and closed my eyes. My earbuds were in, but nothing was coming through them so I could still hear what was happening around me. Somewhere nearby a baby cried. Another child chattered on about his new puppy. Laughter sounded behind me.

Then I felt a tap on my forearm. I opened my eyes and found the woman in the aisle seat hesitantly smiling at me. Reluctantly, I pulled out one earbud.

"I wanted to tell you that you have the most gorgeous hair, honey." She beamed me another smile, this one big and crinkling the skin at the corners of her eyes.

"Thanks." I fingered my long, golden-blond waves. It wasn't the first time I'd received such a compliment. Even in wolf form, my hide was a similar color with a slight ripple to it on my hind quarters.

"Traveling all alone?" she asked.

If she only knew how alone. "Yes."

"Me too. I visited my sister who lost her husband last week." She shook her head, her brows lowered and those eye crinkles long gone now. "Damn cancer."

I gave her a sympathetic look. I'd seen the damage cancer had done in the human population. Fortunately as a werewolf,

I was immune to such things.

Not immune to being wiped out by enemy packs though.

Every species had its darkness.

“Have you been to Vermont before?” the woman asked.

I shook my head. “This is my first time.” My first time anywhere. I’d lived my whole life in Montana. Never had any reason to be anywhere else until now.

“You’re going to love it.” The woman’s smile was back. “I’ve lived there for fifty-five years and wouldn’t dream of living anywhere else in the world.”

I hadn’t dreamed of living anywhere besides Montana, but things changed when you let your pack get killed. My eyes stung over that thought so I plugged my earbud back into my ear and turned my head to look out the window, effectively stopping further conversation with the woman.

The flight lasted forever, especially because I couldn’t take a nap. Not when every time I closed my eyes, the scattered, broken bodies of my pack haunted me. Those images were sure to stay with me for the rest of my life, which unfortunately was longer than the human lifespan.

Unless I was attacked by enemy wolves, of course.

When we finally landed, I grabbed my bag and followed the other passengers off the plane. I shuffled along with them until I reached the car rental area. After securing a vehicle, I turned on its navigation system and punched in Moon Valley, Vermont. It didn’t take long for me to be flying north on I-91 toward my destination.

I stopped at the first source of food I found once I hit the small town. A little burger joint that claimed to have “The Best Burgers This Side of Burlington.” I immediately missed my favorite burger joint back home in Montana, but the bacon-loaded burger and sweet potato fries the waitress brought me did wonders to alleviate that homesickness.

At least a little.

I devoured the burger and the fries and guzzled two ginger ales. The waitress asked if she could get me anything else.

“You wouldn’t happen to know anyone with the last name Sinclaire, would you?” I asked.

The woman grinned. “Oh, if you mean Archer Sinclaire, Moon Valley’s hottest firefighter, then yes, I know someone with the last name Sinclaire.” She fanned her face with her order pad. “I’ve actually considered setting this place on fire a few times just to get him to bring that fine ass and all that tattooed muscle over here.”

Okay, then. “So I can probably find him at the fire station?”

“What’s today?” She looked up to the ceiling. “Wednesday, right? Wednesday is his day off, but someone at the station will know how to find him.”

“Thanks.” I paid my bill and headed back out to my rental car only to find it not where I’d parked it. I hit the alarm button on the keychain, but no warning siren answered back. After searching the lot, car by fucking car, I trudged back into the restaurant.

“Forget something?” The same waitress glanced back at the booth where I’d been sitting.

“Only to lock the doors on my rental car. Someone lifted it from the parking lot.”

“Dammit.” She pounded a fist onto the hostess podium. “That’s the third car this week to get stolen from here. Was it a gray SUV?”

“It was.”

“This thief apparently has a hard-on for gray SUVs.” She shook her head. “I’m sorry. I can give you the sheriff’s number, but don’t hold your breath. None of the previously stolen SUVs have been recovered.”

I took the number, relieved when the waitress told me the fire station was within walking distance. Fortunately, the spring weather was mild and werewolves rarely got cold

anyway. I hiked my purse onto my shoulder and headed for the fire station.

“Sinclair took off for a few days,” the fire chief told me when I inquired about Archer. “He lost his father and got married all in the span of a few days back in October. He went on a little honeymoon because he didn’t get the chance to in the fall. He’s scheduled to be back at work on Monday.”

Monday? What the hell was I supposed to do until then?

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About the Author

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

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

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

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