Dedication

To all my fans who took a chance on my second wolf series and supported me. And to my editor, Christa, who laughs “with” me, supports me, and makes me better every day, even when the subject isn’t related to editing!

Chapter One

"…smoke and debris…falling…twenty percent…blowing east…as the sun rises…" Jaxon stiffened in frustration as he tweaked the dial on the ham radio to get better reception. No matter how slight his movement, he couldn't get the connection to come in more clearly. *"…flames…caves…can only hope…"*

He jerked when the back door flung open. He released his hold on the dial and flexed his fingers as he turned to gaze over his shoulder. Sergius, his oldest brother, crossed the kitchen, his brow furrowed. "Anything new?"

"No." He shook his head. "Unfortunately, I can't even get a good connection. But it doesn't sound good. The fire isn't contained, that's for sure."

Sergius plopped in a chair across from Jaxon. "If they don't get that fire under control soon, it's going to encroach on a few properties to the east."

"I was thinking the same thing. And the weather isn't cooperating one bit."

Sergius's mate, Juliana, padded into the room and wrapped herself around her husband from behind before jumping back a few inches. "What's the temperature out there?"

"It's not *that* cold." Sergius cupped his palms to his mouth and blew into the space to warm them. "Sorry." He rubbed them on his jeans next. "It's just early. It'll warm up later."

"Early?" Juliana raised an eyebrow at him. "Babe, I know we've been married for several months, but I still don't call this butt-crack of dawn *early*. I'm gonna have to refer to any time this much before the sun rises as *late yesterday*, not *early today*. In ten years I'll never get used to the hours you keep on this farm." She smiled and took a seat at the table, reaching for the steaming mug of coffee she'd prepared like every other morning in an attempt to rise with Sergius and his brothers.

Jaxon watched the two interact in amusement. He didn't have a mate of his own, so he couldn't really relate, but it fascinated him how they read each other's minds and spoke in partial sentences. Sure, Jaxon and his brothers could also communicate telepathically, but the men didn't have the same level of connection as mates seemed to have. Sergius stared at Juliana, brow furrowed, not saying a word.

Finally, he spoke. "Speaking of brothers, Micah will be in soon. We'll call the sheriff if he doesn't call us first."

Juliana glared at him, her eyes scrunched in mock disapproval. "How many times have I told you to at least keep it to yourself when you read my mind? It's disconcerting to know I can't block my thoughts from you yet."

Sergius stood and kissed Juliana. "It'll come in time."

The screen door flew open once again and Micah entered, bringing with him a draft of cold air and a swirl of fall leaves. He stomped his boots on the doormat. "Any news?"

"I can't get a good signal this morning." Jaxon motioned to the table and stood to grab mugs and the full steaming pot of coffee. "It does seem to be blowing toward the east still, but that's about all I could discern."

Jaxon flinched and nearly spilled his coffee when the two-way radio on the counter beeped. "I'll get it." He dove for the receiver and pressed the button on the side. "Jaxon here. What's the latest, Hardin?"

James Hardin was the local sheriff and one of the few people who knew the Durham brothers were wolves. Any time an issue arose, Hardin called on them to help. Usually a missing hiker. But you never could tell what might happen with a wildfire raging out of control in the Smokies.

After two days, they were all on edge. Worry about stranded hikers trapped among the flames made it impossible to relax. No one was supposed to be in the area of the fire, but people always seemed to gravitate toward danger.

"Jaxon. Glad I caught you," the sheriff shouted into the ham radio, the distress clear in his voice. "A firefighter got trapped. He's missing on the southwest side of the flames. I'm hoping he got backed into a cave along that stretch and is hunkered down. The firefighters are not capable of a rescue. The flames are too close to the entrance. I don't have any more details. The communication with the chief was choppy."

"Got it. We're on our way." Jaxon set the receiver down and reached for the pouch he kept ready at all times on a hook by the back door. Each brother had one filled with essentials they would need. In wolf form they could easily carry the bag in their teeth and then have the meager supplies when they shifted.

Unease crept up Jaxon's neck as he headed for the door, his brothers on his heels.

Fires brought danger to everyone in the vicinity. Controlled fires they were used to. Lightning fires happened frequently also. This one had undoubtedly been caused by lightning, but with the conditions unfavorable, urgency filled his steps.

Juliana followed them to the door. "Please be careful."

Sergius kissed the top of her head and squeezed her tight. "We will, hon. Try not to worry. I'll call you as soon as I can."

Jaxon stared back as his brother's mate as they left the house. "Lock the door," he muttered. Something about this fire had him tensing his entire frame.

They'd all been living on pins and needles since May when Sergius had rescued Juliana from the forest. That fateful day *she'd* been a lost hiker. But she hadn't gotten into that position on her own. She'd been lured off the path by Keeton McKinney—vampire, and bane of their existence.

Jaxon and his brothers had chased McKinney off their land and he hadn't been heard from in months. Who knew when the vamp would resurface?

Jaxon pulled the truck to a stop as close as he could get to the location Hardin had provided. Luckily the fire was still blowing in an easterly direction, and they were able to park along the road to the west of the fire less than a mile from the line of small cave entrances the sheriff hoped the missing firefighter was holed up in.
Usually when the brothers searched for a missing person their information was more vague. Almost always they were given some articles of clothing to scent before they shifted and took off in wolf form.
Today was a different mission. Jaxon was going to have to pick up the trail of a random human. He wouldn't have any personal items to smell beforehand. Any human in this area of the woods right now would be in dire straits anyway and in need of rescue. All they could do was pray the firefighter had indeed ducked into a cave for cover to await rescue. There were only about six entrances in this vicinity.
How the hell the Durhams were going to explain their kind of rescue was another story altogether. They'd have to cross that bridge when they came to it.
As Jaxon jumped down from the truck, he shielded his eyes from the smoke-filled air.
"Shall we split? I'll take the southern end. Micah, you take the central caves. And Serg, you wanna take the northern two?" Jaxon stripped his clothes and stuffed them in his pack while he spoke. His brothers followed suit. There was no time to waste. Besides, it was fucking cold. He didn't want to stand around chatting in human form one second longer than necessary.
Both brothers nodded assent and in moments they were shifted and running. The temperature was in the low forties this early in the morning. If the fireman had been trapped for more than a few hours, he'd be getting awfully cold.
I hope the man's fire gear is warm. Jaxon bolted through the trees, aiming for the flames. In his wolf form he could race through the fire…as long as there was an opening. He didn't relish the idea of singeing his fur, but he could dodge almost anything with relative speed when necessary.
As Jaxon approached the back side of the fire, he tested the charred ground with his paw and found it to be cool enough to trod upon, at least in this section. The fire must have gone through this area a while ago.
Jaxon stared into the distance to assess the situation. The wind had shifted, undoubtedly trapping the firefighters on the other side of the blaze against the long ridge of mountains. He'd have to dodge the flames to get to the caves hugging the side of the mountain.
It could be done. He was fast and he could jump.
Jaxon approached cautiously, wary of the temperature of the ground and the unpredictability of the fire. The heat grew intense as he got closer. The smoke shortened his visibility. The distinct crackle of branches snapping from the trees and tumbling to the ground reminded him of giant drops of rain in a downpour. How ironic since rain would be a welcome blessing and the polar opposite of the intense heat currently destroying the forest floor.
If there was a firefighter trapped on the other side of these flames, it appeared increasingly unlikely the guy would still be alive. Jaxon inhaled around the pack he held between his teeth and shook the thought from his head. The only thing worse than finding a hiker who didn't make it would be finding the charred remains of a firefighter.
Jaxon jumped back and forth, weaving across the ruined black kindling of the forest until he came to the very edge of the section where he could reasonably stand in one spot without burning his paws. Could he even get through? And was it even worth it? What were the chances someone was alive on the other side?
More importantly, could he not? And the answer to that was glaring. If there was even a fireball's chance in hell someone was alive in one of those caves, he needed to get there…and fast.
Spotting a break between two lines of flames, Jaxon seized the opportunity and dodged forward. Less than fifty yards separated him from the other side. He had to take his chances. Worst case scenario, he suffered a few burns. It would be worth it. He was fast. It took little time to reach the bed of dry leaves on the other side. Couldn't have been too long because he'd held his breath the entire time. Except for a few singed hairs here and there, he was unscathed.
A glance down at the forest floor saddened Jaxon. The fall leaves still crinkled beneath his paws. Blades of dying grass fluttered in the breeze as though begging to be rescued from the inferno creeping toward them. A chill went down his spine. What a strange morbid thought, as though the grass and weeds had actual feelings of despair…fear.
Time to move. He too was in danger of the flames he'd just leaped from. If he wasn't fast, he'd be trapped himself. In fact, a glance behind him proved he might be anyway.
Lifting his nose to the air, Jaxon attempted to track the scent of a human. Nothing. Not surprising. Under these conditions, any scent that might have lingered in the air probably had been wiped away by the fire.
Caves. Two of them loomed ahead of him. Jaxon darted toward the first. He knew these caves. He'd explored the entire area in wolf form since moving here ten years ago. Very little of this forest was a mystery to him.
The cave he approached was small, but could be used as refuge in an emergency. And this more than constituted an emergency.

"I've crossed the line of flames and I'm entering the first cave," he communicated with Sergius and Micah as he darted toward the opening in the mountain.
"Got it. I'm about to cross now." Micah spoke into Jaxon's mind.
"Nothing this far north. I've been in. Good luck to you two. I'll double back that direction in case you need me." Sergius sounded bereft even through their connection.
Locking his gaze and attention on the opening between the rocks, Jaxon jumped over a few downed trees and bounded into the first cave.
Darkness consumed him, but it would be momentary. His eyes would adjust to the lack of light. In no time he'd see almost as well as outside. One of the perks of being lupine. He saw fantastically in the night.
Dropping the pouch from his mouth, Jaxon lifted his head and took a deep breath. Immediately he dropped his gaze and blinked. His eyes burned from the smoke he'd run through. His vision had not yet cleared.
He panted, letting his tongue hang out. One thing was clear. There was most assuredly a human in this cave. And…that human was his mate.
Jaxon couldn't move. He couldn't see yet either. And that aggravated him more than anything. His ears were ringing, keeping him from concentrating.
Was his mate the missing firefighter? A man?
He backed up a step. Took several short breaths. His head twitched back and forth as though in denial. He couldn't stop it. He'd never once considered himself attracted to men. Maybe there was a woman in the cave also? Another deep inhale.
Nope, one scent. Faint, but just the one. Not particularly identifiable.
God, let there be someone else hiding in a cave today besides a fireman.
A missing hiker? What were the chances?
His vision began to clear. He blinked back the smoky film causing him to squint and stepped farther into the cave.
Do I have some latent subconscious tendencies toward men I was unaware of? Why on earth would my mate be a man?
A gasp made him jerk his gaze to the left. Movement. Shuffling. Deep wheezing breaths. A flash of yellow. More movement. Scampering.
Jaxon approached gingerly. His paws made almost no sound as he inched forward. He stopped.
The fireman sat, hunkered really, against the wall. His boots scraped the hard-packed ground in front of him in desperation as if he could perhaps push himself through the solid rock behind his back if he could get enough purchase.
Jaxon tipped his head to one side. His brain scrambled. The fireman was covered from head to toe with flame-retardant clothing. Soot covered the yellow, almost completely obscuring any evidence of color. Even his face was covered—goggles, a mask, helmet.
No wonder Jaxon could barely scent the man.
He hesitated. Considered running from his destiny. What the hell was he going to tell his brothers? His mate was a fireman? Could he be mistaken?
Shit. Jaxon suddenly focused on his error. He was in wolf form. The guy was fucking petrified because a goddamn wolf had entered his hideout. Jaxon had been so focused on finding evidence of a human in the area, he hadn't thought further. Adrenaline pumping, he'd concentrated only on the remote hope someone was alive in this cave.
And here he was, standing on four paws, staring down a fireman as though he intended to eat him.
Jaxon shivered, shook his entire body as he would after being caught in the rain.
He had to shift before the man had a heart attack. This wasn't the way he ever planned to reveal himself to anyone. Hell, he'd never shifted in front of another human in his life, with the exception of Sergius's mate, Juliana.
It couldn't be helped. And besides, whatever weirdness fate had in store for him right now, he might as well get the whole I'm-a-wolf-shifter-and-you'll-have-to-get-over-it thing out of the way now.
Jaxon didn't take his eyes off the frightened firefighter. Bones popped, limbs lengthened, hair receded. In moments Jaxon stood before the man, naked…and human.
The fireman didn't move a muscle. He appeared to not even be breathing.
Jaxon cleared his throat. "Sorry. There was no other way." He knelt in front of the man and held his hands out, palms up. What difference did it make that he was naked? It wasn't as though the guy hadn't seen a cock before…
"I think you can breathe in here right now. The air isn't too bad." Jaxon reached for the man's protective helmet with slow calculated movements. He didn't want to scare the guy to death, but he did want to see what was under the hardhat.
Jaxon's hand shook more than he would have liked as he tugged the helmet off. "I didn't mean to…reveal myself like that. I wasn't thinking when I came barreling in here looking for you. I—"
Jaxon froze with the helmet held in midair. *Holy mother of God*.

Suddenly the firefighter wasn't the only one not breathing. Jaxon could feel his heart beating, but he didn't think he'd ever be able to inhale again in this lifetime.

Long blond curls fell from the helmet seemingly in slow motion. They cascaded down until they sprang back, bouncing as though they belonged in a photo shoot for some feminine shampoo. Emphasis on the word feminine.

The helmet slipped from Jaxon's fingers and landed on the hard ground with a loud clatter. He swallowed. His mouth opened and closed, but no words came out.

Synapses fired from one side of his head to the other as he made sense of the picture in front of him.

This was no fire*man*. This was a woman.

And she still wasn't breathing. And his dick thanked God *she* was a *she* and sprang to life. And, oh…he was naked.

Jaxon licked his lips and reached for her protective goggles. His hands shook considerably more than they had moments ago as he lifted the eyewear off her face and stared into her deep blue eyes. Huge eyes. Frightened eyes.

"Oh, God. I thought…" Jaxon let the goggles fall from his hand. A lock of silky hair caught in his fingers and he let the tresses dangle between them as they cascaded to her shoulders.

He let go with a start, as though she'd shocked him. "Wow, umm…" He abruptly stood and turned away.

Hastily he retraced his steps back to the entrance to the cave. Hands trembling, he grabbed his pack and yanked it open. His fingers quickly found his jeans. He shook the denim free of the pouch and stepped into them with more haste than he'd ever donned clothing in his life. In fact, he hobbled a bit on each leg as he tried to maintain his balance on one foot and then the other. His cock grew larger by the second, knowing his mate sat behind him. Jaxon didn't bother with the button. The partially raised zipper would have to suffice for now.

When he turned back around he found his mate still sitting in the same spot. He doubted she'd even blinked yet. Soot covered her face, having found its way in between the edges of her helmet and mask. The only clean area was the figure-eight space where the goggles had rested.

Jaxon approached slower this time. "Sorry for the…" God, what was he supposed to say? *Sorry to shift in front of you? Sorry I was naked? Sorry to inform you we are destined to spend our lives together?*

Chapter Two

Brianna White stared at the man in front of her, unable to move a muscle. Was it possible she'd actually perished in the fire instead of escaping into this cave? Or better yet, perhaps she died of smoke inhalation or something after entering the cave.

Seemed plausible when she considered the god of a man who'd suddenly appeared naked before her very eyes. Surely, she'd been good enough on earth for God to have given her such a gift upon entering heaven. She certainly deserved such a gift after the last several years of celibacy she'd endured trying to make something of herself as a firefighter.

The work was tough, but it had been her dream, and no man was going to stand between her and her dream.

On the other hand, if this was heaven, why was she still in the cave, a haze of smoke smearing her view? And why was she still encumbered with full fire gear, hot, tired and thirsty?

Brianna swallowed the lump in her throat. She closed her eyes as the sexy man approached her for the second time, this time wearing low-slung jeans that had been made to fit his exact body. They hung open in front just enough to glimpse the dusting of sexy brown hair she'd witnessed in its entirety moments before.

She silently wished he'd remained nude. It was her heaven after all. She hadn't ordered the bronzed, muscular male specimen to get dressed.

He hunched down in front of her as her gaze wandered from his torso to his deep brown eyes. Concern furrowed his brow. "You okay?"

He didn't touch her this time.

She had a fleeting thought she should reach out and grasp him, just to prove he was real and not a figment of her imagination.

On second thought, now that her mind was clearing, maybe it wasn't such a good idea. He certainly had to be all in her head. This was indisputable since she'd also witnessed him change from a wolf to a man.

Brianna licked her lips. "Fine." How did one address the first ghost they met after death?

"I'm really sorry about…everything," the man repeated for the third time. He waved his hand around behind him as though to encompass all activities of the past few minutes. "I've never done anything like that before… I mean not in front of anyone. I wasn't thinking straight. Your scent threw me off my game." He smiled, a wry grin that lifted only one side of his mouth.

Sure, that explained everything.

"My scent?" What was he babbling about? Smoke?

The man leaned forward, his chest muscles straining and bulging inches from her. He inhaled deeply and his eyes fluttered closed for a moment.

"You don't know how happy I am you're a woman."

What? Was this man on drugs? Maybe she'd hit her head and wasn't even dead yet, just concussed.

"Excuse me?" Brianna shook her head to clear her mind. Nothing happened.

"I'm Jaxon. Jaxon Durham. Not like Michael Jackson. J-A-X-O-N." He reached toward her but not with the intention of shaking her hand in introduction. Instead he gently wiped the side of her face with his fingers.

The moment he made contact with her skin, Brianna sucked in a ragged breath. Warmth filled her, not just where he touched, but her entire body, as though she were…home.

I must be dead.

"Am I dead?"

Jaxon startled, his gaze jerking from her cheek to her eyes. "No. You're perfectly safe. Are you injured?" Without warning, he reached with both hands and began to run them up her arms to her shoulders. Even through the layers of protective clothing she wore, she could feel his touch.

Confusion over her body's response to this Jaxon character made her shake free of his clutch. The more he touched her, the more she wanted him to continue. She stood abruptly and backed against the rough wall of the cave.

Smoke was filling the cave entrance now and visibility was growing poor.

Brianna immediately regretted standing. Had she learned nothing in the fire academy? Rule number one: always stay low. She coughed and covered her mouth with one hand to block the smoke.

"I'm fine." She glanced around.

"We need to move farther into the cave." Jaxon stood and turned back toward the entrance. She could barely see him now, but he returned in seconds, holding a pack. "The wind must have shifted. Let's go." He took her by the arm and pulled her toward the back of the cave.

He was right. But she didn't know what was worse—taking her chances against the smoke at the mouth of the cave or following this man whom she would swear had entered as a wolf.

What did it matter really? Either way, she was fucked. None of the choices really made any sense, so what could it hurt to get away from the smoke? She'd either died in the fire, died in the cave or lost her mind.

Wait, there was still the possibility she was dreaming. Brianna smiled as she followed the stranger deeper into the cave. *That* she could live with.

The haziness of the smoke was nothing compared to the darkness that enveloped them as soon as they turned

a corner.
Brianna would have grabbed her flashlight from her pocket, but Jaxon stopped abruptly anyway and tugged her to sit on the ground.
“I think we’re okay here for the time being.” He coughed. In fact, he started a fit of coughing that wouldn’t stop for several seconds.
Well, that shoots that idea out of the water. She couldn’t be dead. No way would a ghost react to smoke like that.
“Sorry. Between the smoke I ran through and the smoke filling the entrance, I think I’ve reached my limit.” He coughed again.
“Are *you* okay?” It was her turn to be concerned.
She couldn’t see him, not even a glimpse, but she held on to his arm like a lifeline. “Stay low.” The smoke didn’t seem to be reaching this far inside.
“What’s your name?”
“Brianna.” She let her hand rest on his forearm, but he untangled himself from her grasp and took her hand in his.
“Nice to meet you, Brianna. You must be extremely confused.”
“Nope. This shit happens to me every day,” she lied.
“I don’t mean about the fire. I’m talking about me shifting in front of you like that.”
“Pardon?” *Shifting?*
“I know you watched me shift. I could feel your fear. In fact, you are still trembling.” Jaxon laid his free hand on her knee and squeezed. “I’m a shapeshifter. It’s a long story, but I swear I won’t hurt you. Please don’t be afraid.”
“Shapeshifter?” This guy was crazy. A crazy ghost in her own personal crazy hell. *Shit*. That must be it. She wasn’t in heaven at all.
“I can shift into wolf form. That’s how I dodged the flames. I came in here in my animal form.” Jaxon reached for her face, though she had no idea how he could so specifically lay his palm on her cheek in this darkness.
His touch soothed. It shouldn’t, but it did.
Brianna leaned into his hand against her better judgment. No matter what the hell was happening, she felt no fear of him. One of them was delusional, but she didn’t think he was harmful.
“You are far too calm.” He chuckled, the vibrations radiating through his fingers to send a chill down her spine.
“Your pulse isn’t even accelerated anymore.” He grazed his thumb across the vein in her neck.
“Why wouldn’t I be? It won’t change anything. I’m either dead and you are one freaky-ass ghost, or I’m unconscious and you are the best wet dream a girl could conjure up in even her wildest imagination.” Brianna bit her lip. Why’d she have to go and admit all that?
Jaxon laughed hard, so hard he started coughing again. When he finally caught his breath, he pulled her head against his chest. His bare chest. Warm…smooth…hard…bare chest. She inhaled his masculine scent and the soap he’d used long before racing through the flames to get to her.
She couldn’t believe she’d been so brazen.
Jaxon pulled her into the V between his legs and wrapped his arms around her. She was burning. The cave was getting hotter by the minute and she had on way too many clothes.
Brianna wiggled free of his embrace, leaned forward and tugged her fire coat off. She dropped the jacket on the ground beside them and leaned back into Jaxon’s embrace. Why not? “It’s getting hot in here.”
“I’m not complaining.” He chuckled again and leaned his chin against her shoulder. His breath came in short pants against her neck, so close she thought he would kiss her.
Jaxon ran his hands up and down her arms. His fingertips sent sparks up her arms and then down her torso.
She only had her thermal shirt on now. It hadn’t occurred to her until then how exposed she’d be to his touch when she removed the jacket.
Shit, she wasn’t even wearing a bra. Women couldn’t wear any underwires in a fire for fear of burns, and she hadn’t bothered with a sports bra this time. She’d been in a hurry. And lately she’d been so damn fit, her body weight so low, she was more muscle than fat. She didn’t exactly have flabby breasts hanging down that needed to be lifted.
Suddenly she felt rather naked. As though her thoughts alone had caused the next event, Jaxon’s fingers grazed the edge of her breasts. He froze, sucked in a breath and stayed right in that position with the tips of his fingers ever so lightly resting against her chest.
Brianna’s breathing, in contrast, came in heavy pants. Her nipples jumped to attention. She wanted him to reach around and grasp them with both palms so badly she willed it. It was her dream, after all. If she wanted the man in question to fondle her tits, he would.
But he didn’t. Goose bumps rose all over her skin.
“God, you’re sexy.” Jaxon’s words came out on his exhale. His breath blew across her neck and sent a new shiver down her body. This time she physically shook.
She reached with her own hands to grasp his on her biceps. Did she mean to keep him there? Push him away?

Tug him around to continue this dream?
She had no idea.
Jaxon kissed her neck, sweet little nibbles that made a path to her ear. “I’m one lucky wolf. Thank God for female firefighters.”
“What if I had been a man?” she joked. “Would you have left me for dead?”
“No…but I was worried.”
“About what?” What difference did it make?
“When I scented you as soon as I entered the cave, I knew—”
“Knew what?” she interrupted. He wasn’t making any sense.
“Knew you were my…mate.” He leaned his chin on her shoulder again. “It’s complicated. But I’ll try to explain.”
“Please do.” She spoke in jest, uneasy with this line of discussion, but somehow not afraid. No matter what weird stuff he said, she still felt some sort of draw to him. And why not humor the man? She had nothing but time. Might as well enjoy her dream, her death or her concussion to its fullest. The man’s voice was deep and warm and sexy. She could listen to him all day.
“Wolves mate for life. When we find the one, we instinctively know it. We don’t normally spill all our cards quite like this—shifting and blurting out all the details so quickly. After all, most women would run screaming.” He kissed her neck again.
“I don’t presently have any place to be.” *Nor could I if I wanted to*.
“Love your sense of humor.” He grinned against her neck. “Anyway, I guess the smoke and your suit masked your scent enough that I knew you were my mate, but I still assumed you were a man.” He squeezed her arms, his fingers so close to her chest. “No offense. I have nothing against female firefighters, I just…”
“None taken.” She wanted to hear the rest of this. Was her mind spinning this tale?
“I wasn’t exactly doing jumping jacks when I found I’d met my mate and it was a man.” He took a deep cleansing breath. “I’m over-the-top relieved to find you are actually as female as they come.”
A pause filled the smoky air. Was the smoke penetrating their new spot too?
“So let me get this straight. You are actually a wolf. And you believe I’m somehow your destiny?”
“Exactly. Well, except for the part about me believing it to be true. There’s no doubt. You’re mine, Brianna.”
He said her name like she was the sexiest creature on earth, and for a moment she let the word ring through her head.
So possessive. And why did that make her even hornier?
His story was farfetched at best, and the entire time he’d spoken she’d grown hotter for him. Her pussy clenched inside her thermals and the fire pants she still wore. Was she actually wet, or was she sweating profusely in the heat?
This was certainly the most convoluted dream she’d ever had. Aside from romance books, had she ever even daydreamed about the paranormal?
She decided to change the subject. “Did you stumble upon me in this cave or specifically come searching for me?”
“I was looking for you. We knew a firefighter was missing and hoped he—or in this case she—had found refuge in one of the caves along this ridge.”
“We? Are there others out searching?”
“Not anymore. My brothers were looking also. We’d split up and each took a section of caves. Now that I’ve found you, they can retreat.”
“Except they don’t know you found me.”
“They do.” He inhaled. “We can communicate…telepathically.”
Oh, great. So now she was sitting in the dark in the embrace of a man who was a wolf, claimed she belonged to him and could communicate telepathically.
And her damn pussy *still* leaked. She squirmed.
“I know it’s a lot to take in all at once.”
“Ya think?” She stiffened, wishing for all the world her body would stop responding to him—his touch, his smell, the deep timbre of his voice.
Both of them coughed at once. Jaxon choked a bit before regaining his ability to breathe. Unease crept up Brianna’s spine. Why would they both be continually interrupted by fits of coughing in a dream or in line at the pearly gates?
“We need to move again. Too much smoke.” Brianna reached for her belt, searching for her flashlight. She carried an arsenal of necessities around her waist. Regardless of her current mental state, instinct told her to move.
Jaxon gripped her shoulders. “We can’t. We’re sort of trapped.”
“How do you know? It’s pitch black in here. There could be ten tunnels reaching in deeper.” Grasping the object of her search, Brianna flipped the switch and the cavern lit up. Well, lit up was a bit of an overstatement considering the glare she now stared at amongst the smoke.
Nevertheless, she aimed the light all around them and finally spotted a section of the cave large enough to

accommodate them. “This way.” She nodded in the direction of the beam of light and then glanced back at Jaxon.
His tan skin had grown pale and he shook his head. “Too small.” He glanced around. “Maybe if we stay low in that corner.” He pointed to the left.
“Are you crazy? That opening is plenty big and we aren’t safe here. We have no choice but to try it.” Who was saving whom?
Time was running out. Brianna took Jaxon by the arm and tugged him toward the opening. She grabbed her jacket, slipped her arms inside, put her helmet back on her head and flipped on the headlamp.
Perfect. Now her hands were free and she could dig into the recesses of her brain for all the training she’d gotten with regard to spelunking.
Crouching low, Brianna tucked her flashlight back in her belt and turned toward Jaxon. He hadn’t moved. “Don’t tell me my wolf in shining armor who can read minds and apparently see in the dark is afraid of tight spaces.” She laughed, but then her face fell. It was true. He was white as a sheet. Her helmet light made him squint.
Great.
“Let’s go. Grab your pack and follow me. I won’t let anything happen to you.” She crawled forward. He didn’t follow.
“Yeah…no. I’m sorry, but I don’t do caves. It’s absurd really, but true. I’m going to have to shift.”
“Shift?” *Into wolf form?* She’d hoped that was all in her imagination. Even though she’d seen it and he’d confirmed it verbally, she still wasn’t a believer.
“I’ll lead. I won’t be able to communicate with you since we aren’t mated yet, but you can follow me. I have a great sense of space, even better in wolf form.”
“Fine.” Why she was agreeing she had no idea. Whatever it took to get out of the smoke was fine with her. Her eyes burned. Her throat felt raw. She couldn’t see more than a few inches now.
And additionally, she was doubting her sanity.
She watched, blinking, as Jaxon stuffed his pants back into his pack. As though watching a horror film, her eyes remained pinned to him as he dropped to all fours and shifted. Small pops made her flinch as his bones changed structure. Fur pushed out of his skin. It lasted only a few seconds. A large gorgeous wolf stood before her.
He glanced at her, cocked his head and nodded toward the narrow opening in the cave. Grabbing his pouch with his teeth, he led her to the slit in the stone wall.
Brianna was stunned. Her heart beat rapidly, but she didn’t pause. There wasn’t time. The air was thick with smoke. She’d pass out soon if she didn’t move.
With her headlamp pinned to Jaxon’s tail, she stayed right behind him, crawling through narrow gaps, some of which were barely wide enough to accommodate either of them. Finally, they emerged into a large space.
Brianna breathed a sigh of relief. Oxygen filled her lungs.
How long would it last? Would they have to venture even deeper?
She plopped down on her butt and reached for the canteen attached to her center with all her other supplies.
A deep gulp of water cleared her throat.
She closed her eyes for a moment. They burned.
A popping noise made her flinch and when she opened her eyelids, she found a naked Jaxon standing inches from her once again.
“That’s amazing.” She didn’t take her gaze off his cock. Even under the stress of this crazy situation, he was aroused, hard and ready. And she found herself wanting to touch him. Feel all that maleness wrapped in her palm.
What if this is real?
“Thank you.” Jaxon chuckled and Brianna flushed to her toes.
“Not *that*, you dolt. The wolf-shifting thing.” She waved a hand through the air.
“I know. I was kidding.” He reached for his bag and then stopped. “You want me to dress or stay naked so you can enjoy the view?” He chuckled again. “I only ask because you haven’t lifted your gaze away from my dick since I shifted.”
A new flush covered the old. She’d turn the color of the flames outside if he didn’t stop teasing her. She pulled her helmet off and set it on the floor. If she could stop aiming the light directly at him, it would help.
Jaxon didn’t wait for her response. He simply shrugged on his jeans once more and even grabbed a T-shirt. She actually felt sad when he pulled the cotton material over his pecs.
“Now what do we do?”
“Now, we wait. Perfect time to get to know each other.” He sat next to her and tugged the sleeves of her jacket until he’d removed it. She let him, limp in his arms, unable to stop him from anything he wanted to do with her.

Jaxon pulled his mate back into his embrace. He liked her between his legs, leaning against his chest. He could get used to it. He reached for the switch on her helmet and turned off the light.
Darkness consumed them once again. He had the advantage in the dark. She could see nothing. He could see fine. “We need to conserve the battery. Never know what might happen next.” His explanation sounded good, didn’t it? It was certainly plausible they’d need the battery later.
Brianna sighed. “So you’re a wolf. And I’m not dead.”
“Correct.” He paused. “You okay?”
“Me?” She laughed. “I’m not the one afraid of the dark.”
“Now you’re confused.” Jaxon wrapped his arms around her middle below her breasts and held her tight. “I’m not remotely afraid of the dark, baby. I don’t even actually know darkness. I can see fine. It’s tight places I could do without.”
“So, you’re claustrophobic.” She set her palms on his thighs and he had to work hard not to jump. Did she have any idea what she did to him?
“Hmm, I guess so. If you tell anyone, I’ll deny it though.” He kissed her neck again while he smiled. Was this okay with her? Was she feeling the connection too?
“That’s a laugh.” She tipped her head to one side, giving him better access to her neck. Her fingers bit into his thighs where she gripped him. “If I made a list of all the things about you worth mentioning, claustrophobia wouldn’t even make the short list.”
This time when Jaxon laughed, his body shook enough to cause his hands to brush against her breasts. His amusement got cut off quick at the contact. He swallowed. The woman was all firm muscle, except her chest. His fingers grazed the softer flesh, not for the first time, and he wanted desperately to cover her entirely with his palms.
She wasn’t wearing a bra. His dick grew hard thinking about the thin layer of her shirt between his hands and her nipples.
Brianna squirmed against him. His cock stiffened further.
“So, what do you do? When you aren’t out saving firefighters from caves.”
“My brothers and I have a farm outside Pigeon Forge. We raise thoroughbreds.”
“You live with your brothers?”
“Yes, Sergius is one year older than me. Micah, two years younger. We’re very close.”
“How close?” She grew rigid.
The woman had a sense of humor. Well, actually, she was probably serious, but she made him laugh, nonetheless. “Not *that* close. We just don’t know any other wolf shifters in the area, so we stick together. We came here ten years ago, built our cabin, and love it here.”
“Sounds lonely.”
“Oh, we aren’t lonely. In fact, my older brother Sergius mated about six months ago. Juliana is fantastic. She lives with us now too.”
“Your brother got married and you all live in the same house? Why doesn’t he move out?”
“It’s a big house. Everyone has plenty of privacy. Besides, it’s safer for Juliana that we all stick together.” *Now why did I have to go and mention that?*
“Safer from what?” Brianna turned toward him as though she could see him. Her lips were inches from his. It was the perfect time to put an end to this line of questioning. The last thing he needed right now was to explain vampires to her. She hadn’t finished swallowing the shapeshifter addition to her life yet.
Jaxon closed the gap and set his lips against hers. Her warm, soft mouth forced a low moan from deep inside him. What the hell? He didn’t moan. Not even when having sex.
Jaxon tilted his head to one side and took possession of her more thoroughly. She opened for him. He licked the seam of her lips and then reached inside for more.
Brianna twisted farther and gripped his arms. She met him halfway, not showing any signs of stopping the mind-numbing kiss.
And that’s what it was. In fact, Jaxon could feel his brother Sergius trying to communicate with him, but he couldn’t quite make the connection. He didn’t want to. Sergius would have to wait.
Brianna pressed her chest against his. God, how he wanted their shirts to disappear into the ether.
After long moments, his mate pulled back. She set her forehead against his. She’d squirmed her way sideways across his lap. Her thigh pressed against his dick.
“You’re like a drug. I can’t even think.” Her words puffed out of her mouth as though she’d been running. “Who kisses a man she just met in a cave in the dark? What am I, twelve? It must be the stress of the situation making me lose my mind.”
“I sincerely hope you aren’t twelve. That’s…ew. And you’re my mate. It’s controlling you. You wouldn’t be able to help the attraction you feel toward me no matter where we were or what the circumstances.”
“Jaxon.” The voice of Serg nearly shouted into Jaxon’s mind.
“What?”

"Where are you? Why aren't you communicating with me? You had me worried."
"Kinda busy right now is all. I'm in the cave. The smoke was overwhelming and we had to move deeper. We're safe."
"You sound funny. What is making you 'busy'?" Sergius laughed into Jaxon's head. *"Did you encounter more than a fireman in that cave? You sound out of breath as if… Wait… Don't tell me…"* Now he laughed so hard Jaxon cringed.
"Are you done?"
"Me? I'm not the one screwing a fireman. Is he hot?"
"He *is a* she. *And yes, she's hot. She's my mate."*
"Whoa… The fireman is a woman? Now why didn't I think of that?"
"Well, I didn't either. And believe me I was worried when I realized she was my mate and still thought she was a man."
"I'll bet." Serg laughed again. *"Okay. Listen. You are good and trapped for a while. The flames are really high and pressing against those caves with no end in sight. Thank God you got in there when you did."*
"Yeah, I'm not sure my feisty mate truly needed my help. In fact, I'm probably holding her back with my aversion to tight spaces. But I'm not sorry I'm here." Jaxon squeezed his mate and pulled her head onto his shoulder.
"I'm laughing my ass off, dude. Mr. I'm-not-claiming-a-woman-in-this-lifetime."
"Go ahead. Get it out of your system." Jaxon wasn't laughing. He did, however, deserve any ribbing his brothers dished out. *"Are you done yet?"*
"No. But we have more important things to consider. Guess who's in town?"
"Are you kidding? Now? Could that possibly be a coincidence?"
"In my opinion, nothing Keeton McKinney does is a coincidence."
"How did you find out he was around? Has he hurt anyone?" Jaxon tensed.
"No, we sensed him. He's lurking around the area. But, I will say one thing, Micah and I have been taking turns following him and he isn't going anywhere near that fire."
"Huh. Now that is *interesting. Do you suppose he's afraid of flames?"* Could they have stumbled on a weakness in the vampire who thought he owned these mountains?
"I'm hoping he's a whole lot more than afraid of them." Sergius's voice was serious. *"We'll keep tabs on his location. I just wanted you to know. He isn't approaching the fire, but he is watching like a hawk. He surely knows you're in there, and he's circling the area."*
"Great. Thanks for the info."
Jaxon jolted when he realized someone was calling his name.
"Jaxon? Hello? Earth to Jaxon?" His mate wasn't just calling his name, she was practically screaming.
"Yes?"
"God, Jax. Where were you? I've been talking to you. You were in some sort of trance or something."
"Sorry, baby. I was talking to my brother."
"Your brother? Oh, telepathically. Were you serious?"
"Yes, he was updating me on the fire. We're stuck for a while. Surrounded by flames."
"Okay. We knew that. Besides, how long would it take to tell you that?"
"He mentioned a few other details." No way was he ready to share the vampire threat with her yet.
Why was McKinney back today of all days? Was there a chance in hell the vampire just happened to show up now by coincidence? After Serg mated with Juliana, they'd had to chase the vamp off numerous times to get rid of him. Jaxon had known getting McKinney to leave town was temporary, but this was plain inconvenient. Did the forest fire have something to do with today's appearance?
"Jax?" The nickname she'd assigned him made him smile. It sounded so personal coming from her lips. "What other details?"
"Nothing to worry about right now. All we need to concentrate on is staying away from those flames." Or, perhaps, it would be better to stay *near* the flames.
Jaxon reached for his pouch. He tugged the strap open and grabbed a bottle of water. "Are you thirsty? Do you still have water?"
"I do. And there's a pouch built into my jacket. We won't go thirsty."
"Cool." Jaxon took a swig and paused. His mate was a firefighter. She fought fires for a living. Dangerous fires. Could he live with that? Would she be willing to quit? How could he keep her safe if she was out in the open like this all the time?
These were questions he would have to deal with later. Not today.
"Jaxon?" Serg's voice once again entered Jaxon's mind.
"Yeah?"
"Update. Micah is following McKinney who is circling your cave. It's weird. I don't get it. Please be careful."
"And McKinney doesn't realize he's being followed?"
"Doesn't seem like it. Micah's pretty far back, but I think he's so focused on you, he isn't paying attention to Micah."

"Wonderful." Jaxon hoped his sarcasm came through as strongly as he'd intended. *"Is there another entrance to this cave?"*
"We're checking."
"Jax."
Jaxon tipped his head toward his mate. "Yeah?"
"You left me again. Talking to your brothers?"
"Yeah." He didn't even bother to keep the negative inflection out of his voice.
"That bad?"
"Yeah."
"Do you know any other words besides 'yeah'?" She didn't laugh.
Jaxon held his breath.
"What aren't you telling me?" The woman was intuitive.
Jaxon had an idea. He jerked his gaze to Brianna, knowing full well she couldn't see him. "I need to claim you."
"Claim me?" Her eyebrows rose. "Dude, you've been laying claim to me pretty consistently since you first walked into my cave. Or should I say, bounded." She laughed.
Jaxon didn't. "If we cement the bond, you'll be safer."
"Safer from what? What are you talking about?"
Jaxon took a deep breath. "There's a bad guy on our heels. He's circling the cave." He hated telling her all this. And he hated even more how she stiffened as he spoke.
"A bad guy? Jax, I don't think you have all your marbles. Did you breathe in too much smoke? There's a fire out there. Nobody's going to get in here." She said all that, but she still held herself rigid.
"The fire is buying us some time, but this isn't the kind of man I want to risk giving any leverage to." Jaxon set a hand on her cheek, rubbed along her jaw with his thumb.
Brianna swallowed. Her eyes grew large. She was scared. He could see it in her face and smell it coming from her pores. She was also aroused. Just cupping her chin made her clench her legs together.
"Will you let me claim you, baby?"
"What does that mean?" Her words came out as a whisper.
"Mate with you. Make love to you."
"Seriously? Now? Here in this cave with a fire raging outside? You want to fuck?" She pulled back, but only enough to tip her head up toward him as though she were looking into his eyes.
With a sudden jerk, Brianna yanked from his grasp and fumbled for her helmet on the ground. In two seconds, she'd turned the light on.
Jaxon stared at her. He let her shine the light in his face. "You're mine, Brianna. You know it deep inside. Normally, I would woo you for…well, for a while…but under the circumstances it would be better if we solidified our relationship now."
"Why?" She didn't say "no".
"Once we mate, you'll be able to communicate with me telepathically. Our bond will be stronger. If anything happens, you'll be able to reach me through our connection."
Her brow furrowed. "You expect me to believe if we have sex, I'll be able to get inside your head?" She shivered, her body shaking beneath his hands.
"You will. And I yours."
"That's even worse."
Jaxon smiled. "Why? Do you have any secrets you'd like to divulge before I claim you?" He leaned toward her and kissed her forehead.
"No." She leaned back. "Besides the ones I've acquired since meeting you." She bit her lip and gasped. "God, did I say that out loud?" She lowered her gaze.
Jaxon grabbed her neck and kissed the top of her head. "You did. What do these 'secrets' entail exactly?"
Brianna moaned.
"Got a lot in your closet, do you?"
She tipped her head back and looked him in the eye. "My closet is full. But it was empty until about half an hour ago." She poked his chest, but he caught her finger with his hand and held her palm against his heart.
"Intriguing. I can't wait to see what's inside that head of yours."
Jaxon took her lips. He tangled his hand in her hair and kissed her thoroughly. His intention—to wipe all memory she had of ever being kissed before.
With the hand he held against his chest, she squeezed his shirt, balling it up in her fist and holding on as though her life depended on it.
Without breaking the kiss, Jaxon laid Brianna on her back and held himself over her.
Her blond curls spread out beneath her. Her eyes closed as he plundered her mouth even further. He didn't want to take her choice away, but he did intend to make "no" a very difficult answer.
He rationalized that it would have happened eventually, so he wasn't really playing unfair.
Brianna's helmet lay on the floor a few feet away. It rolled back and forth on the rim, casting light in every

direction. Every time it rolled their direction, he got a stronger look at her features. Even with soot smudged on her face, she was gorgeous. Her button nose was speckled with black from ash. Her round face fit perfectly in his palm.

Jaxon placed his free hand on her stomach. His fingers spanned from her breasts to her pants.

Pants was not even remotely close to being an accurate word to describe what Brianna wore. And they needed to go. Now.

Chapter Four

Brianna clenched her legs together briefly when Jaxon's hand went to her waist. *What the hell am I doing?* This was so unlike her. And yet, she wanted him more than she'd ever wanted anyone in her life. So what if she had sex with some man in a cave during a crisis. Didn't people do strange things in situations of great duress? He smelled so good, like the outdoors, like a man who loved animals, like…Jaxon. And God could he kiss. Her brain cells were exiting her body one by one as he kissed her senseless.

After gripping her thighs together for the briefest of moments, she released them and reached to help undo her pants.

Her hands met with Jaxon's. They seemed to battle to get her pants off as though neither could do it fast enough.

Jaxon broke the kiss and straddled her body. He sat up and grabbed both her wrists. "I've got it," he muttered. His gaze rested on her chest. He seemed to forget the pants and his hands landed on her breasts. The unexpected move sent a shiver down her body. A noise escaped her lips, and she couldn't stop it. A moan, or almost a purr. She arched into his hands as he filled them with her breasts.

"You're so sexy. I love the little noise you make when I touch you." He pinched both nipples at once and Brianna thought she would come undone from his touch alone. She wasn't even naked. Far from it. How could anyone elicit such a response from her body?

"I need to taste you."

What did he mean by that? She assumed he meant her chest, but in the next breath he scooted down to her knees and went to work on her pants. In record time, he undid the snap and zipper. Moments later he tugged off her boots and then pulled the fireproof pants off her body.

"God, you have a lot of layers." He grinned and glanced at her face. "How did I ever scent you as my mate under all this?"

"If I recall correctly," she mumbled, "you mistook me for a man."

"True." He dropped the pants next to them. "Why do I find this long underwear set of yours so sexy? It's formfitting. I can see every curve."

"Base layer."

"Huh?" Jaxon straddled her once again.

"It's called a base layer. Fire resistant…"

"Uh huh." Jaxon splayed his palms on her stomach and pushed the gray material of her shirt up until the heat of his fingers rested on her bare skin.

Brianna took a deep breath.

Jaxon's gaze didn't leave his hands as he gradually pushed her shirt up her chest.

In an abrupt switch from slow motion to speed racer, he tugged the shirt over her head, leaving it tangled around her forearms. In a gravelly voice, he spoke. "Leave your hands here. If you touch me, I'll come before I've had a chance to enjoy you."

Didn't seem fair to Brianna. "What about me?"

Jaxon smiled and lifted his gaze to her eyes while his fingers began to circle her nipples. "*You* are going to come over and over. *I* don't have that same luxury. Two or three times will be my max."

Two or three times? What guy could do that?

Brianna shook her head. It was cloudy up there. "I think you're sadly mistaken if you think I can come over and over. You'll be super lucky if I come once, and then only because I've never been this aroused in my life."

The smile on his face spread. "We'll see." He pinched her nipples and then plucked at them.

Brianna bucked beneath him, her torso trapped by his body straddling her. Her eyes rolled back and she lost him from her line of vision.

Jaxon shoved back a bit and leaned down. His body covered hers. She would have felt smothered normally, but instead, for some strange reason, she loved the way he got into her space.

No man had ever commanded her quite like this. Shit. All he'd done was ask her to keep her hands above her head and threatened to consume her. Was that really dominant? Subtle, but still…

Jaxon dipped his head, licked one nipple and then blew across the wet skin. Goose bumps rose all over her torso.

"So sexy." He moved to the other nipple and gave it the same treatment. Back and forth he traveled, setting up a pattern of plucking with his fingers on one nipple while licking and blowing on the other.

Just when she thought she couldn't take another minute of the torture, he sucked one straining tip into his mouth.

Perhaps he'd been right. She almost came. The torture was exquisite.

"God, Jax." She rolled her head to the side and stared at the flickering light of her headlamp. The battery would surely go dead, but she didn't care right now. "Please… I need you inside me." Begging was not something she'd ever done before. When in her past had a man done enough to prepare her before taking for himself? Never.

"Not yet, baby." He licked both nipples in succession and left them to cool in the open air while he wiggled his

way down her body.
Almost before she could contemplate what he'd done, her base layer pants disappeared, along with her panties and socks. Except for the material twisted around her wrists, she lay naked beneath him.
Brianna dragged her gaze back to Jaxon's face. She was fit, more fit than any woman she knew. Some guys found that attractive, most did not.
Jaxon obviously did. He worshipped her with his gaze and the tips of his fingers.
"Take your shirt off. I'm at a disadvantage here." Her voice did not sound like her own. The pitch was low. The words broke up, syllables skipping over each other as though falling out of her mouth haphazardly.
Jaxon whipped his shirt off and tossed it to the side with the growing pile of clothes.
He lifted his head to her face then. "Shit. You must be uncomfortable." He grabbed for the soft material pile of her pants and his shirt and stuffed them under her head.
It hadn't occurred to her even for a second that she should be uncomfortable.
The cave was warm. Warmer than it should have been, but there was a blazing fire outside, heating the chamber perfectly.
Who cared about a little dirt under her?
As Jaxon adjusted the pile of clothes under her head, she got a close-up of his chest. His pecs were firm and dark. Tan like that of a man who worked outside—bare-chested.
She longed to run her palms over his torso, but the tangle of her shirt prevented any such thing right now.
Later…
Jaxon scooted back down her body. He trailed his fingers on a path from her neck to her thighs where he straddled her legs. She watched, growing wetter and hornier by the second. She no longer doubted she could come without much coaxing. She was so close.
Jaxon lifted off her, spread her knees and then knelt in the V of her legs.
She'd never been so exposed. He pressed her thighs farther apart. He didn't touch her, just gazed at the juncture of her legs. The inspection made her squirm.
"You shave."
She didn't respond. First of all, he'd spoken the obvious. Second of all, she couldn't find her voice.
"I love it."
Brianna exhaled. Why did that please her? Who cared what he loved? This was a one-night—correction—one-day stand. As soon as the fire moved from the mouth of the cave, they would leave. She'd go back to helping fight this wildfire. He'd go back to his cabin in the woods. Right?
A tremble shook her body under his perusal.
He stroked the sensitive skin at the top of her thighs, his fingers barely grazing where she wanted him to grasp her firmly and ram into her.
"So wet. You are so wet for me."
Brianna bit her lip. Did her clit pulse when he spoke?
With no warning, Jaxon plunged one finger into her core.
That was it. She came. She screamed, her voice echoing in the chamber.
"That's it, baby. So hot. So sexy. Your pussy is milking my finger so hard. God, you're tight."
His words did not help. She kept convulsing around his finger in the longest orgasm she'd ever had.
When she finally opened her eyes again, she tried to focus on the man hovering over her.
"Please. I need you."
He ignored her. Instead, he scooted down her body farther and settled on his chest between her legs. The finger disappeared from her pussy to join all his other fingers holding her spread open before him.
He replaced the digit with his tongue, his grip tightening on her thighs as she bucked into his mouth.
"Oh. My. God." Brianna whipped her arms over her head, but they were still useless, all tied up in her shirt. Somehow she'd managed to make it worse with all her squirming. She could only set the bundle over her chest.
No brain cells were available to figure out the puzzle of her tangled arms because Jaxon chose that moment to lick over her clit, a long swipe of his tongue that took its time reaching the tip. The final flick made her buck again.
"Jaxon." Her breathy voice vibrated through her body.
"Come for me again. Please, baby. I want to feel your clit throb against my mouth. Then I'll give you what you want."
Jaxon latched onto her nub and sucked. As if that weren't enough, he even nibbled around her clit with his teeth, the slight pain completely overshadowed by the intense pleasure.
She'd never come twice in her life. Not even with her vibrator. Hell, she'd never come even once in this short a time frame. Maybe she should reconsider keeping him.
Jaxon lifted his face and glanced at her over her tangled arms. "Come, Bri. Come around my mouth." He resumed his torture and got what he wanted.
Brianna shouted his name this time. "Jaxon. Oh, God. Jaxon."
Her clit pulsed between his lips. He didn't let go, dragging out the orgasm even longer than the first.

As she finally came down, Brianna yanked free of the shirt and grasped Jaxon's head with both hands. "Inside me. Now," she commanded.
She'd had two orgasms, but her pussy was in no way appeased. She lacked that feeling of fullness only his cock could provide.
"Are you sure?"
"Jesus, Jax. I couldn't be more sure."
Jaxon stood and unzipped his jeans. He dropped them to the ground and stepped out.
As he nestled in the V of her legs, he took her mouth in a long kiss, his cock pressing against her clit.
Finally, he pulled back to gaze into her eyes. At this close distance, he glanced from one eye to the other before settling back a few inches. "Brianna, this is serious. May I claim you? There is no going back. I know you're thinking I'm loony and you won't see me again after this encounter, but you're wrong."
Brianna sucked in a breath. How could he know her so well?
"Besides being bonded to me in a way that can't be broken, you won't *want* to break that connection. Your body will crave mine, demand to be taken, over and over again for several days…weeks. You won't be able to deny the draw."
He seemed so serious. Either way, it didn't matter. If he could elicit this kind of response from her even one more time, she'd be on board. She already craved him like a drug. How could it get any worse?
If what he said was true by some miraculous chance, so be it. She was in.
Brianna reached between their bodies for his cock. She stroked him from base to tip. "Take me, Jaxon. Now."
She guided him to her entrance and let go to grasp his ass with her fingers.
Jaxon pushed into her in increments. He grit his teeth as he took his time.
She wasn't in the mood for slow though. Grabbing both cheeks of his ass, Brianna bucked up toward him, forcing him in to the hilt.
Her vision clouded for a moment at the sheer fullness. Perfection. She was born to have this man inside her. They fit together like a glove. It sounded cliché even in her mind, but it was true.
"Ahh." Jaxon stiffened and held himself deep inside her. "Brianna… So…fucking…tight." His words were clipped. His eyes closed.
"Move, Jax."
"Can't. Hang on." He set his forehead against hers, but didn't open his eyes. He breathed deep, a long slow inhale followed by an equally slow exhale. "Oh, fuck." His face scrunched, but finally he pulled out and slammed back in.
Brianna let her legs fall open wider. She tipped her pelvis up to allow him the deepest entry possible. She squeezed his ass cheeks until she was sure she must have left crescent moons all over his butt.
"I'm…sorry…" Jaxon plunged in again and held rigid. His entire body jerked with his orgasm.
Brianna could feel his cock pulsing inside her. It felt better than any sex she'd ever had. It felt… *Shit*.
Brianna's eyes shot open wide. She shoved against Jaxon's chest.
"What? Did I hurt you?" Jaxon's gaze landed on hers. He cupped her cheek with one hand. "Bri?" He didn't pull out of her.
Brianna nailed him with her gaze, still pushing on his pecs. "We didn't use a condom. Jaxon, I've never been so stupid in my life." *Why won't he move?*
"Relax, Bri." He stroked her temple with his thumb. How could he be so calm? "You can't catch anything from me and you can't get pregnant right now either."
"What? Are you crazy? How do you know?" She narrowed her gaze at the crazy wolfman trying his damnedest to soothe her.
"I'm clean. Wolves don't carry any human diseases. We can't catch them and we can't transfer them. And…you aren't ovulating." He grinned, cocked his head to one side and actually winked at her.
"Ovulating?" *Do men even know that word?* "What? Now you're going to tell me you can sniff out my best breeding time of the month? Come on…"
Jaxon nodded, his face growing serious. "I have so much to explain. But, yes. I can scent everything about you."
"That's just…wrong." She finally relaxed. It wasn't doing any good pushing against his chest anyway. He was a rock.
"I'm sorry. Normally I would have taken more time…eased you into my life…but this…snuck up on me."
"Normally? You've done this before?" She bit her lip.
Jaxon shook his head. "Never, baby. And I never will again either. You're the first and last woman I will ever claim."
There was that word again. Claim. Perhaps she should have paid closer attention. Asked a few more questions before she essentially let this man fuck her senseless. She'd been driven by the strongest hormones she'd ever experienced.
Could she possibly consider believing what he said? He seemed so sure of himself. Men did not usually intentionally avoid condoms and then act cocky about it. *Cocky. Ha. Pun intended. He's cocky all right…*
God. He was still stiff inside her.

“That went a bit too fast for me. I couldn’t hold back. Let’s try again.” He smiled, a devilish grin that made her melt. When he slid almost out of her in slow motion and then pressed back inside like a man with a mission, her body turned to goo. Her world shrank to the pleasure in her pussy.
She moaned, wishing she could hold on to a thought for one second.
Right when she reached the edge of sanity again, Jaxon pulled out. “Flip over, baby,” he whispered.
Huh? She stared at him. Was English even a language she understood?
Jaxon grabbed her torso and lifted her, helping guide her onto her hands and knees. He grabbed their shirts from under her head and stuck one under each knee.
Holy God Almighty. He was going to take her from behind? Nothing had ever been so erotic in her life. Sure, she’d had a few boyfriends, but none that were this adventurous in bed. *Or in a cave*…
Jaxon ran his hands down her spine, danced them really. Goose bumps rose all over her body and she shivered.
“Spread your legs, baby.” He tapped the inside of one thigh and then the other until she complied.
Her pussy pulsed. She wanted him back inside her so bad. His hands gripped her ass cheeks and squeezed.
“Sexiest ass I’ve ever seen,” he murmured. “How do you stay so tan? You don’t even have bikini lines.”
“Spray.” She choked the word out.
“I have no idea what that means. You can explain later. I don’t really want to chat right now.” He accentuated his words by swiping his cock over her pussy.
Brianna rocked forward.
“So wet from both of us now.”
She wasn’t prepared for him to pinch her clit. She flinched.
Jaxon chuckled. “And still so responsive…” He laid a palm on her lower back and spread his fingers wide. “Your arousal is increasing. I can scent it,” he whispered in a deep gravelly voice. “Does it make you hot knowing I’m going to take you from behind?”
Brianna’s arms shook. She leaned lower, planting her weight on her forearms. No way could she respond to his rhetorical question.
With his free hand, Jaxon spread her pussy open. When he entered her, she had to set her forehead on her hands. *God, that feels so good. Who knew?*
Holding still, Jaxon snaked one arm around Brianna’s middle and held her around the waist. With his other hand, he reached around to circle her clit.
Her vision clouded. Or maybe it was just the smoke. She couldn’t see with him holding her so possessively and stroking her clit so tenderly.
Jaxon started a slow rhythm that defied reason. She couldn’t imagine how he could fill her so completely, his cock still rock hard inside her after he just came.
“I could stay like this forever, Bri. You feel so good.”
She couldn’t breathe. He pushed in and out of her in a perfect rhythm, his finger circling her clit in a lazy pattern as though he had all day.
Brianna rocked back against him on each pass. She bit her lip, silently begging him to stop teasing her and flick his finger over the sensitive nub still begging for attention even after two glorious orgasms.
“I don’t want you to come yet,” he whispered, as though he’d heard her thoughts. “I want to take this one slower. Enjoy your sexy ass.” As he spoke, his finger left her needing more. He released her waist and used both hands to knead her butt again, pulling the cheeks apart as he did so.
A chill went down her spine at the exposure. She’d never experimented with anything anal before. She’d thought about it. In fact she’d even purchased a butt plug at some point, but it still lay in the wrapper in the drawer of her bedside table—with all the other toys she’d bought over the years. But something about Jaxon… He made her want on a new level. She moaned as she realized the direction of her thoughts.
“Oh, trust me, baby. I’m gonna take your ass too, but not today. You aren’t ready for that. It’ll take some preparation first.”
Preparation? Why on earth did the thought of him stretching her turn her on? *Because you’ve always secretly wondered what it would be like to have both holes filled at once. That’s why you bought the plug…and the lube.*
And more importantly, how was it he seemed to be reading her mind?
Brianna didn’t care right now. All she could focus on was his hands and his cock. He seemed to grow even larger, harder as he increased his thrusts.
“Please…”
“Okay, baby.” Jaxon reached back around her and pinched her clit. She squeezed her eyes shut, trying to fight off the orgasm looming beneath the surface, but it was a losing battle.
With a long moan she never would have believed herself capable of, Brianna came, her pussy clenching Jaxon’s cock, her clit throbbing between his unrelenting fingers.
A few seconds behind her, Jaxon stiffened and held himself deep inside her. If she didn’t know better, she would swear she could actually feel him pulsing into her womb, his hot come shooting into her possessively.
When they were both spent and gasping for breath, he eased out of her and laid her gently on her side, curling

up along her back and wrapping his big hands around her middle.
“I can’t believe we just did that.”
“Which part?” He chuckled into her ear, making her shiver.
“The…whole thing I guess.” *I came three times in the span of what? Ten minutes?*
“It’s been more like fifteen, but I’m glad I could wow you with my abilities as a lover.”
Brianna stiffened. Was he in her head? She’d assumed it had been a coincidence before.
“I told you, we’d be connected mentally after we mated.”
Brianna jerked from his arms and sat, turning to face him. “You just spoke into my head.”
“Yes.” He nodded.
“Oh my God. You weren’t kidding?” She hadn’t truly believed any of his ramblings until now. Truth be known, she still felt uncertain, but holy hell she was having one doozy of an illusion.
“It’s not an illusion, baby.” He tentatively reached for her and stroked his fingers down her arm. “You’ll get used to it.”
“Why can’t I hear all your thoughts then, wiseguy?”
“Because I’ve been doing this my whole life. I know how to block you. You’ll learn to block me too, over time.” He reached for her neck and wrapped his fingers around it to pull her forward. “Lucky for you, Juliana can help you understand all this. I’m afraid I’m kind of ignorant when it comes to blocking, but she’s apparently getting pretty good at blocking my brother Sergius.”
Powerless against the magnetic pull he had on her, Brianna leaned toward him and let him kiss her lips. She didn’t really respond appropriately, but what did he expect? Her mind was swimming with all the information she tried to process.
“Come here. I liked having you in my arms. We need to rest while we can. I’m not sure how long we’re going to be in here, but I have a suspicion we’re going to need all our brain cells when we finally get out.” He tugged her neck until she complied and allowed herself to be snuggled back into his embrace.
He fit her perfectly. She felt…cherished.
Relaxing once again in the protection of his arms, Brianna closed her eyes. She needed rest. Exhaustion took over.

"What's going on, Serg?" Jaxon communicated with his brother while he smoothed his mate's hair away from her face.
She was asleep and he would never tire of watching her at rest. Her face had a peaceful angelic look. Her lips parted slightly, tilted on each side almost in a smile. At least he liked to think she was smiling.
"Well, hello. Where have you been? You've been blocking me for half an hour." Sergius chuckled into Jaxon's mind.
Micah added to the mirth with his own laugher.
"Where do you think I've been? Claiming my mate. Figured it would make McKinney less of a threat if I claimed her as soon as possible," Jaxon responded.
"Good plan. Now you can communicate with her," Micah said. *"Bet that was a hardship,"* he continued.
"Listen," Sergius interrupted, *"McKinney has been circling closer to you from behind that cave ever since you entered. There is no doubt he knows you're in there. The question is why? Is he after you or the woman—"*
"Brianna." Jaxon cut him off with his mate's name.
"Okaay. Brianna it is then." Micah got serious again. *"Anyway, while you've been claiming your woman, McKinney has been planning his next move. And the real question is, what is he waiting for? It seems our theory is correct; he isn't fond of fire."*
"That's certainly good information to stash away for later. Never know when it might come in handy." Jaxon squeezed his mate closer as though he could somehow protect her better if she were nearly attached to him.
"Speaking of fire…"
Sergius jumped back into the conversation. *"The flames surrounding the entrance are almost contained. Sheriff Hardin is close by, waiting to get you out of there. Don't take any chances though. Wait until we let you know either the coast is clear or you have company."*
The kind of company Sergius was talking about was unwanted.
"There isn't an entrance on the other side of this cave, is there?" Jaxon knew these caves as well as he could. But the truth was there were so many small entrances all around the national forest it made it difficult to remember every detail.
"Can't say I remember such a thing, but judging from McKinney's position, I wouldn't take anything for granted. That man probably knows better than any of us. He's been here hundreds of years and he's practically foaming at the mouth. I'm staying a distance away, but even from here I can tell he's so focused on you two that he isn't even paying attention to me.
"Granted, the wind is in my favor, blowing in this direction, so that's keeping my presence a secret." Micah was on the move. Jaxon could tell by the way his thoughts were coming through. Over time, they'd grown even more aware of the subtle nuances of telepathy that included the differences between communicating while running and standing still.
"Jaxon," Sergius interrupted. *"Is Brianna okay? Will she be able to move fast when the time comes?"*
Jaxon stared at his mate and grinned. Certainly not at the moment. Right now, she was naked and dead to the world. Not to mention well-fucked.
Jaxon responded, *"I'll work on that now."*
He hated waking her, but his brothers were right. They didn't want to have to run from the cave butt naked, that was for sure.
Jaxon stroked his mate's arm and then skimmed his fingers up her stomach and between her breasts. When she didn't even squirm, he circled one nipple several times and finally flicked his thumb over the distended tip. That did it.
Brianna bolted upright. The headlamp that had been lying next to them this entire time jolted at her movement and began rocking on the ground, sending long shadows all around the room.
She caught her breath, her gaze landing on Jaxon. "How long was I asleep?"
"Not long. I'm sorry. I hated to wake you, but we need to get dressed. We should be ready to go when my brothers give us the all clear."
"Has the fire moved away from the entrance?"
"Not yet, but the moment it's safe, we're getting out of here."
"What aren't you telling me?" She eyed him, her gaze narrowing in on his face.
Jaxon exhaled. He had to tell her the entire truth. The last thing he wanted was for her to be in danger simply because she was uninformed. "There are a few more details about this world I need to fill you in on."
"What? Don't tell me in addition to werewolves, there are also zombies out there and they prey on female firefighters, cuz Jax, I gotta tell you, I've reached my weirdness quota for the day. In fact, I'm sure I've surpassed my ability to take in anything supernatural for the month."
Jaxon scrunched up his nose. "Sorry. Can't be helped. I know it's a lot. If it makes you feel better, the demon we'll be fighting this afternoon is a vampire, not a pack of zombies."
Brianna froze. Her eyes closed for a moment and when she reopened them, she took a cleansing breath. "Please tell me you're fucking kidding me."

“I wish I was.”
“Why on earth would a vampire be staking us out, no pun intended?”
“I wish I knew.”
“With all this strange psychic ability of yours, you can’t figure out the guy’s motive?”
Jaxon cringed. “I don’t have any psychic ability, Bri. Just an ability to communicate telepathically and only with my brothers and now you. Believe me, I’ve wished on more than one occasion I could have anticipated the plans of Keeton McKinney, but I’m afraid the man eludes us every time he’s in town.”
She stared at him, not moving. Finally, when he thought he was going to have to say something else, she stood and gathered her scattered clothing.
Jaxon helped. The light from the headlamp was growing dim. He could see her clothes better than Brianna. He handed her her panties, a shirt, her fire-protective pants.
She didn’t say a word as she dressed, her body becoming completely hidden by all the gear she put on. Soon the woman who stood before him was once again unrecognizable as female, except for the locks of blond hair still landing on her shoulders. She didn’t need to put her hat on yet or cover her face.
Jaxon gathered up his jeans and T-shirt and stuffed them back into his pack.
When he was ready, he glanced back at Brianna who stood there staring at his naked body.
He smiled. He was trying not to climb around in her head and invade every private thought. It seemed…unfair somehow. But as she licked her lips, there was no mistaking the desire he read in her eyes.
“Get out of my head, Jaxon. It’s disconcerting.” She turned toward the crack they’d come through. “Do your mojo thing and lead us back into the front chamber would you, wolfie?”
Jaxon laughed silently into her head. “Yes, ma’am.” He wasn’t even bothered by the fact she’d called him “wolfie”. Coming from her, it almost sounded like an endearment.
With her back to him, he shifted and squeezed through the slit in the cave. He’d be glad to get out of this inner chamber. That was for sure. And he wasn’t too manly to admit, never was soon enough to repeat this spelunking experience. Tight spaces were not his friend.
“Follow me,” he told her.
Judging by the amount of smoke coming through the space between them and the front chamber, the fire must have been under better control. The air was much clearer than it had been earlier.
“Do you think it’s safe?” Brianna placed a hand on his rump. He loved her touch even in wolf form.
“Not completely. But I want to get us out of here as soon as we get the all clear. The faster we get the hell out of the forest and back to the cabin, the better.”
“What? Jaxon, I can’t leave. I’m in the middle of a job.”
Jaxon froze, not even considering his location stuck in a tight crevice. *“Brianna, you can’t mean to go back to fighting this fire right now?”*
“Of course that’s what I intend. I’m not injured and I have a job to do. There are men out there who need me.”
Jaxon held his tongue as he ducked through the last of their entombment and back into the front chamber. Immediately, he shifted. Naked, and not caring about that fact even for a second, he stomped around the still-smoky room.
“Brianna…” He tried to make his voice sound calm, even though inside he was anything but.
“Don’t. I’m not a child, Jaxon. In fact, I just met you. Sure, I’ve just had the most amazing sex, but the intensity of the moment was largely due to the danger. My adrenaline was on full-speed. Wouldn’t that account for the fantastic orgasms?” She didn’t pause for an answer. “Nevertheless, I’m in the middle of a job. You can’t start ordering me around like you own me simply because we shared a good fuck.”
Jaxon flinched. Is that what she thought happened?
He shook his head to clear his mind and approached her. It wasn’t necessary to doubt their bond. She was his mate now. She didn’t fully understand what that entailed. “Baby, you misunderstand. This has nothing to do with your job. If you want to fight fires, far be it from me to stop you. I’m not that kind of guy.” He’d cringe every time she went to work, but he’d do it in secret. “My concern is the vampire. Trust me, the damage McKinney can cause will put your forest fire to shame.”
Brianna stepped back when Jaxon reached for her.
“Don’t.” She shook her head.
His chest tightened at her rejection…until he heard her next words.
“Every time you touch me, I can’t think. It’s like you have some kind of spell cast on me and I melt when your damn fingers make contact with my skin.”
That made him smile.
“Jaxon.” He stepped back and held up a finger, hoping she realized he was talking to Sergius. *“Time to go. The fire is moving slightly east. It’s gonna be hot. Make sure Brianna is completely covered. And you’ll have to come out in wolf form. Watch for hot spots. Head west when you get out. James will meet you about a quarter mile from the entrance with the cruiser.”*
“Got it.” He turned to Brianna.
Without pausing, Jaxon took her lips in a brief kiss. “Put the rest of your gear on. We’re heading out. I’m gonna

shift. Stay on my heels and…be careful. It's still hot out there."
"Me?" She laughed. "Jax, love." She shook her head at him. "I'm trained for this kind of situation. You, on the other hand, are going to burn your…paws."
"I'll be fine." He cupped her face and thanked God when she leaned into his touch. "I'm tough. And I don't plan on letting my paws stay in one place for any longer than necessary. Think you can keep up?" The challenge was intentional. If she had something to keep her mind off the fire and the vampire, maybe she'd forget about returning to fight this fire today.
Brianna grinned. She put the rest of her gear on, tucking her hair into her hardhat and covering her eyes with her goggles. "Ready when you are."
Wasting no time, Jaxon shifted once more, grabbed his pack with his teeth and led them out into the unknown. Oh, he knew the forest. He even knew the damage fire could wreak. What he didn't trust was that damn vampire.

Brianna followed as close to Jaxon as she could manage. He could run. His speed in wolf form would outmatch her any day. But this was important and she didn't want him to slow down and risk injury. The ground had to be very hot.
It didn't take long to get out of harm's way, at least as far as the flames and hotspots were concerned. As to the other threats to the area, she couldn't even wrap her mind around those yet.
When she spotted who she assumed was the sheriff standing next to a patrol car, she breathed a sigh of relief. Until she saw him, she hadn't even realized she'd secretly been harboring the thought that perhaps she'd actually slipped into some alternate universe—one with werewolves and vampires. Seeing an actual human helped ground her in reality.
"Ms. White." The man took her outstretched hand when she came to a halt.
"Brianna." She took off her goggles and pushed the material around her face down to her neck. "Thanks for rescuing me."
"James Hardin. No thanks necessary, ma'am. I didn't have any part in it actually. In fact, until about a half hour ago, I didn't realize we were looking for a woman. The fire chief only mentioned a missing firefighter." The sheriff released her hand and glanced behind her. She turned to find Jaxon zipping up his jeans.
It was a shame really. The man was ripped. His cock was impressive and she rather liked him naked.
Chuckling filled her head. She froze. Thank goodness her cheeks were smudged with soot because the flush that crept across her face at having been caught ogling Jaxon's assets would surely raise the sheriff's eyebrows.
"Baby, you're making my cock so stiff right now, I can't concentrate." Jaxon came up beside her, his gaze nailing her in place. His words dripped into her head like syrup, thick, rich, slow…molasses.
Brianna jerked her head toward the sheriff.
He eyed her with his chin tipped to one side and then turned to Jaxon. Did he know?
"He suspects. He knows how our kind operates."
"Stop talking into my head. I can't pay attention to both of you at once."
Jaxon took her hand. He pulled it up to his face and kissed her fingertips. Without looking at the sheriff, he spoke. "James. As you can tell, Brianna's rather important to me."
"I see that." Sheriff Hardin chuckled.
Brianna cleared her throat. "Where's my unit? I need to get back with them. Do you know how contained the fire is?"
Brianna jerked her hand out of Jaxon's grasp. She wasn't kidding when she said she couldn't think with him touching her. The contact sucked all her brain cells out and shuffled them around on the ground, like fifty-two pickup.
"They are just east of here, but your captain is on his way to this location. He'll be here in a sec. Were you injured?" Hardin glanced down at her body and nodded.
"No. I'm fine. Glad there was a cave entrance at that precise location this morning, but I'm all good." She stood straighter.
The only thing injured was her pride. It was tough enough proving her value as a female firefighter. She didn't need this sort of occurrence to make the guys think she wasn't up to the task.
Just then a brush truck pulled up behind the cruiser and Captain Wilson exited, rounded the hood and headed her way. "White. Thank God you're okay. You scared the piss out of us. Fucking smart of you to duck into a cave. You were well and truly screwed when the wind changed direction and trapped you against that hill."
His words were like a balm. Instead of reprimanding her for being careless or implying she wasn't up to the job, the man commended her for her quick wit. She exhaled a long breath she'd been keeping stored up since the minute she'd entered the cave in the first place.
Brianna worked hard for this career and she didn't intend to blow it now. She had been the only girl she ever met who went as a firefighter for Halloween every year from the time she was four years old. This was her life.

Her father had been a firefighter. He'd died in a freak accident when a ceiling collapsed when she was twelve. Her mother had died a few years later of a broken heart. The woman never got over the death of her husband. Even with Brianna by her side, she hadn't coped well.
Brianna had gone to live with an aging aunt for a few years, but the minute she'd graduated from high school she'd come back to the Smokies to fulfill her dream of following in her father's footsteps.
The man had been her idol. Even his death hadn't stopped her from wanting to make this her career. If anything, his dying solidified her drive to reach this goal.
She wanted him to be proud of her…wherever he was.
"Where's the rest of the unit? I'm ready to get back on the line."
Wilson shook his head. "Not today. Take the rest of the day off. Join back up at the base tomorrow morning. Six sharp. You need to unwind. That was quite a scare."
"But—"
"That's an order, Brianna. Not a suggestion." He eyed her seriously. Captain Wilson often called her Brianna when they were alone. She knew for a fact he didn't call any of the others by their first names. She was astute enough to realize he thought of her as sort of a daughter he never had. And that worked out perfectly since she thought of him as a father figure in the absence of her own.
Brianna opened her mouth to complain again but thought better of it. She didn't need to sound like a whiney brat on top of everything else that happened. "Okay, sir. I'll meet you in the morning then." She turned toward Jaxon who'd stepped several feet away from her when her captain had arrived. A thought made her glance back. "Captain? Did anyone else get trapped?"
"No. It was close. Michaels was in the next position over from you. He ran backward when the wind shifted. He got lucky. Wide open space was behind him. It was he who radioed in your location and reported you missing. He hoped you'd ducked into a cave."
Brianna nodded.
The sheriff spoke up then. "I'll drive you into town."
"Thanks, Hardin. I really appreciate your help in this matter. I don't know how you did it, but I'm grateful for your assistance." Wilson took Hardin's hand. Then he turned to Jaxon. "Are you the one who found her?"
"I am." Jaxon shook the captain's hand next.
"Jaxon is one of the best trackers I have in this area. If he can't find someone in my mountains, they aren't there." Hardin beamed with pride. His explanation was a little lacking to her ears, and Wilson eyed Jaxon with a furrowed brow, undoubtedly wondering how a man in jeans and a T-shirt made it into that cave. He didn't say anything else just then though. His radio beeped, demanding his attention.
"Gotta run. I'll see you tomorrow. Get some sleep. Long day expected." The captain stepped back around his car, his radio up to his mouth. He was already barking instructions before he pulled away.
"How many people know about you?" Brianna questioned as the three climbed into the cruiser.
"Very few." Jaxon ducked into the back seat next to Brianna. "Don't worry. James will come up with an explanation for your boss. He always does."
Hardin glanced at them both in the rearview mirror as he started the engine. "Sure. Leave it to the human…again. Why do I always have to do the dirty work?" The sheriff shook his head, but he was grinning. Obviously, this wasn't the first time he'd concocted some sort of story to keep the wolves' existence a secret.
"Where to?" Hardin turned the cruiser around and got back on the main road.
"My place." Jaxon didn't even glance at her as he controlled her next destination. Was he always this domineering?
Brianna didn't have the strength to argue with him. Now that she sat down on the leather seat, her muscles relaxed and she was grateful for the rest of the day off. Besides, she wouldn't admit it out loud, but the idea of going to Jaxon's cabin didn't exactly turn her off.
Jaxon squeezed her hand. Of course. The man was reading her thoughts. *"It's going to be fine. You'll see. You'll love my family and I have a nice big tub you can soak in, a hot meal to eat and a king-sized bed to…sleep in—or whatever else your heart desires."*
The sooner she learned to control her ability to selectively project her thoughts, the better.

Keeton McKinney watched the scene unfolding from a great distance. His vision was excellent, but when he added high-power binoculars, he could practically read lips.
He smiled. "Perfect." He spoke to the forest at large. No one was around to hear him.
When he'd returned to the Smokies last week, his intentions had been clear—kill the wolves and take back his mountain range. The fucking wolves had been in his territory for over ten years and frankly they were on his last nerve. Especially after their antics in the spring when they'd stolen the woman he'd intended to own right out from under him.
He'd licked his wounds and returned now with a vengeance.
The fire hadn't been in the bargain, but Mother Nature had a mind of her own even Keeton couldn't control.

Lucky for him, circumstances had drawn the wolves out to play. Damsel in distress always did it. And, as it turned out, the fire was the perfect distraction. The wolves were so concerned with the flames, they weren't paying any attention to Keeton.

Of course, even with his binoculars, Keeton hadn't realized the trapped firefighter had been a woman. Bonus. He smirked as he watched the female get into the patrol car alongside the wolf. *Well, well, well… What have we here? Could it be the little wolf is interested in the blond he just rescued?* These wolves sure had a propensity for falling for the damsels they saved.

This twist could come in handy. The women these wolves fell for tended to be excellent bargaining chips when necessary.

The police cruiser drove away, leaving Keeton with his thoughts. Fire wasn't his thing. He abhorred the substance. But if that female could help keep the wolves out of the house and separated, he'd take the good with the bad.

It was only a matter of time…

Chapter Six

Brianna's jaw dropped as they pulled up to Jaxon's *cabin*. "Jax?"

He turned to face her and squeezed her hand. "Yes?"

She didn't look his way, but she sensed him grinning next to her from his tone. "This is not what I would call a cabin."

"Well, it's home to us. Cabin. House. Whatever."

"It's so…big." The cruiser pulled to a stop and Brianna dipped her head to get a better view out the window. A sprawling ranch-style home sat tucked away in the mountains. Sure, it was made of logs, but the resemblance to a cabin stopped there. Cabins were tiny structures with one room where a person might go away for the weekend to get a rustic vacation.

Suddenly she understood better how so many people could live here together.

"Come on. I'll show you around." Jaxon opened his door and tugged her toward him.

Brianna followed, awestruck by the surroundings. With no neighbors and only trees and animals for company, this elegant home was truly secluded.

Sheriff Hardin twisted around in the front seat and tipped his hat at them. "I hate to run, but I've got to get back to the station."

"No problem. We'll talk later." Jaxon patted the hood of the car with one hand as Hardin drove away.

Jaxon didn't release Brianna's hand. His thumb grazed repeatedly over her palm, distracting her from everything around her. She had to yank her hand free so she could take it all in.

To the left of the main house was the barn. "Thoroughbreds you say?" She took a few steps in that direction. "I don't know a thing about horses." She could see a few of them in the corral outside the barn. Gorgeous majestic beings. She was drawn in that direction and ambled toward the fence.

Jaxon followed her. She could sense his presence right behind her even without glancing back. It made her shudder. What if there was more to his story than she currently believed? They did most assuredly seem to have a connection beyond just telepathy she couldn't deny.

When Brianna reached the fence, she leaned against it, folding her arms over the top and resting her chin on her hands. Even the fence was perfect for the scene. Natural wood rungs nestled together to blend with the environment.

Jaxon laid a hand on her back. "They are beautiful, aren't they? I guess I don't stop and admire them often enough. I'm glad you like the farm."

"I didn't—" *Right. I didn't need to say how I felt, you read my mind*.

Jaxon set his chin on her shoulder and kissed her neck. His breath on her ear made her melt beneath his gentleness.

"My brothers are coming out of the barn to meet you. Then we'll go inside and you can meet Juliana."

Two figures emerged from the barn at that moment.

"This telepathy thing is weird." Brianna turned toward the man who insisted he was her mate. "I'm not sure I'll ever get used to it."

"You will, baby." His words caressed her in sync with his hand running up her spine. "Juliana said the same thing and she's doing fantastic now."

"That's Sergius's wife, you said?"

"Yep." Jaxon nodded toward his approaching brothers and tugged on Brianna's hand. "Come on."

The men coming toward her looked amazingly similar to Jaxon. There was no doubt they were brothers. They could have been triplets. *Dark hair and penetrating brown eyes must run in the family.* Even their strides were similar.

"Ma'am." The one on the left tipped his hat. "I'm Sergius." He reached out a hand and shook hers.

Brianna smiled at him. Before she could speak, the other brother took her hand from Sergius. "Micah. Welcome."

Jaxon pulled her hand from Micah and swatted at his brother. "That's enough. Give her some space." He pulled Brianna in front of him and wrapped his arms around her middle.

She grinned internally at his possessive streak. It felt so…safe.

Micah stepped back. "Like the space *you're* giving her?" He laughed.

"No, like the space you'd want me to give your mate, hotshot." Jaxon squeezed her tighter, if that was possible.

She glanced down at his hands against her stomach. God, she was still in full fire gear. And she had no doubt there was soot still lingering on her face. "I'm a mess. Do you have a shower somewhere in that *cabin* of yours? Perhaps if I could clean up a bit, I might be recognizable." She twisted her neck and smiled up at Jaxon.

"I think we can at least muster up some cold water and a metal trough," he rattled in a mock backwoods accent.

"Ha ha. Unfortunately, even *that* sounds divine right now. Water of any sort would do wonders."

Sergius laid a hand on Jaxon's shoulder. "Take her inside, man. We'll talk later."

Brianna let Jaxon lead her toward the house, his grip tight on her hand. Every time he touched her, she could feel it all the way to her soul. Electricity flowed from him into her, warming her and heightening every sense.

When they reached the house, Jaxon bowed dramatically low as he opened the front door. "After you, ma'am."

The inside was not what she expected. Modern, and yet maintaining a rustic look. She could tell a woman lived there. The place was immaculate.
“Hey, now. Juliana is a wonderful gal and she works hard around here, but we did okay for ourselves before she met Serg. We aren’t slobs.” His jest made her smile.
“Jax?” She looked pointedly at him.
“Yes?”
“Stop rummaging around in my head.”
“I can’t help it. You’re so wide open.”
Just then the woman who had to be Juliana appeared. “You must be Brianna.” She smiled as she grasped Brianna for a quick hug, soot and all. “I’m so glad you’re here. The potent male overload was getting on my nerves,” she teased.
Juliana was stunning. Thick, soft, red curls made a halo around her face and hung halfway down her back. Clear green eyes gave Brianna the most genuine welcome. Even in jeans and a simple long-sleeved shirt, the woman made Brianna feel inadequate.
“Thank you,” Brianna muttered. She had no idea what to say.
Juliana turned to Jaxon. “Why don’t you show her to your wing? I’m sure she’d love a bath and a change of clothes.”
Clothes. Shit. Brianna had nothing with her. Why hadn’t they stopped to pick up some things before heading out here?
Juliana was sharp. “Can I lend you something to wear? You must have come straight from the fire.” She glanced up and down, making Brianna feel a bit self-conscious. “I bet we’re almost the same size. I’ll find something for you.”
“Thanks.” The woman was incredibly kind. It was impossible not to like her. “I’d appreciate it.”
“Come on. I’ll show you my rooms and let you get cleaned up.” Jaxon tugged her arm again. He did that habitually. Brianna felt a bit like a rag doll, allowing him to yank her around from place to place. However, it wasn’t at all unpleasant.
Her entire life was structured around fighting to stay tough in a man’s world. Every day she struggled to stay stoic and firm. It was the only way she could be taken seriously in her line of work. The idea of having someone take control for a while made her feel desirable, sexy, who was she kidding…horny.
“Relax, baby.” Jaxon took both her hands and led her down the hall backward. “Just be yourself. Everyone will love you.”
When they reached the end of the hall, Jaxon pushed a door open and backed into the room. “Here we are.” He stood back and let her enter. “Sorry, it’s a bit messy. I wasn’t expecting to bring home a mate when I left the house this morning.” He chuckled.
Brianna glanced around the room. Although, honestly, the word “room” was a bit too diminutive for the space. It was more like a suite.
Jaxon shut the door with a snick. “Whatever you don’t like, we’ll change. I don’t have much of a sense for style.”
The bedroom was bigger than her apartment. Brianna wandered in farther. A king-sized bed sat against one wall, the blankets strewn on it haphazardly. Jaxon rushed past her to straighten the sheets and make the bed. To the right was a sitting area with a beige couch and a flat-screen TV. Surrounding the television was an entertainment center that bulged with CDs and DVDs.
“I like my music.” Jaxon shrugged as he wandered back toward her.
The carpet was a thick luxurious tan, a shade deeper than the sofa and the comforter on the bed. The walls were also painted a deep brown. The room was warm and inviting, like the rest of the house.
“Did you decorate yourself?” Brianna couldn’t imagine any man having the fashion sense to pull this together.
He shook his head. “’Fraid not. I love it, but I can’t take the credit. I hired a decorator when we first moved in. Haven’t changed much since then.” He took her hand again. “Interested in the bathroom?” He raised an eyebrow as he spoke.
“If you don’t mind.”
“Mind? A gorgeous naked woman in my bathroom, luxuriating in my deep Jacuzzi tub? Why would I mind?” Jaxon turned toward a door on the left and pushed it wider, exposing the largest bathroom Brianna had ever seen.
“Did you say Jacuzzi? You have one of those in your bathroom?” She followed him, lured by the promise of steaming hot water.
“I did.”
She nearly gasped when she entered. Sure enough, the bathroom boasted a tub big enough for two people in the middle of the room, half sunken into the floor. While she gawked, Jaxon fiddled with the knobs, sticking his hands under the water until he got the temperature just right.
As the tub filled, Jaxon turned to Brianna. With his gaze plastered to hers, he tugged on the sleeves of her jacket until he had the yellow coat removed.
Brianna stood frozen, as though she weren’t capable of undressing herself. Something about the way Jaxon

moved around her was so damn sexy, she couldn't bring herself to stop him. Like a ritual mating dance of some sort, he pulled her boots and outer pants off, lifting her feet one at a time. He then proceeded to remove all her thermal wear.
Every time he let his gaze land on hers, she could see the fire burning behind his eyes. His expression grew more serious by the second.
When he had her completely naked, he laid a hand on each of her biceps. "Brianna…" The one word was all he said, muttered so soft she could have missed it. His lips landed on hers for a sweet kiss. "Do you know how fucking alluring you are?"
Brianna didn't respond. She knew she was attractive. Well, she assumed as much by all the whistles she got from men in the academy she'd attended. But those men could have been desperate, considering the long days without any other women around besides her. The captain of her company didn't tolerate any sexual misconduct from his firefighters.
Thank God for her collection of sex toys in the special drawer next to her bed. She could entertain herself just fine during fire season without getting involved with a man.
But nothing could have prepared her for the look Jaxon gave her now—as though she were the most precious commodity.
"Can I join you?" Jaxon stepped back and let her enter the water. "You can say no, of course. But I might self-combust now that I've seen you naked."
Brianna slunk down under the hot water as it rose up the side of the tub. She looked over at Jaxon and sucked in a breath. Even fully clothed, the man could turn heads. His jeans hung low on his hips in such a perfectly casual way.
He pulled his T-shirt over his head, exposing his firm chest. Only a light sprinkle of hair covered his pecs. He was a bronzed god. Under normal circumstances she'd have considered him out of her league. But these circumstances were anything but normal, and according to Jaxon, he was already hers in every sense of the word.
You are a lucky woman. If you get to spend even one full day in the hands of this man, life will have been worth living. No way in hell would she turn him down for anything he suggested. Who knew what tomorrow might bring when she went back to work? She'd at least have today.
"You've seen me naked." She tipped her head and gave him a coy grin.
"Not quite the same." He sauntered toward her, popping the button on his jeans. "It was dark."
"You said you see perfectly fine in the dark."
He smiled. "I see well enough. Good memory. But in the light of day, you look exquisite." He dropped his jeans and stepped out of them. He sprung free in front of her, right at eye level.
Brianna licked her lips.
Jaxon moaned. "Baby…"
She jerked her gaze up to his face, her own cheeks burning with embarrassment. What the hell was with her today?
Brianna hadn't really answered the question, but she scooted forward in the tub as Jaxon moved to climb in behind her. He spread his legs and situated her between them before pulling her back against his chest. The water still ran, not quite covering her entire body yet.
Where was her usual modesty? Her breasts lay bobbing over Jaxon's arms above the water level. When she glanced down, she saw her nipples firm and pointing out. She gripped Jaxon's thighs and let her eyes fall shut.
"Relax. Enjoy." Jaxon nibbled on her ear as he spoke. He left one hand wrapped around her middle and grazed a path up her arm with the other until his fingers reached her head and pulled her mouth around for a penetrating kiss.
Her ears rang. The only sound in the room was the water still running. The world stood still while Jaxon sucked her tongue into his mouth, forcing a moan from her lips.
The hand around her waist released her to travel to her breasts. With her eyes shut, she couldn't anticipate where his fingers might land, which heightened her arousal even more as he trailed his fingertips almost imperceptibly over her nipples, circling them and flicking them one at a time until she squirmed with need.
His cock rested behind her ass and she was more than aware of its length as he grew more aroused.
Suddenly, he pulled back from the mesmerizing kiss and left a peck on her nose. "Let me wash you," he murmured, "before I get so carried away that soap gets completely forgotten."
Shit. She'd already forgotten.
He chuckled, a habit that told her he'd read her mind. "Tip your head back to wet your hair."
Brianna obeyed, leaning back into the water when he pushed her forward just enough to allow her to get completely wet. The water was higher now, having submerged her up to her neck while she'd been lost in the vortex that was Jaxon's kiss.
"I'll have to kiss you silly more often if it makes you this pliable," he teased as he reached to turn the faucet off.
"I can't think when you're touching me. Your kisses turn my mind to mush." She narrowed her gaze. "But you know that."

“You’ll learn to block me. Don’t worry.” Jaxon grabbed a bottle from the side of the tub and tipped it up. Thick pink liquid poured into his palm.
Brianna raised her eyebrows. “How many women have you entertained in this tub?” Why did the man have girly shampoo?
He smiled at her and reached for her head. When his fingers rubbed her scalp, she thought she’d die. “None, baby. You’re the first. I’m sure my brother’s thoughtful mate scurried around here when she heard we were coming so you’d have some nice things in my bachelor wing.”
Ahh. She’d have to thank Juliana later.
“Close your eyes.” As soon as she did, Jaxon leaned her back and rinsed the shampoo from her hair. He was so precise; she needn’t have bothered with her eyes. He didn’t even get her face wet.
“You know,” she began when he’d lifted her back to sitting, “I *am* capable of washing myself.” She scooted forward a few inches to give herself some space and looked back at him. “Hand me that soap.” She pointed to the bar behind him.
“This soap?” He lifted the bar but made no move to give it to her.
She held out her hand, but he didn’t let her have the bar.
“Wasn’t I doing a good job? You nearly purred while I rubbed your scalp. What sounds would you make if I was to bathe the rest of your body?”
She couldn’t resist him. “Turnabout’s a bitch, you know,” she warned.
“God, I hope so.” He made a show of lathering up his palms and then spread them over her shoulders and down her arms. He even massaged her fingers as he worked his way down. When he reached for the soap again, she was breathing heavily.
The water was so warm, her skin pinkened. Resigning herself to his pampering, she leaned back against him while his magic fingers caressed her breasts and then wandered down to her thighs. He lifted first one leg and then the other, kneading her muscles as he soaped all the way to her toes.
When he finished with her legs, he tucked each one under his own. She stiffened when he used his feet to pull her legs apart, spreading her wide and then reaching under the water to stroke her sex.
Her head rolled back against his shoulder. She reached for his hand between her legs to stop him. If he kept this up, she was going to come with little effort. She’d never been so fucking horny in her life. The scene was so damn erotic and she wanted this man like she’d never wanted anyone before.
She wanted to flip around and straddle him, sit down over his cock and take him into her warmth. But he wouldn’t have it. He grasped her wrists with his hands and put them both in one of his larger ones. “Let me love you, baby. Please. I want to watch you come apart.”
Brianna moaned and bit her lip. She opened her eyes to find Jaxon’s gaze on her face. A serious expression filled with care. He kissed her, deep and long, his tongue tangling with hers while he explored her mouth as thoroughly as he’d washed her body.
With his free hand, he stroked her thighs, first one and then the other, right at the apex of her sex. Finally, when she began to squirm once more in his clutch, he stroked her clit.
All thoughts of kissing flew from her mind. Every brain cell went toward concentrating on the fingers playing her like an instrument.
He alternated between circling her nub and flicking over it until she lifted her ass off the bottom of the tub, using her body to plead for more.
“I’m getting there, baby.” He set his chin on her shoulder, undoubtedly enabling him to watch what was happening beneath the water. “Stay still.”
Stay still? Didn’t he know she had no control over her body right now?
Finally, he plunged two fingers into her and angled them toward the front to drag them over her G-spot on the way out. The second time he pushed inside her, he pressed his thumb against her clit.
“Jaxon!” She screamed his name right before she came, squeezing around his fingers still buried deep inside her pussy. His thumb rubbed her clit until she stopped pulsing around him.
“That’s it, baby. God, you’re so fucking sexy.” He released her wrists and pushed her hair from her face as she gasped for oxygen.
This man made her feel like the most sensuous creature on earth.
She swallowed. “I need you. I love that you can make me come so easily, but I still need you inside me.”
“I know, baby.” He kissed her brow. “I just like to watch first. I’ll never tire of watching you come undone under my touch. It humbles me.”
She stared into his deep brown eyes, sensing he truly cared for her on a level that was inconceivable considering they’d met only hours ago.
“Lean forward, baby.” He scooted her forward, lifting her around the waist until she was on her knees. “Grab the side of the tub.”
She glanced over her shoulder as he nudged her thighs wider and inched up behind her. Oh God. He’d taken her from behind earlier and she’d nearly wept.
She had no idea she had such a submissive streak before today, but her pussy leaked watching him arrange

her so he could plow into her from behind again. The show of dominance made her shake with desire.
Brianna leaned forward and held the side of the tub. She'd do whatever it took to get him inside her. Nothing except the girth and length of his cock was going to abate the burning fire.
She didn't have to wait long. Jaxon gripped her hips and plunged into her warmth in one thrust. The moan he emitted could undoubtedly be heard outside the house, let alone the room. And she didn't even care. Her only concern was that she did this to him. A smile spread across her lips. With just her existence, she had the power to bring this man to his knees.
"Stop thinking, baby." He held himself inside her and leaned over her body, his chest covering her back. He ran his hands up her arms until their fingers twined together on the edge of the tub. And then he began a rhythm, his cock pulling in and out of her in a way that made the rest of the world cease to exist.
She cared about nothing except fucking this man, or having him fuck her senseless. "Jax…" Her voice faded as she pleaded with him. She had no idea what she wanted beyond what she was getting, but she still begged. She was so full.
As he continued to stroke in and out of her, he pulled back up onto his knees. His hands skittered down her back until he reached her ass. When he spread her cheeks apart, she thought she might faint. She leaned her head on her hands against the edge of the tub.
No man had ever ventured into that forbidden hole, and she was powerless to stop him from doing so. In fact, she wanted him to do anything and everything to her.
Still thrusting into her at a steady pace, he circled her rear hole with one finger and then pressed into her. She whimpered. It felt so good. Even that one finger heightened her awareness of him.
While he stroked her, stretching her tight hole farther with each pass, he reached around her body with his other hand and pinched her clit. Brianna collapsed under the onslaught of sensations. If she hadn't been leaning over the side of the tub, her head would have fallen under the water.
"Come with me, Bri." Jaxon increased his thrusts, still pinching her clit and stroking her rear hole.
She was powerless with him. His command sent her over the edge. She gripped the sides of the tub to keep from falling. Or maybe to ground herself in this world while it tilted on its axis, sending her over the edge into the deepest orgasm of her life. She'd never known anything like it. So powerful even her vision grew bleary for several seconds.
As Brianna floated back to earth, Jaxon pulled out of her and sat down in the water, gathering her back against his chest.
She took deep gasping breaths, unable to form words for what had just happened to rock her world.
"You're amazing. I'm already falling in love with you."
Brianna's bliss froze in place. Love? Did he really see this going further than a one-night stand? She couldn't wrap her mind around that.
"Don't fight this, baby. It's meant to be. Yes, I said the *L* word. Get used to it." He chucked her under the chin and kissed her nose.
She closed her eyes again and let herself relax like the pile of mush she was.

Chapter Seven

Jaxon stared down at his mate, sound asleep beneath the covers of his bed. He had truly fucked her unconscious. Her hair lay fanned around her face. Poetic, because she was an angel as far as he was concerned.

He wanted her again. But she needed to rest.

God. Now he understood perfectly what all the hype was about. When a wolf met his mate, all bets were off. He'd teased Sergius mercilessly when he'd claimed Juliana. He'd have to apologize with his tail between his legs.

Brianna White hung the moon and the stars. She was his world now.

Jaxon wiped the smile off his face and sobered up. He slipped from between the sheets, leaving the warm, sexy body behind. He needed to deal with the fact that McKinney was back in town.

Jaxon padded into the main living area and found his brothers and Juliana gathered in the kitchen. "Does anyone else feel a strange sense of déjà vu?" Hadn't they stood around this same kitchen island just months ago in much the same predicament, with McKinney stalking them in an effort to get his hands on Juliana?

"Unfortunately." Sergius pulled the refrigerator door open and grabbed a bottle of water. As he twisted off the top, he shook his head. "I think we may need to get proactive. Too much defense and not enough offense here."

"This isn't a football game, Serg." Juliana wrapped her arms around him. "What the hell is the sports euphemism supposed to refer to?"

Serg squeezed her tight. "I'm thinking we spend too much time waiting for McKinney to come to us. Maybe we need to advance onto his turf instead of waiting for him to attack."

Jaxon sat on a stool but then immediately jumped back up. Brianna was awake. He could sense her energy. "Be right back."

Jaxon headed down the hall. When he came back into his bedroom, he found his mate stretching languidly on his bed. Like a cat. She smiled at him and sat up, dragging the sheet with her.

"You're awake." Jaxon climbed up onto the bed and sat next to her.

"Yes. I can't believe I slept like that. I never take naps." She cocked her head to one side. "Somebody wore me out in the middle of the day."

"Who?" Jaxon glanced around the room all innocent.

"I could hear you thinking awfully hard out there with your family. Is everything okay?"

"If you discount the rabid vampire on the loose stalking what's mine, then yes."

"Oh God. I'd almost forgotten about the vampire situation. Or maybe I blocked it out because it's impossible for me to wrap my mind around the idea." Brianna held the sheet tighter, gripping it in front of her chest.

Jaxon walked his fingers up Brianna's thigh. When he reached her center, he grabbed the sheet and yanked hard. She wasn't prepared and lost her grip, exposing her fantastic body to his gaze.

All thoughts of vampire threats flew out the window. His woman was fucking fantastic and made his cock hard in an instant.

"Don't look at me like that. I'm worn out. You can't touch. You're insatiable." Brianna made a lunge for the sheet, but Jaxon was quicker and held the corner out of her reach.

"And you're better? I seem to remember one very wet, sexy woman begging me to take her from behind in the tub a short while ago. Wasn't that you?"

"Ha ha." Brianna slithered from the bed on the opposite side and grabbed one of Jaxon's T-shirts from the back of a chair. She slipped it over her head in warp speed.

"Now why'd you have to go and do that for?" Jaxon crawled across the bed in her direction, hoping to tease her with his meandering approach. "You do look fantastic in my shirt, but you looked much better without it."

"Back up, buster." Brianna stepped back until she bumped into the sitting-area couch. "Every time you touch me, I lose my senses. Tell me more about this vampire."

"Fine." Jaxon climbed off the side of the bed. "Get dressed—if you must. Juliana left a pile of clothes for you. I set them in the bathroom." He winked at her. He'd only been teasing. They really did have to face reality this afternoon, but he loved when Brianna got all flustered. Her cheeks reddened and her gaze flickered around the room in an attempt to keep from looking at him. It was cute.

Brianna stepped gingerly around the god of a man who claimed to own her now. A battle of maximum proportions was going on in her head. On the one hand, she should consider Jaxon and everyone else in the house to be certifiable. On the other hand, she'd seen firsthand what he could do, so there wasn't any way to refute that kind of evidence.

Even if she could convince herself the man hadn't shifted into a wolf form several times right before her eyes, she still couldn't avoid the telepathy she now shared with him. It was unnatural.

Unfortunately, she wasn't getting any privacy from him right now either. He had the audacity to slink behind her and follow her into the bathroom. She shivered as she heard his thoughts.

Jaxon had claimed he could block his thoughts from her and she would learn to do the same in time, but if that was the case, the man was sending her visions and ideas on purpose.

She whipped around inside the enormous bathroom and glared at him. “Stop it.”
“What?” he asked.
“Stop thinking about fucking me. And stop following me.”
“Why? Do the images I send distract you?” He stalked even closer, forcing her to back up to avoid his touch.
“You know they do.” Her pussy grew wet again. How many orgasms had she had since this morning? She’d lost count. It was absurd what he did to her.
Jaxon denied nothing. “The best part is I can keep a running tally of all the things that make you the squirmiest and be sure to incorporate them into future sessions. Do you realize that every time I think about bondage, you nearly come on the spot?” His words grew softer as he got closer. “I can smell your arousal, baby. It spikes considerably when I send an image of tying you up, blindfolding you, gagging you, taking away your control and fucking you so hard you can’t remember where you end and I begin.”
His words trickled over her, making her shake. She swallowed, but her mouth was so dry there wasn’t anything in her throat. He’d nailed her and it scared the shit out of her. How many times in her life had she dreamed, awake or asleep, about being taken while bound up?
Jaxon stood so close now, she could feel his breath as he whispered his next words. “Oh, I fully intend to fulfill your every fantasy. And baby, it makes me so hard I’m going to have to jack off just to carry on a civil conversation with the family now.”
Brianna shook her head. She didn’t know why. She couldn’t get her brain to cooperate with her.
Jaxon flicked his hand out so fast she didn’t even see it coming. One second they were standing there inches apart like statues with him seemingly providing the space she needed. The next second, he flicked one finger expertly between her legs, dragging the digit up her thigh and across her sex, collecting copious amounts of moisture.
With a grin, he held his pointer up to her face. “Care to deny anything?”
How could she? The evidence of her arousal was on the tip of his finger. She’d been so fucking horny for him, precome had leaked down her thigh. There was no denying it.
In slow motion with his eyes at half-mast, Jaxon sucked his pointer into his mouth and pulled it out with a pop. “Mmm. You’re delicious. Next time, I’ll make *you* lick it.”
Brianna licked her lips. Damn him for getting all in her head. And damn him for the knowing smile he now sported. Of course the bastard knew that comment didn’t exactly dry her up.
“I’m not going to take you again right now. I know you have to be sore.” His words seemed in contradiction to his actions because as he spoke, he grabbed the bottom of the T-shirt she wore with both hands and pulled it over her head.
Brianna moaned. *Damnit*. All the man did was look at her and she couldn’t control herself.
“Fuck, you’re hot.” Jaxon turned his head away, grabbed a stack of clothes and set them next to her. When he reached for a tank top, Brianna found her voice.
“Um, Jax? I can dress myself.” Did he really think he was going to put her clothes on her like she was some kind of child?
“I know you can.” He gazed into her eyes. “But, right now, I feel like doing it.” It wasn’t a question.
Brianna flushed. She glanced around the room. What she really needed to do was pee. “Um, could I have some privacy, please?” She nodded at the toilet.
“Oh, right. Sorry. Go ahead. I’m not a modest person, Bri. I’m sure I’ll be peeing in front of you sometimes, and vice versa.”
Was he kidding? She knew her skin had to be beet red without even looking down. Now she was shaking. His dominance was…still turning her on. Damn damn damn. She had no idea she had such a submissive streak.
He wasn’t going to budge.
Brianna took a deep breath and glanced down at his cock. He wore a sagging pair of jeans again that hung low on his hips. The bulge in front spoke volumes.
“Fine. But you have to do something for me in return.” She spoke directly into his mind. Maybe she could get the hang of this telepathy yet.
“Anything your heart desires.”
Brianna marched over to the commode, sat down with her legs as close together as possible and peed. It wasn’t quite as embarrassing as she’d expected. After all the things they’d done together today, what was a little bodily function?
When she finished, Jaxon didn’t say a word. He simply smiled at her and then pulled the tank he held over her head. It was rather tight. She was the same size as Juliana more or less. Undoubtedly Sergius liked his woman half naked too.
A glance down proved Brianna’s nipples were pebbled beneath the cotton material.
“Perfect.” Jaxon smirked.
“Jax, I’m not going out into the living room dressed in this.”
“I didn’t ask you to. But I will know what you look like under this sweatshirt nevertheless.” He plucked a bulky sweatshirt off the pile next and held it up before dropping it once again. “I’m pretty dominant, I’ll admit. And I will

ask a lot of you in the bedroom, but rest assured I will not share you. Not even your bare skin." He kissed her. A quick peck on the lips that left her bereft when he pulled back almost as fast as he'd leaned into her.
Next, he handed her a pair of yoga pants. "Would you like to put these on, Miss Independent?" he teased.
Brianna peered around him. Panties?
Reading her mind, he wrapped her in his arms and pulled her close. His mouth landed on her ear. He whispered, his voice husky and full of promise, "I like the idea of knowing you're naked under your clothes. Your wet pussy rubbing against the fabric of these tight pants. No one will know but me. Will you do that for me?"
Brianna stepped into the pants, never taking her gaze off his. They were tight. And she was wet. Those were both true facts. Next, she grabbed the oversized sweatshirt and tugged it on. It was his. It smelled of him. And it was huge. It reached lower than her ass, affording her at least that small modicum of privacy.
With a chuckle, Brianna flipped the toilet seat down and sat on it. She crossed her legs and prepared to get as comfortable as possible. "I believe you made me a promise." She raised her eyebrows.
Jaxon's face went lax. *"What are you up to, woman?"*
Brianna pointed at Jaxon's bulging jeans. "You mentioned needing to do something about that. And if I recall correctly…" she tapped her lips and glanced at the ceiling as though trying to remember the details, "…oh, that's right. You didn't want to fuck me just now out of concern for my poor overused pussy."
"And?" Jaxon narrowed his gaze. *"No."* He shook his head.
"Yes." She smiled demurely. Oh, if felt good to best him at one thing. "I *so* do want to watch."
"Fine." Jaxon tipped his head both directions as though stretching for the mile run. He popped the button on his jeans and lowered the zipper with a flourish. His cock sprang out, the tip dripping.
Brianna licked her lips. God how she wanted to suck his length into her mouth, but right now she wanted to watch him get himself off even more. Later…
Jaxon crept toward her and planted one hand on the wall behind her head. Leaning at an angle, his dick inches from her face, he took himself in his other hand and pumped.
She'd never seen anything so fucking sexy in her life. The man let his head fall back after about two strokes and sunk into his own world. She never took her gaze off his shaft, learning by example what would most pleasure her lover and storing the information away for future use.
Jaxon gripped himself gently at first, letting his hand graze tentatively up and down. Soon, he switched to a firmer grip and pumped himself with abandon. His abs tightened behind his cock, his entire stance rigid as he groaned toward the ceiling.
It took all Brianna's restraint to keep from licking the come leaking from the head just a breath away from her mouth. She held firm, enjoying the show almost as much as she would later enjoy sucking him off. She imagined what he would taste like, how his cock would feel against her tongue and the roof of her mouth. The tight skin was so smooth. It would glide toward her throat with ease when she took him. She did nothing to block these images.
Before she could even finish the thought, he shot off, his come jetting out onto the floor beside her as he jerked to one side to avoid hitting her.
When he was spent, Jaxon leaned forward and claimed Brianna's mouth. He grabbed her face with both hands and held her head still while he plundered her until she forgot the world around them.
When she no longer had any sense at all, he pulled back. "Don't think for one minute that exchange was equal. Payback is a bitch and I can't wait to watch you finger yourself to completion. I won't be lenient."
Jaxon stood, tucked his still-hard cock back into his jeans and fastened himself. He grabbed a section of toilet paper and wiped the floor of his come. "And, by the way, I didn't miss that push of thoughts into my head, you little nymph." He winked at her, a coy smile on his face. "Let's go. I'm sure my family is wondering what happened to us."
"I seriously doubt it," she muttered as she stood.
Jaxon turned toward her and nailed her with his gaze as she rolled her eyes. "Did you sass me, mate of mine?"
He grinned, but in a flash, before she even knew what hit her, Jaxon had grabbed her hands and pressed her face-first into the wall. He held her wrists above her head and licked a line up her neck.
"Baby, you tempt me."
"Tempt you to what?" she taunted. Her heart beat rapidly. *What the hell is wrong with me?* No matter what Jaxon did, she grew even more aroused.
He nipped her earlobe and licked around her ear enough to make her shiver. "I'll spank that sweet ass of yours in a heartbeat, baby. Would you like that?" He paused and then chuckled. "Fuck… You are going to kill me. Stop distracting me with your scent. I can't concentrate."
"Good, 'cause we're even." Brianna wiggled her ass against his groin. Probably not a good idea, because he ran his hand through her crotch, grazing over her clit and sex with just enough pressure to make her moan. With her arms above her head, the sweatshirt she wore climbed up her body, exposing her ass. A quick swat made her suck in a breath.
"Hell, I can't even punish you without making you moan." Jaxon released her, rubbing her ass where his hand had just landed. "Come on. We have to get out of here before I lose myself."

As though nothing had happened and she wasn’t on the edge of an orgasm, he clutched her hand and dragged her from the bathroom, straight through the bedroom and down the hall.

Chapter Eight

"'Bout time you two showed up." Sergius lay sprawled out as though bored on an overstuffed couch as Jaxon led his mate back into the living room.

Jaxon at least flushed, but he didn't let his brother get to him. It had only been a few months since Sergius had been in exactly this same predicament. He remembered. There was no doubt.

Dragging his mate behind him, Jaxon found a seat on the couch across from his older brother. Juliana sat nestled under Sergius's head. Micah relaxed in a recliner between the two facing couches.

"So tell me more about what happened this morning, Micah." Jaxon tugged Brianna down next to him, holding her body so close she was practically on his lap. He wanted her. Even though he'd just come at his own hand, he still didn't even take the edge off. But right now he needed to think.

Juliana cleared her throat. "Brianna, would you like a drink? Perhaps a glass of wine with me? It might drown out some of the testosterone in the room," she joked.

"Thank you. That would be amazing." Brianna moved to stand. Jaxon held her tight.

"I'll get it." Juliana shook her head as she wandered to the attached kitchen. "Chardonnay?" she asked over her shoulder.

"Sounds perfect." Brianna glared at Jaxon, but he ignored her. *"Little highhanded, don't you think?"*

"Nope. I just like having you near me."

"And the kitchen is too far away?"

"Yep." Jaxon looked down at his mate. She smelled so fucking good. He knew he was being a bit of an ass right now, but he wanted her next to him—touching him.

Juliana handed Brianna a glass while Micah spoke. "Seemed like McKinney was tracking you two. The way he circled that cave, not even paying a bit of attention to me and Serg on his tail—it was just weird."

"When did you first notice him?" Jaxon squeezed Bri's leg.

"Right after we split up and you found Brianna. Who knows how long he'd already been there."

"Do you think it was a trap? Or a coincidence?"

"I'm not sure, but I wouldn't rule anything out." Micah stood and began to pace.

Sergius sat up next to his mate and rubbed his chin. "Should we go after him?"

Jaxon flinched. "I'd like nothing more than to kill that bastard, but I don't think we have enough information. I'm not letting my guard down for an instant though."

Sergius stood now too. "I think it's time we put the word out to some other packs and see if anyone knows anything about other vampires in other parts of the world. This jackass is starting to royally piss me off. I had hoped we'd seen the last of him after he kidnapped Jules and tried to get away with her. If he threatens us again, I don't think we can simply chase him off and assume we're safe. Enough is enough."

"After all these months, I secretly hoped he'd been killed in that mineshaft blast." Jaxon cringed to think how lax they'd all gotten in recent weeks, silently hoping McKinney was out of their lives.

That bastard had rocked their world last spring when he'd lured Juliana off her hiking path with his mind games. And then, after Sergius determined the missing hiker was his mate and claimed her, the vamp still tried his best to get her back. He'd even set up an elaborate ruse, sending the three brothers in separate directions to hunt down three separate women. As soon as they'd fallen into his trap, he'd kidnapped Juliana from the sheriff and taken her to an abandoned mine shaft.

Luckily, Sergius had been sharp enough and quick enough to thwart McKinney's designs and the vampire had found himself on the inside of the mine where he inadvertently set off his own antiquated dynamite.

God how Jaxon wished he'd died in that explosion. Such did not seem to be the case now. If that bloodsucker thought he was going to sink his teeth into Brianna…

Jaxon grit his teeth and squeezed Brianna's thigh almost too tight. And his sweet mate wondered why he didn't want her wandering away from him.

"Wait." Brianna glanced around at everyone, her hand trembling, sloshing the wine inside the glass. "You think this vampire is after me?"

Juliana spoke up. "It's possible. Trust me. You don't want to get caught by him. It's disheartening to say the least. He tried to get away with me in the spring. If Sergius hadn't outsmarted him, I don't know what would have happened."

"Jesus. Does he have something against you people…er…wolf-people?"

"Seems that way," Jaxon stated.

"Motive?" Brianna turned to Jaxon. Her look stopped his heart.

"I don't think he likes the fact that we took up residence in his national forest ten years ago. We keep chasing him off. We might have been able to live harmoniously at one point, but we wolves don't care for anyone who threatens humans." Jaxon rubbed Brianna's thigh. She stiffened under his touch. He could smell her fear.

"I have to work in the morning. Do you think I'll be safe? Maybe he isn't after me…just you." Brianna bit her lip.

Jaxon shook his head. *Not a chance*. "No way, baby. I know I said we'd discuss this, but there's no fucking way I can let you go back out on the front line of that fire under the circumstances. It's too risky. I don't even want you to go to the bathroom alone until we figure out what McKinney's angle is." He gave Brianna a half grin at his

unintentional choice of comparisons.
He meant that literally, but making her pee in front of him earlier had been a show of dominance. It hadn't had anything to do with protecting her inside the house.
Brianna yanked herself from his grasp and stood. She glared down at him. *"Not very submissive outside the bedroom, are you?"* he questioned. He secretly was glad. Not that he was going to budge on this issue, but he wanted his woman to be strong-willed and determined…outside of the bedroom.
"No. And don't you forget it." She spoke out loud, but if anyone was confused, they didn't say a word. "I worked very hard to get where I am as a female firefighter. If you think I'm going to cower and hide over some mythical madman that no one else in my unit even knows exists, you're crazy."
Brianna jumped back a few feet when Jaxon tried to grab her hand. All he got was air. "Baby—"
"No," she asserted. "This is not negotiable. You may have noticed I can be quite flexible when the need arises, but not on this issue. This is my job, Jaxon. Not a game. I love my work. Those men are counting on me and I've proven myself to be a fine asset to the team. They'd never look at me with respect again if I don't show up tomorrow morning at six sharp ready to work as hard as any man."
Jaxon exhaled. *Fuck*. How the hell was he going to handle this?
"I'll tell you how you're going to handle it. You're not. I am. This is my life. The one I was leading just fine until today. Back off where it concerns my work."
"You read my mind."
"You must not block well when you're pissed." His mate cocked her hip to one side and glared at him. If she'd had a wad of gum, she'd no doubt be smacking it in his face and blowing bubbles as though he'd bored her to tears with a poorly executed joke.
"Let's calm down. I'm sure there's a solution we can all live with." Sergius, the peacemaker, stepped into the middle of the room.
Jaxon hung his head and stared at the floor. His face heated. Hell, his entire body shook with anger. No…fear. He wasn't mad at Brianna. He was scared.
"I just found you," he whispered toward the carpet.
"And I'm so glad you did. You probably saved my life in that cave." She kneeled on the floor in front of him and took his head with both hands. "Look at me."
He lifted his gaze to hers.
"I'm going to be fine. I'll be with a dozen firefighters. And hey, you said yourself the vampire guy didn't seem to like flames. He stayed clear of them, right?"
"Yes, but…"
"Then I'll stay as close to the flames as possible. Simple. Problem solved."
"That makes me feel so much better. Perfect." His tone was sarcastic, but he grinned at her all the same.
"If we are going to be together—"
"And we are," he interrupted.
"Then we have to compromise."
"Okay. Fine. You can pee without me in the room, but you can't run wild in the woods with a vampire on the loose who is undoubtedly going to track you down and suck your blood until he turns you into his concubine for all of eternity. There. Compromise." Jaxon matched her stance, wrapping his fingers around her face the way she held his.
Micah spoke up. "Dude, I think you might possibly need to reevaluate your definition of compromise." He laughed.
Jaxon stood, pulling his mate to her feet. He glared at his younger brother. They were only two years apart, but still… "When you get a mate, and I hope that's soon, then you can talk to me about her safety. Until then, butt out."
Micah held both hands in the air and pursed his lips. He still grinned, but at least he kept his mouth shut.
"Well, I for one have a mate. And I've been in your shoes, Jax, and I have to agree with Micah. Let's find a way to make this work instead of stomping our foot and pouting." Serg sat back down.
"I'm not pouting. I'm—"
"Scared," Sergius finished. "I know. I get it. Sit." He nodded toward the couch and waited until Jaxon had resumed his spot, Brianna at his side.
Jaxon even handed her back the glass of wine she'd set on the end table.
Sergius resumed his speech. "What if we three take turns spending the day following Brianna in wolf form? It won't seem strange to anyone for a wolf to be ambling around trying to escape the flames if we are spotted. We'd be able to keep a close eye on her and we'd be sure to scent McKinney if he dared to approach her from any angle. If anything goes awry, all bets are off. Could you agree to that?" Serg turned his gaze to Bri.
"Seems reasonable to me," she murmured.
"I don't like it," Jaxon began, "but I suppose it's better than nothing."
"Great. Then it's settled. Jaxon, you take the first shift. You can drive her to work and then not come home. Keep us posted on your location and we'll step in when you need us." Serg stood again. "Now let's get some

dinner. I'm starving."

Brianna was exhausted. By the time the five of them rustled together a meal of hamburgers, fries and salad she was dead on her feet. Undoubtedly caused by the stress of the day, multiple orgasms and mind-blowing sex. *Oh, and let's not forget mating with a werewolf and being stalked by a vampire. No wonder I'm tired.*

"Jax, I need to get up by about five to get to the base on time. Do you mind if I go to bed?" She leaned on him from her spot at the table.

"Of course." He stood, tugging her up with him. "'Night all."

Brianna was grateful for the quick exit. As aroused as she'd been earlier before all the commotion in the living room, she was too tired now to even consider letting Jaxon start something.

As they entered his bedroom she headed straight for his luxurious bed. "Could I have a rain check on whatever idea you had in mind for my limp body this evening?" She tipped her head up to him as he peeled her shirt over her head. Her arousal spiked, but she was too tired to give in to it. Even as Jaxon stripped the rest of her clothes, she simply watched him.

Jaxon smiled and nodded at the bed. "Sleep. When this all blows over, we'll spend several days not coming out of the bedroom and I'll show you all my tricks." He wiggled his eyebrows as he approached her.

With her eyes half open, she slid under the covers. She watched him drop his pants, tug on a pair of shorts and climb into the bed beside her. He gathered her body against his own and spooned her. When he smoothed her hair away from her face and kissed her temple she relaxed into his touch. "How did I get so lucky?"

"Fate, my love. And I'm the lucky one." With that, Brianna drifted into the deepest sleep she could ever remember, wrapped snugly in the arms of the man who claimed he would be at her side for the rest of her life.

Chapter Nine

Brianna was so warm. And naked. Wrapped in a perfect cocoon, her back against a hard male body, she snuggled deeper to enjoy the bliss. A large rough hand splayed over her stomach and rubbed against her skin. She pleaded with the god of dreams to let her stay in this state of perfection for as long as possible before her alarm went off. Since when did she have such erotic dreams?

The hand caressing her wandered up her torso to encompass a breast and knead the soft globe. She moaned in satisfaction and pushed her chest out to get more purchase against those delicious fingers. To her relief, the fingers circled her nipple and flicked over the tip until it stiffened.

Even if she woke up now*, it would be worth it. Palm flat, that hand roamed down her body, over her hip and thigh, and then nudged her top leg forward, opening her sex. With her knee bent and tucked up past her center, she leaned forward almost onto her stomach.*

Brianna would be willing to give up all future memorable dreams if that hand would just please reach between her legs and caress her clit to completion.

She got her wish. A long finger reached into her core and pulled out her moisture, swirling around her opening before circling her clit and gently pinching the nub.

She was so close. Her senses were all in super mode. She could feel every touch as though she were not only awake, but hypersensitive. She could even smell the masculine scent of her dream man, his soap mixed with a taste of the outdoors. And sex—she could smell her arousal and his beneath the blankets.

She could practically taste what his cock must be like on her tongue—the huge firm length currently pressing into her thigh. Even her sight wasn't left out. Visions of a tall, muscular, sun-bronzed god with dark thick hair and deep brown eyes rounded out her perfect dream man.

Just when she thought she would finally come under the delicate ministrations of the hand between her legs, it disappeared. Brianna moaned in frustration.

And then, just as suddenly, she was filled to the hilt with her dream man's huge cock. A long, low groan escaped her lips at the delicious stretching of her pussy. Exactly what she needed.

Wait. Brianna's eyes shot open when a chuckle filled her ear. Lips landed on her neck, tickling her and bringing her closer to the surface of wakefulness. "Are you finally going to join me, baby?" The words were tender, soft, gentle, deep. They dripped with sex. He chuckled again.

Jaxon. Oh God. It wasn't a dream. It was reality. As he began to pull out and then plunged back into her, Brianna gripped the sheets and pushed her ass back against him.

Heaven. Jaxon pushed her the rest of the way onto her stomach and wormed his way between her legs, his cock never leaving her warmth. He danced both hands up her body until he gripped her fingers over her head, holding her trapped between the mattress and his huge form.

The pressure was exquisite, better even than the dream. If he would just…move.

"I'm getting there. Patience, baby. You make me come so fast every time, I never get to enjoy your tight hot pussy." He chuckled again into her neck. "Between your sexy body and your moans of delight, it's a wonder I can last one minute." He nibbled a path to her ear, holding himself deep inside her. "When you add the rampant thoughts running through your brain, I can't hold back."

Brianna only groaned again. *"Shut up and fuck me."*

"Okay. As the lady wishes…" Still pressing her into the bed, Jaxon began to fuck her from behind in earnest. The grip he had on her hands above her head told her how hard he was working to avoid shooting off instantly. She was so close. Hell, she'd been on the edge of an orgasm minutes ago before even being awake.

"Come with me, baby," he murmured.

That did it. Brianna's sex gripped his cock and her orgasm swept her body, shaking her from head to toe.

"Jaxon," she squealed against the pillow.

Right behind her, Jaxon stiffened and held himself deep inside her. She could feel the pulsing of his length as he shot his come against her cervix.

When finally she stopped milking him and he slackened against her, half on top of her and half to the side, Brianna relaxed her muscles. "You're going to kill me."

"I hope not." He spoke into her hair. "I'd miss you."

Brianna tried to catch her breath, difficult with her face smashed into the pillow. She turned her head to the side and sucked in oxygen. "What time is it?" The room was dark. Hopefully she wasn't late. Had they even set an alarm?

"Relax." Jaxon leaned back, only enough to give her wiggle room, and caressed her skin, bringing goose bumps to her entire body wherever his fingers tickled. "It's early still. I have a great internal alarm. You'll never be late for anything as long as you're with me. Unless, of course, I manage to distract you into being late."

"Ugh."

"Don't worry. I'll have you to the base at six sharp."

Jaxon leaned across Brianna's face, wiped the hair from her cheek and kissed her on the mouth. "Good morning."

"Is that the way you're planning to wake me every day?" Not that she was complaining.

“Well, it was interesting. I almost lost my concentration when you opened your mind enough to let me slip into your ‘dream’. That was amazing. I was privy to your thoughts even while you were still partially asleep.” He kissed her again, a long, deep, thorough kiss that made her blood flow once again to her sex. When he pulled away, he continued, “I’m glad to know that was the best *dream* you’ve ever had and I find it interesting that you would plead with the—and I quote—’god of dreams’, to let you orgasm at my hand before you awoke.”
Brianna stiffened and opened her eyes to see him smirking at her. “I’m gonna need to talk to Juliana right away about this blocking you mentioned. That’s just…weird.”
Jaxon swatted her ass, making her flinch. “Shower. Breakfast. There’s a fire still raging out there, haven’t you heard?” As if made of morning energy, Jaxon bounded off the bed and dragged Brianna’s limp body to the edge.
She let him tug her like a rag doll, not helping. She pulled a corner of the sheet over her face and groaned into the mattress. “Lord, don’t tell me you’re a morning person? I don’t think I can take that.”
Mornings were not her friend. She could not be held responsible for anything that happened before two cups of coffee. Anyone who’d ever met her knew that. *“Coffee?”* The ability to make requests without moving her lips or uttering sounds might come in handy on occasion.
“I’ll go get your elixir if you promise to be at least standing and walking toward the bathroom when I get back.”
Jaxon released her and padded from the room. She listened to his footsteps. Just a few more minutes then. Her body was sated. She needed a snooze button.
She must have drifted back into slumber, because the next thing she knew, there was a cool breeze wafting over her naked form. The sheet had been yanked from her body and her eyes shot open in time to watch Jaxon swat her ass gently.
He narrowed his gaze and lowered his face to hers. “You fell back to sleep.”
“Apparently.”
Jaxon pulled her limp body to standing. His face grew serious and he groaned while he kissed her forehead.
Jaxon stood naked before her. Why hadn’t she noticed that? His cock bobbed in front of her. Hell, they’d made love like five minutes ago. Was he always this horny?
“Yes, I’m usually horny, but only since meeting you. Here.” He shoved a steaming cup in front of her. The smell of rich coffee filled her nostrils as she took a whiff.
“Bless you. I don’t function well until I’ve had my coffee.”
“I gathered that.” He smiled. “Let’s get a move on.” He tugged her free arm toward the bathroom.
She followed reluctantly, eyeing his firm naked ass in front of her and wishing she could climb back into the bed and dig her nails into him while he fucked her senseless once again.
“Woman, are you always this difficult to light a fire under? How did you ever manage to get to work on time before today?”
Brianna picked up the pace and stepped into the bathroom. “Well, for starters, no one has ever worn me out to the point that I couldn’t even set an alarm before bed. Nor have I ever woken up to find a werewolf of a man pawing me all over until my brain cells were scrambled. I managed fine before you came along to hold me in a permanent state of arousal.”
Jaxon reached into the shower and adjusted the knobs. “You’ve never slept with a man before?”
“Well, no. Not *slept* slept. No. I’ve always liked to have my bed to myself.”
Jaxon grinned and pumped his chest out. “I feel proud. I’m the first man you’ve spent the night with.” He tugged her forward and kissed her soundly. “And the last…” he added.
He didn’t wait for a response, but grabbed the half-drunk mug from her hands and nudged her into the shower stall.
Warm water descended over her head, perking her up. Between that and the caffeine, she might make it out of the house on time.

Jaxon waited outside the shower. His dick said to get in and run the soap over his mate’s body. His big head reminded him she’d never make it to work on time.
“Aren’t you coming in?” She angled her head over her shoulder and yelled through the door.
“Nope.” Jaxon backed away. “Not a good idea. I’ll meet you in the kitchen.”
It took every ounce of self-control to get himself to leave the room. But he did. The house was alive already. Serg and Mic would be just returning from the barn. Jaxon chuckled to himself. His mate wasn’t a morning person? This would be interesting.
“Morning.” Micah leaned against the counter, a mug of coffee in his hand. “So you’re heading out with Brianna and we’ll be on standby if you need us.”
“Yep. If I scent McKinney in the area, I’ll let you know.” Jaxon headed for the fridge.
He had no idea what his lovely mate generally ate for breakfast. Hell, he didn’t even know if she ate breakfast. Usually the brothers left early for the barn with just coffee and came back into the main house to eat a few hours later. They were sufficiently spoiled to death now that Juliana lived with them.
No one liked to abuse her, but she seemed to enjoy cooking breakfast for them while they took care of the early

chores. Said it made her feel useful since she wasn't working very much. This was probably not how she'd envisioned her days after graduating from college, but hiking was her passion and she intended to take advantage of the area and become a guide…as soon as the vampire threat was eliminated.
"Baby, what do you want to eat?" Jaxon pulled out orange juice and set it on the counter.
"Shit. You made me drop the soap. I don't need anything. They'll have a spread for us to grab at the base before we take off." Brianna's voice in his head made him smile. He could get used to this.
It was one thing to communicate with his brothers, another thing entirely to chat telepathically with his woman.
Jaxon grabbed a glass of juice and headed back for the bedroom. He'd jump in the shower after her and then they'd be off.
As he left the room, the radio on the counter chimed. Juliana bustled into the room. She considered manning the radio another one of her responsibilities. Jaxon paused at the entrance to the hall to listen in.
"Hey, James." Juliana always called the sheriff by his first name now that they were friends. They'd apparently bonded over a long discussion about vampires and wolves when she'd first arrived.
"Jules. Is the plan still the same for today?"
"As far as I know." She glanced at Jaxon with a raised eyebrow.
He nodded back.
"Yep. Jax is taking Brianna to the base and he'll follow her around in wolf form. If he sees or smells anything out of the ordinary, he'll let us know."
"Perfect. I'll be patrolling the area. Keep me informed if you hear from him."
"Ten four." Juliana grinned.

Brianna glanced at Jaxon as they approached her unit. *"Don't hover. These people finally respect me. I don't want to blow it in one morning with a new boyfriend who can't keep his hands off me. I'd rather not let on yet, if you don't mind."*
"What if I do mind?" he teased.
"Tough." Her word held no conviction and she knew it, but she still needed him to stay back. Not to mention, if he so much as grazed her with the tip of one finger, she'd melt and be incoherent the rest of the day.
"Hey, Bri. 'Bout time you showed up." The jester was Devin Richmond, a firefighter who'd been with the unit for over ten years.
"Just 'cause you don't have anyone warming your bed, making you the early bird, doesn't mean the rest of us have to race to arrive at work first." Brianna had learned to give as well as she got. Her choice of jibes this particular morning perhaps wasn't the best, but she held her head high and aimed directly for the bagels and cream cheese—acutely aware of Devin's gaze traveling toward the man she'd fucked about a dozen times in the last twenty-four hours.
"You probably should have dropped me off and driven away. Everyone is staring."
"Yeah, well, I'm not the one who just announced they'd been fucked nine ways until Sunday to the world at large, baby." He laughed into her head so hard she could almost feel the vibrations.
"It was an accident. You scatter my mind."
"I scatter more than your mind. But I'm going to take off because the last thing I want is for you to be anything less than completely present on the job. I don't want you caught in a fire, nor abducted by a vampire. Please be safe. I'll be close at all times." Jaxon walked away without speaking out loud to his mate.
Brianna was relieved she didn't have to introduce him or create a scene. Out of the corner of her eye, she watched Jaxon head toward the sheriff. The men exchanged a brief conversation she wasn't privy to and then Jaxon ambled back to his truck without looking her direction.
Brianna swallowed. She leaned against the table laden with donuts and bagels, willing the back of Jaxon to give her a sign of some sort. It was stupid. She was being petty. She'd specifically asked him not to make a scene and here he was not making a scene. Like a girl, she wanted him to acknowledge her anyway as he left.
"Baby, you are the only thing on my mind. Stop staring daggers at my back. I'm head over heels for you and that's never going to change. You own my soul. Eat your bagel and enjoy the respite of not having your entire entourage teasing you today, 'cause this is the only free pass you get. After today, I'm claiming you openly in front of all your coworkers and friends.
He kept walking, his back growing smaller as he approached his car.
She could have sworn at the last second he turned and winked at her. At least that's the way she cared to remember the departure.
There was no time to ponder Jaxon's pronouncement further. Captain Wilson called everyone together to brief them on what lay ahead.
The fire was anything but contained. In fact, it had spread out some during the night, continuing to move in an easterly direction. At least the wind wasn't shifting back and forth. It was always a bitch when they had to account for strange weather.
The forecast called for rain, but firefighters didn't trust weathermen. They were notoriously unreliable when it

came to precipitation on days when fires were raging out of control.
Brianna would take up the western flank as she had the day before. Each “man” had their position and their job was to fight to maintain it while inching forward.
Even though it was cool outside, she was already sweltering in her gear, her base layer soaking wet beneath the outer, flame-retardant layer. She’d be suffocating when she put the mask on and approached the flames.
For the first time in her life, she experienced some trepidation about the work ahead of her. She had someone to live for and intended to see that it happened.
There was no time to think about Jaxon or his brothers, and certainly not a vampire. Now that she was back at work, the notion that a blood-sucking, mythical creature was stalking her seemed absurd. She had to put it toward the back of her mind and focus.

Chapter Ten

Jaxon paced back and forth between the trees. He stayed as far away from the rear line of defense against the flames as he dared. It was so hot. The air was filled with falling soot even with the wind blowing in the opposite direction. And fuck all, his mate did this every day? How was he ever going to kiss her goodbye in the mornings knowing the danger she put herself in?

You're going to find a way, buddy. There wasn't a chance in hell her job was up for discussion. She was strong-willed, independent and determined. He might win a lot of battles in the bedroom, and fully intended to test that theory, but all bets were off when they crossed the threshold from his wing of the house to the rest of the world at large.

Jaxon had his hands full scanning the area for McKinney. The flames presented two problems he hadn't counted on. One: his eyes were burning from peering all around the forest. And two: all he could smell was charred wood. The burnt trees would mask his ability to scent out his opponent. And he was less than pleased.

On top of everything else, Jaxon put a lot of effort into blocking himself from his mate. The last thing he wanted was to distract her from her job with his banter in her head. And she must have been concentrating awfully hard herself, because he hadn't gotten a single uttered word from her either.

"How's it going?" Serg startled him from his thoughts.

"No action. Any news from there?"

"Nope. The sheriff hasn't seen or heard anything. Micah circled the area and didn't smell a trace of McKinney."

If anything, not knowing McKinney's whereabouts was almost worse than knowing. It put Jaxon on edge. High alert. His ears stood on end. His eyes bore into the hazy horizon. Deep repeated breaths gave him no indication of danger.

With his head held high, Jaxon was totally unprepared for what happened next…

"That's it you fucker, a little to the left…two more steps…riiight…there. Bingo!" Keeton lowered his binoculars and laughed. That jackass werewolf had played right into his plan.

In the blink of an eye, the wolf had gone from scanning the area with his supposedly sharp vision to flying up into the air. Now he swung between the trees in the simple animal trap McKinney had set up. Howling with anger, the wolf fought to free himself of the ropes that ensnared him.

"Sorry, big guy. You'll never get out of that mess. You're mine now."

With a glance at the line of firefighters in the distance, Keeton considered the idea of toying with the woman on the western end before killing the wolf. It would serve that damn wolf right if he had to watch Keeton fuck his prize before succumbing to a long, painful death.

There wasn't time for that right now, however. Too risky. The effort of luring the girl away from her job was beyond his grip right now. The objective was to kill the wolves, one by one, ridding himself of their incessant trespassing on his national forest. The woman was just a pesky side…snack.

Enough was enough already. If it hadn't been for the flames burning so fucking hot so close to that cave yesterday, Keeton would have had a field day killing both the human and the wolf.

But that was yesterday. Today, Keeton had to concentrate and settle for the wolf. Perhaps later, when the woman was desperate and teary-eyed over the loss of her pet, he would sweep in and suck her dry too, just to enjoy the taste of fear.

With no particular haste, Keeton climbed down from his perch and ambled toward the wolf. Even without his binoculars, he could see the rustling in the trees as the fucker tried to free himself. His howls grew louder.

"Yelp all you want, dog. No one is coming for you," he muttered to himself. Keeton was almost three hundred years old. His powers had advanced gradually over the years, but recently he'd worked hard to perfect one particular aptitude—blocking these beings from communicating telepathically.

Keeton hadn't met anyone for over two hundred years who could speak into another being's mind until these wolves came along. A few months ago he'd managed to block the older wolf's ability to communicate with his mate when Keeton had kidnapped her. Unfortunately his efforts had been thwarted when Sergius had followed her scent.

This time, there was no one tracking the younger brother. Jaxon was his name. He'd heard it several times out of the sheriff's mouth. Young Jaxon was on duty, so to speak, apparently guarding the female firefighter. She appeared to be his mate, judging by Jaxon's stance of protectiveness guarding her in the forest. The wolf wouldn't head out to the woods and stalk just any human for no good reason.

So the wolf hadn't just entered the cave yesterday to protect the woman. He'd fucked her. Claimed her. *Ha. That was a short relationship. Hope you enjoyed it while it lasted.*

Keeton had intended to catch the wolves off guard with his arrival. However, it seemed they must have either spotted him or scented him yesterday. After Jaxon had emerged from the cave with his woman, everyone had been suspicious. Leery. Scanning constantly. Staying close to home.

Had they always acted that way, ever since Keeton had fled the area several months ago to regroup before returning with a plan of attack?

What worried McKinney was the idea that the amount of energy he'd expended with his new ability to block telecommunication even from a distance had perhaps rendered him lax in noticing his own surroundings. When had the wolves discovered him? And how had he not known it?
It didn't matter now. What did matter was that Jaxon was squirming with all his might to escape the hanging rope trap amongst the trees, and no one appeared to be dashing to the rescue.
Keeton smiled. His blocking skills seemed to have improved beyond his imagination. He was still a great distance from the suspended wolf. Even the woman hadn't flinched from her spot on the front line fighting the fire. So, Jaxon wasn't able to send her any thoughts either.
Perfect.

Fuck. Goddamn it. Shit. Jaxon was pissed. Especially with himself for not having noticed the trap. He'd been so damn worried about scanning, he hadn't paid any attention to where he was walking.
For a moment, he'd assumed the trap had been left by some random hunter, which would have been a very bad thing. Hunters had a tendency to kill wolves when they caught them. Of course, he did have the option of shifting into human form to avoid being shot, but then he'd have the difficulty of explaining why he'd been traipsing around in the forest, in the fall no less, butt naked.
No. This situation reeked of McKinney. Especially since all efforts on Jaxon's part to communicate with his brothers had been to no avail. He was fucked.
And pissed.
Sergius had explained McKinney's ability to block the brothers' telepathy last spring, but none of them had expected something like this. Where was that bastard?
And more importantly, how was he managing to control the wolves from a distance?
Struggling in vain, Jaxon twisted around in every direction. He didn't want that fucking bloodsucker to catch him off guard. The least he could do was notice which direction McKinney approached from. And he had little doubt by now it would happen.
Calm yourself, Jax. If you expend all your energy before the guy gets here, you'll be useless defending yourself when it really counts.
Jaxon took deep breaths. He squirmed only enough to scan the area in every direction—repeatedly. Meanwhile, he tried again to connect with his brothers.
"Serg? Mic?" The last thing he wanted was to disturb his mate. He wouldn't attempt to contact her unless the situation grew dire. She might lose concentration, and the woman was busy fighting an out-of-control forest fire.
Nothing. Nada. Not even a twitch to indicate he'd gotten through to either man. Time was of the essence. The longer he went without reaching his brothers and managed to stay alive, the greater the chance the two would grow concerned and come looking for him.
So now he just needed to distract McKinney when he made his presence known long enough to give Sergius and Micah a head start.
Suddenly, McKinney stepped out of the trees, a huge smirk on his face. "Well, well, well. What have we here? Did the big bad wolf fail to pay attention to his surroundings?"
Jaxon grit his teeth and narrowed his gaze. His stomach roiled as though he'd eaten something bad. Directly below stood Keeton McKinney, pacing nonchalantly under Jaxon and taunting him with his stance.
Jaxon had no intention of engaging the fucker any more than absolutely necessary for survival.
"Perfect. And kind of your sheriff to blab your location on the radio. Made my work so much easier." The vamp smirked up at Jaxon. "Let's see. How shall we play this out?" McKinney thumped his lips with one finger, pondering what to do next. As though the asshole hadn't planned the entire day before he'd gotten out of bed—if he even slept.
The vampire strutted around beneath Jaxon in a figure eight, glancing up at his victim. Suddenly, without warning, he lurched out and swiped a long knife through the air. Jaxon hadn't even seen the machete-type weapon until that split second.
With a howl of fear, Jaxon tumbled to the ground. Instinct kicked in, helping him right himself so he landed more or less on all four paws. His immediate concern was injury. A quick survey of all his limbs showed little damage to himself.
He was, however, still trapped by the sack-like arrangement of ropes. Intentionally. McKinney grabbed the long end of rope and tugged. "Shame that fall didn't kill you. Now I'll have to do the dirty work myself." He turned and began to pull.
Jaxon growled and dug his paws into the ground. He was caught in the rope contraption, but that didn't mean he had to be helpful where his abduction was concerned.
McKinney turned toward him. "Listen, little doggy. We can do this the hard way or the easy way. You choose." He nodded down the hill toward the fire. "If you insist on fighting me on this, I'll leave you here to rot in hell and watch while I head on down the hill and take that sexy little blonde you seem so fond of for myself. Which will it be?"

Jaxon froze. How dare this motherfucker threaten his mate?
“Do you think she’ll scream while I suck her dry? Or perhaps she might enjoy herself while I fondle her pussy. They usually do. It’s amazing how much pleasure I can give my victims with just a touch while they succumb to my alluring qualities. Many women actually moan in delight while I bring them to orgasm, never knowing that their life is slowly leaking out of their necks and into my mouth.”
Jaxon narrowed his gaze. Goddamn this bastard. He knew where to hit and how hard.
“Your choice. You’re dead either way. If you want to take the blonde down with you, that’s fine. In fact, I think I’ll sequester you in the cave I have arranged for your funeral and let you watch while I fuck that sweet little number right in front of you.”
Jaxon growled, the lowest snarl he’d ever heard coming from his mouth. He was well and truly screwed. The best he could hope for was to buy himself as much time as possible while McKinney dragged him to the unknown destination. Perhaps if he managed to waste enough time, his brothers would catch on to his plight. Trouble was, the brothers had no set arrangement when it concerned checking in. It could be a while before one of them tried and failed to contact Jaxon. By then, it could be too late.
Jaxon ducked his head, a sign of submission. He had no choice. He wasn’t about to shift. It was way too cold out this morning for him to survive as a naked human. His best chance was to remain in wolf form as long as possible.
“That’s what I thought you’d choose. Good doggy.” McKinney cinched the saclike contraption tighter.
This was the closest Jaxon had ever been to the vampire. He was surprised how normal the guy looked. Granted, he seemed rather old world, but other than being a bit too pale for his obviously Native American heritage, he appeared average. Black jeans, black boots, black tank, black leather jacket. The man liked black.
McKinney cut a long length of extra rope from the trap with his knife. After he sheathed the long blade behind him, he stared Jaxon right in the eye.
Jaxon nearly cringed. The man’s eyes were even black. And eerie. Not normal.
“We’re heading down this incline now. If you cooperate, I might consider going lenient with my plans. If not…well…let’s just say, the more grief you cause me before you die, the more grief I’m going to cause that sweet blonde after your death. Got it?” He raised an eyebrow.
Jaxon seethed with anger. He’d never in his life been in such a predicament. His blood boiled. If he’d been in human form, he’d have been beet red. Baring his teeth, he gave McKinney a look he hoped conveyed what he thought of the vampire’s threats.
If that vampire so much as considered laying even one finger on Brianna, Jaxon would come back from the dead personally and slaughter the motherfucker.
“Now, now. There’s no need for all this posturing. I’m sure you’ll be plenty compliant.” McKinney jerked on the rope trap and tugged. Jaxon slipped onto his side, losing his footing.
He had no idea what might disable the vampire. Hell, he didn’t even know the man’s strength. The best course of action for everyone right now was to comply and let McKinney drag him. There’d be a hole in his plan somewhere along the line, and Jaxon would be able to get the upper hand.
As though dragging a pig to slaughter, McKinney tugged on the rope sack like Jaxon weighed nothing at all. Jaxon did nothing. Luckily he was tangled up inside the ropes enough to not be injured as McKinney pulled him down the slope toward the nearest cave entrance.
“That’s a good doggy.” McKinney laughed at his own joke.
Jaxon snarled.
It was about a quarter of a mile to the cave. In minutes they had entered. Without saying a word, the vampire tied Jaxon to an iron loop protruding from the wall of the main cavern.
Jaxon eyed his surroundings. This wasn’t an ordinary uninhabited cave. This was an entrance that had once been used for tour groups. The iron hoops were set in concrete along the main wall and would have probably served as a location to attach a chain link in order to direct the visitors.
“There. That should do it. Now be a good little doggy and stay put. I’ve got a few things to take care of. I’ll be right back.” McKinney headed deeper into the cave.
The first thing Jaxon noticed was the lack of light. He could see fine, but apparently McKinney could too. *Damn*.
Hastily, Jaxon worked on the knot McKinney had used to tie him to the wall. The vampire wasn’t very bright if he thought a slipknot was going to contain his guest. Not only was Jaxon a wolf with very sharp teeth, but he was also a human beneath all that fur. And humans were known to possess enough sense to untie a knot.
What an idiot.
Jaxon wasted no time. He quickly shifted. He was naked, but with his adrenaline pumping the way it was, his lack of clothing was hardly an issue. He barely even noticed the cold.
With nimble fingers, Jaxon untied the knot and escaped the ropes that were no longer secure around him now that he was human.
A noise deeper in the cave alerted him to McKinney’s impending return. Jaxon shifted back, hoping the popping of bones wouldn’t be noticed. Having left one end of the rope draped through the iron loop, he now nuzzled his way under the tangle of his presumed restraints.

Hopefully he didn't appear to have moved in McKinney's absence. All he needed was to wait for the right moment and then pounce. It was well past time to put an end to the vampire. He didn't yet have a clear plan of action, but he resumed peering around the entrance to the cave for anything that might assist him.
Jagged rocks and crooked iron loops dotted the concrete wall. Even in the near darkness, Jaxon could make out the details of each nuance.
Bingo. Internally, Jaxon smiled when his gaze landed on just the thing that might save his life.
"Did you have fun pondering your fate while I was away?" McKinney stepped back out of the darkness with his arms full. "What? You didn't think I lured you here unprepared did you?" He set down a large box and rummaged through the contents.
From Jaxon's location, he couldn't identify anything specific.
"It would be so much more fun if you shifted, little doggy. I mean we can't even haggle over the method of your execution if you stay all furry. I was planning on giving you choices."
Jaxon didn't move a muscle. His heart beat like never before. His blood pumped through his veins so hard he could hear a ringing in his ears that nearly drowned out McKinney's banter. His tail twitched with impatience. But he remained as still as possible.
"No?" McKinney stood, holding a stick of dynamite in his hand. "Damn. You're no fun." He tapped the red cylinder against one palm and stalked toward Jaxon. "I'm thinking an explosion would be excellent. Not only will you be deader than dead, but your little blond cunt will be forced to run up to this cave and investigate. I'll be watching from the trees when she finds your limbs strewn around the ground in here." He laughed, a low chortle that didn't resemble anything close to humor.
"Had you chosen to shift, I had hoped to drain you a bit before blowing your lupine carcass to smithereens. I've been wondering what the blood of a shifter might taste like. Is it as sweet as a full human? Or richer?"
Why was this bastard so intent on killing him?
As though he'd read his mind, McKinney continued his speech. "I'll be glad to pick you three assholes off and rid this mountain range of the likes of you. Do you know what a thorn in my side you wolves have been for the last ten years? And you can't just leave well enough alone. No, you have to be fucking heroes every damn day, saving every damsel in distress that gets lost amongst the trees.
"I'm fucking sick and tired of it! Those lost hikers are part of my diet. Do you know how difficult it is to get a good meal with you three meddling in my sustenance?" While he rambled, he worked. He grabbed a handful of dynamite and arranged it in a circle around Jaxon.
This guy was not modern in the least. In fact, he'd used dynamite when he'd attempted to make off with Juliana in the summer. For a contemporary-looking guy, he sure didn't seem too bright. Why not just carry a gun? Hell, if he wanted, he could shoot the wolves all in one fell swoop and be done.
Was it possible he didn't believe a bullet would kill a wolf? Was it possible a bullet wouldn't kill a vampire?
Jaxon's gaze followed McKinney's every step, waiting for the right moment to attack. All he could do was pray his instincts were correct.
"This much dynamite will blow a hole in the side of this mountain so big, the only thing the authorities will find will be bits and pieces of your flesh. In fact, if you don't shift, they won't find anything but a dead animal. Even better."
McKinney turned his back on Jaxon and meandered back toward the box. Now or never.
In less time than it took for the vampire to flinch, Jaxon dropped the tangle of ropes and leaped through the air, pouncing on his victim as he turned to face the wolf.
Jaxon was huge in wolf form, larger than the average red wolf. And he was smart. He just prayed he outwitted this vampire.
With surprise on his side, Jaxon battled for the upper hand.
McKinney blocked his face from the claws Jaxon unleashed upon him. McKinney stumbled backward. Just what Jaxon intended. He pressed on, scratching the vampire any place where flesh was exposed. He growled and drooled and snapped his teeth at McKinney, not with the intention of ripping him limb from limb, but rather hoping to press the vampire back a few feet until he reached his goal.
It worked. McKinney stepped back. Jaxon pawed forward, standing on his hind legs and slamming his huge paws into the vampire. The moment Jaxon had the bloodsucker where he wanted him, he pounced forward with all his strength, toppling McKinney and sending him careening backward—right over the exposed piece of rebar that stuck straight up out of the concrete.
The twisted piece of iron hit its intended target dead center, ramming through McKinney's chest until it stuck out the other end.
McKinney's eyes grew so wide Jaxon could see the whites filling with blood. He stumbled back and watched in stunned shock as his worst enemy succumbed to an agonizing death.
Blood. So much of it. Jaxon was surprised to see blood. He'd expected something out of fiction to occur, like maybe McKinney suddenly going up in smoke and vaporizing, or cracking in half as though he were made of concrete and disintegrating to ash.
Neither was the case. Instead the vampire appeared almost human. He gurgled blood out of his mouth. His

chest heaved, pumping only a few more times before stopping entirely. At last, McKinney went limp, his body hanging awkwardly over the stake; all life drained from his corpse.
Jaxon stepped back. Shock kept him from moving for a moment. He stared at the body as though it would spring back into action. It had been too easy. He hadn't thought the entire plan through beforehand, but now that he paused to consider the ramifications of his actions, he'd have to be honest with himself and admit he hadn't really expected this result.
Dead. The bastard was fucking dead. Thank God.
Jaxon turned then and ran out of the cave. His brothers would be frantic by now. He bounded through the trees, branches and leaves slamming into him. He barely noticed. He just wanted to get as far away from the scene as possible, touch base with Serg and Mic, and then wrap himself around his mate and love her for as long as they both should live.
"Serg? Mic?" Jaxon kept running, his goal clear. Base camp. He needed to reach the base and talk to the sheriff.
"Where the fuck have you been?" Sergius's voice was music to his ears. Even though he was pissed to high hell, Jaxon had never heard a more glorious noise ringing in his head. *"We've been worried sick about you."*
"I was a little preoccupied. Where are you?" Jaxon kept running. It wasn't far, but he was impatient.
"Base. You?"
"On my way. Don't move. Can either of you see Brianna? Is she okay?"
"She's fine and accounted for. Still battling the flames with the others," Sergius stated.
It took less than a minute more for Jaxon to arrive back at the base. He circled behind the huge trucks where he'd left his pack and shifted. No doubt Sergius and Micah had seen him arrive, but he still couldn't very well waltz in wolf form into the group of humans gathered at the base.
Just as Jaxon pulled on his jeans and reached for his sweatshirt, Sergius rounded the fire truck. He strode forward with his gaze narrowed. "What the fuck happened to you?" he barked.
"McKinney."
Sergius stepped back, bonking into Juliana who approached from behind. He sucked in a breath. "Seriously?" He tugged his mate into his embrace and held her tight.
"Would I lie about that goddamn vampire? Yes, seriously."
Micah came up behind. "Did you say you saw McKinney?"
"Saw him? *Ha*. I fucking killed him."
"You *what*?" Sergius screeched the word before he glanced back and forth and reined in his temper. "Where? How?"
"Are you okay?" Micah stayed calmer, stepping toward Jaxon while he let his gaze roam him from head to toe.
"I'm fine. If you two would shut up for a second and let me catch my breath, I'll explain." Jaxon gasped for air. He'd run faster than at any other time in his life.
Sheriff Hardin came around the corner, no doubt following in the footsteps of Jaxon's brothers and Juliana. The wolves held no secrets from Hardin. If anything, Jaxon needed the sheriff now more than his own brothers. He didn't know a thing about what to do with a dead vampire body.
It wasn't as though he could suggest they send a coroner out to collect the corpse. What if it didn't present the way a normal human did? How would they explain a vampire in the forest? They didn't need that kind of publicity. No, the four men were going to have to be secretive about whatever plan they decided upon.
"What happened?" Hardin asked. Concern etched across his forehead in the form of creases where his eyebrows drew together.
"McKinney trapped me. Apparently he overheard you on the radio and knew where I would be today, so he set a rope trap that yanked me into the air when I stepped in the center of it. I was in wolf form, of course. He then proceeded to threaten Brianna if I didn't do as he said—"
Sergius cut him off. "Why didn't you contact us?"
Jaxon exhaled and glared at his brother. "Do you think I had some sort of hero complex here, Serg? For God's sake man, I tried. You might recall he managed to block you and Juliana from communicating last spring when he kidnapped her."
"Right. Of course. Sorry." Serg nodded toward Jaxon.
"Well, he's expanded that capability. Now he managed to block me even from a great distance. As though he zoned in on me from across the forest and shielded me from communicating with you. It was freaky." Jaxon leaned down and stepped into his boots.
"Anyway, the bastard had me cornered. I decided the best thing to do was to go along with him until I could see a better escape route." Jaxon stood and buttoned his jeans. "He dragged me into a cave like a pet dog and then had the audacity to tie me to a loop of rebar in the wall. Seriously? Like I couldn't just shift and untie the knot? I don't know what he was thinking.
"He left for a few minutes to get his stash of supplies from the cave. The man had sight as good as ours by the way. He never used a flashlight or anything to see… So, while he was gone, I shifted, untied and resumed my position pretending to be tethered. McKinney waltzed back like he did this sort of thing every day and proceeded

to arrange to blow up the cave with his famous stash of dynamite.
“As soon as he turned away, I pounced, driving him backward until he fell onto a long, protruding piece of rebar sticking straight up out of the concrete.”
Everyone gasped.
Hardin spoke next. “And this worked? He’s dead?”
“Deadest guy I’ve ever seen.”
“Was it like…normal?” Hardin paced, his hand running through his hair, no doubt contemplating how he was going to recover the body and handle the fallout.
“Perfectly natural. Blood gushing out. Pupils dilating. Heart stopping. Dead.” Jaxon’s chest heaved, relief washing over him. He glanced at Juliana and winced. “Sorry. Didn’t mean to be so graphic.” Clearing his throat, he continued, “Granted, I’m not suggesting you send an ambulance out to the cave. I can’t guarantee he’s completely humanlike. Perhaps the four of us should take care of it ourselves and keep the entire episode under wraps.”
“Seems like a good idea.” Hardin was visibly stressed. This was apparently not the way he pictured his day going. He lifted both arms in the air and dragged a path through his mussed hair over and over again. He turned from side to side as though searching for the answers lurking in between the forest leaves.
“Well, let’s go now. Get this over with. I for one am looking forward to a good night’s sleep without having to worry about that bastard sneaking up on me.” Sergius zipped up his jacket and stuck his hands in his pockets.
Jaxon knew he wasn’t cold, but more like chilled. To the bone.
The relief of disposing of McKinney once and for all would put them all at ease.
When the group rounded the trucks and headed back to the base area, there were very few people mingling around. The fire chief was leaning over a large map, pointing at various locations and discussing strategy with two other men.
Jaxon looked at the fire chief and thought about checking on Brianna. The chief was busy and Jaxon knew Brianna would be pissed if Jaxon made an issue over her with the chief. *She’s fine. If any of the firefighters were in danger, people would be scrambling*. Deep breath. He turned back and followed his group. But after everything, her safety niggled at him. *“You okay?”* he communicated to her.
“Fine. Get out of my head. I’m working. You promised.”
He smiled at her stubborn streak, relieved by her tone that told him she was indeed fine.
No one paid any attention as the five of them jumped in the sheriff’s cruiser and drove away.
They only needed to go a short distance. Taking the car was more for show than anything else. It would have looked awfully suspicious for the men to have simply walked away into the trees. It was hardly a day for hiking.
“How are things on the fire front?” Jaxon questioned. He sat in the front seat with Hardin.
“Progressing. It’s slow work. The weather hasn’t been cooperating so far, but the forecast calling for rain keeps increasing. I think we’re up to an eighty percent chance of showers this afternoon. That would be a welcome relief.” Thank God Hardin knew what was happening on that front. No matter what, it would be a relief if rain would put an end to Brianna’s work for today. Vampire or no vampire.
Hardin glanced over at Jaxon. He grinned as he stopped the car. “I’m happy for you, by the way.”
Jaxon flushed. “Let’s get this over with.”
Everyone climbed out of the cruiser and headed in the direction Jaxon indicated.
“See that tree? That’s where he set up the trap that landed me in this predicament.” No one asked why he hadn’t been paying enough attention not to notice a fucking rope trap. Jaxon was glad for that small miracle.
They followed his lead in silence until they reached the cave. “Here we are. It must’ve been used for tours many years ago. That would explain the iron loops set in the walls.” Jaxon stepped inside.
Hardin pulled out a flashlight and shined it all around the chamber.
“What the fuck?” Jaxon ran deeper into the entrance and spun in circles. His heart pounded. Sweat trickled across his brow.
Nothing.
No body. No vampire. No McKinney.
“Jaxon?” Sergius asked.
Juliana touched his arm. “Maybe it wasn’t this cave?”
“It was. He was right here.” Jaxon pointed at the rebar sticking out of the cement path. He leaned down to touch the iron stake he’d used to pierce the vampire. Sticky blood still dripped down the rusted metal. “How the fuck did that bastard get out of this mess?”
Everyone gathered closer to inspect. They each leaned over and checked the ground and the surrounding concrete. There was a lot of blood. But no body.
“Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck.” Jaxon stood and kicked a large rock with his boot. He spun around. A pile of ropes lay in the corner where he’d been held captive. Several sticks of dynamite lay scattered across the ground where they’d been disheveled in the battle.
The box that contained who-knew-what was gone.
“Jesus Christ,” Jaxon screamed in frustration and stomped out of the cave.

Brianna…
As if that dynamite was in fact lit and attached to Jaxon's tail, he wasted no time shifting and running toward the flames. With no regard whatsoever for his clothing, the shreds landed on the forest floor as they tore from his lupine frame.
If he thought he'd run fast before, that was nothing compared to the speed he excelled at this time. If that bastard laid even one finger on his mate…
The wind picked up as he ran. He could hear his brothers yelling his name, but he didn't stop. He needed to get to her. Make sure she was safe.
Nothing else was acceptable.
And then he saw her. He came to a ridge, the same one he'd been using earlier to watch her, and spotted her frame below. She was still in the same position in the line of men, fighting against nature.
As if he planned it, the sky suddenly let loose. Huge drops of rain landed on Jaxon's fur, soaking him through in no time.
He gasped for breath and watched as the firefighters looked up toward the sky and then resumed their actions. It was going to take a hell of a lot of rain to put out this fire. He prayed a torrential downpour was about to descend. How many more hours could he sit back and watch while his mate battled these flames?
Clear and present in his mind: a very angry vampire was now loose and roaming this forest. Without a doubt, first chance he got, he would nail Jaxon, his brothers, and any other human who just happened to have ever met them, to the wall—most likely literally, since that was the fate Jaxon assumed he'd just bestowed on McKinney.

Chapter Eleven

Brianna shivered, her clothing soaked through. She'd never been so tired and so relieved all at once in her life. Thank God for the rain. She'd been working fourteen hours when her crew was finally relieved of their duties. By morning the next crew would have the fire contained.

She scrambled through the mud with the rest of her unit until they reached the base. By the time she arrived, her feet hurt and her arms were sore from cutting back brush. The job was brutal. It was tough for a woman to be in good enough shape to do it. Suddenly she was rethinking her great need to fight fires. For about two seconds.

A long soak in her tub was the only thing on her mind.

As soon as they arrived at the base, everyone scrambled to load up the truck that would haul all their supplies. The drenching continued. The sky had turned completely dark hours ago in the storm. It was nearly eight o'clock.

Exhausted, Brianna turned around to find Jaxon standing not far from the crew. He was with the sheriff. Hardin wore a rain slicker. Jaxon stood next to him in nothing more than jeans and a T-shirt. It wasn't the same T-shirt he'd been wearing this morning. He didn't even wrap his arms around himself to ward off the chill.

Even soaked, the man was a sight. *Or perhaps in his wet condition he's even more sexy*.

As soon as the thought filtered through her head, he glanced her way and grinned.

Greeaat. She'd forgotten the man could infiltrate her brain like an undercover agent imbeds himself into a group of drug dealers.

Everyone scattered, dashing for their respective vehicles in the downpour. Brianna didn't even have a car. A coworker had picked her up from her apartment two days ago to carpool to the site. She hadn't been home since.

With heavy legs, she wandered toward the police cruiser. "Everything okay?" she asked when she got closer. The look on Jaxon's face told her all was not perfect.

He smiled. "Better than. I'll tell you about it at home. Come on, let's go. We're both soaked." Jaxon took her arm and led her toward his truck, nodding back at the sheriff as they left.

As soon as they climbed into the cab, Jaxon flipped on the heat and rubbed his hands together. He tugged Brianna to his side and wrapped his wet arms around her body. "Thank goodness the temperature didn't dip as low as expected today. We'd be popsicles."

Brianna leaned against Jaxon. He was warm, even soaked. His temperature ran higher than normal humans, no doubt. "Jax, I just want to go home, climb into my tub, soak for a while and then sleep in my own bed for two days."

"I thought we'd go to my place. You want to go to your apartment?"

"Please. I need some time. Alone. I'm tired, Jax. And overwhelmed." She tipped her head up at him.

He raised his eyebrows. "Wait? Alone?" He shook his head. "No way, baby. There's a vampire out there somewhere, and believe me, he's pissed."

"I don't care. I need to regroup with myself. When I'm with you, you distract me from the world. I can't think."

Like now.

He smelled so fantastic, even wet. The soap from his morning shower lingered under the layers of dirt and wilted clothing. And the scent of outdoors that always surrounded him made her squeeze her legs together.

Lord. Not now.

The last thing she wanted right this second was to be aroused. She was too tired. And frazzled.

Her body betrayed her every time Jaxon was near.

"Bri. I can't leave you anywhere. Not even your apartment. Hell, especially not your apartment. Do you have any idea what I've been through today? I nailed that bastard to a stake. And do you know how much good that did? None. He disappeared. I have no idea if he's actually dead and somehow just poofed from existence or if he escaped. I don't know the capabilities McKinney possesses. He could be watching us even now." He squeezed her and kissed her nose. "Besides, I wouldn't leave you even if the vampire didn't exist. You're mine, baby. We're mated now. Separation isn't really an option."

Brianna wiggled free of his clutches and sat back. He still had his arm around her, but not as tight.

"Wait. What? You fought with the vampire?"

"Yeah. He set a trap and strung me up into a tree. It was fun. Except for the part where he took me hostage and dragged my wolf ass into a cave with the intent of killing me."

"And you're just telling me this now? You could have been killed." She swatted his hand away from her entirely, her gaze narrowed on him. "You're trying to convince me I'm all uber-important to you, and you don't even think to tell me a vampire tried to kill you today?"

"What?" He threw his hands in the air. "I'm still alive. It's not like I wasn't going to tell you all the details. I just thought we'd—"

"Fuck first?" She could feel her skin flushing. Fury made her scoot away from him.

Jaxon glanced at the ceiling and sighed. "Bri, of course not. It's not like that. You've had a bitch of a day, worse than mine. You're tired. I didn't think you needed me to heap my day onto your problems right now. After we get

home, take a long bath, eat—"
"No." She shook her head. "Jaxon, I need to think about all this. This—this—this thing between us…" she zipped her arm through the air in a Z pattern, "…it's weird. It hit me like a freight train. Still is. I need space. Time. To think about what *I* want. I'm clear what *you* want, but I do have my own will here, you know?"
Jaxon shook his head again. The man was infuriating. "It's not possible."
"It *is*," she shouted. "I insist. I'm not *asking* you. I'm *telling* you. You have to let me go home. Let me sleep for like a day and a half. And then let me think. I'll call you. Don't…suffocate me. It won't end well."
"Bri—"
"Jax, no. I'm all good with you dominating me in the bedroom, but the buck stops there. You can't order me around when we aren't between the sheets. If you do, you'll find yourself awfully lonely."
He took a deep breath and leaned his head on the steering wheel for a moment. When he lifted it, he looked her in the eye. "Brianna. Listen to me. I'm so sorry about how this happened so fast that I didn't have time to fully explain how it works. You can't actually choose to ignore it. It'll pull you in. You won't be able to rest without me by your side. And I won't either. Your body will crave mine twenty-four seven. We're…connected now."
"Surely after all the sex we had last night and this morning, I can go a day or two without fucking." She tilted her head and glared at him. *Right?* "I'm not telling you to take a hike. I'm just asking for some time. To adjust. Consider my choices."
Jaxon sucked in a breath. He undoubtedly took offense at her use of the word *choices*, but he didn't comment on it. "Okay. Look. Just so you're clear. The fact that we had sex so many times in the last day does not help your case; it makes it worse. The drive, *need*, to fuck will take over until you can't see straight. Granted, I've not experienced this personally, but I watched my brother and Juliana go through it and it isn't pretty. It's normal for our kind to spend a few weeks without coming up for air before the craving eases. It will abate…somewhat…eventually. But not tonight."
When Brianna opened her mouth, he held up a hand. "Let me finish. Fine. I'll take you home. I won't leave, but I'll take you home."
"You can't—"
"I won't even come inside. You can have whatever time you want. I'll wait outside."
"Might get a bit cold and I'm thinking you'll be rather hungry out there for several days." *Is he kidding? Does he think this highhanded manner of his is going to change my mind?* She was stomping furious now.
"I'll take my chances." He put the car in drive and pulled away. "Where's your apartment?" His voice was low, barely audible, but still rather cocky.
She didn't even glance at his face for fear it would piss her off if he was smirking. How dare he try to control this situation?

They sat in silence as Jaxon drove her home. She had a modest apartment in Pigeon Forge and he cringed inwardly when he realized hers was on the second floor. At least he had a view from the parking lot. He hadn't been kidding. He wasn't going anywhere.
He just prayed it didn't matter and she wouldn't be able to hold out very long. He was banking on that. God, let him be right about this…
As Jaxon parked, he did not look at his mate. The last thing he needed was for her to argue about him seeing her to the door. He was nothing if not a gentleman. And furthermore, he had no idea about McKinney's location. Hell, he didn't even really know if the vampire was alive or dead.
Nope. His mate was not roaming around outside alone under any circumstances, even if the idea pissed her off. She could have her space. She could take whatever time she needed in that little apartment of hers, but not outside.
That was not debatable.
Jaxon rounded the truck and opened Brianna's door. He bit his lip. It would be much easier to walk her to the door without saying a word than get into a verbal match about his chivalry and her lack of need for such things.
Jaxon exhaled when Brianna said nothing and led him to her place. She unlocked the door, grabbed her bag out of his hand and smiled up at him stiffly. "I'll call you. You really don't have to hang around here waiting on me. I'm fine."
Jaxon nodded, while inside his head he was thinking a solid "fuck that".
Jaxon sauntered back to his truck and climbed into the cab. He grabbed the wheel with both hands and squeezed. Perhaps the pressure would cut down on some of the tension.
"Not going to be home tonight, guys." It was official now. He had to let his brothers know.
Chuckles filled the connection. Sergius spoke first, sarcasm lacing every word. *"Shocking. What? You couldn't just pick up a few things at her place and make it back here? She already has you naked and panting?"*
"Wait? Why are you even talking to us?" Micah added.
"Hardly. I wish it was that simple. Nope. My strong-willed, independent mate believes she can just go home tonight and 'think'. She isn't convinced we are destined to be together even though we—"
"Whoa whoa whoa. Stop. No details please," Sergius interrupted. *"Seriously? You aren't planning to leave her*

there, are you?"
"What do I look like? Of course not. I'm sitting outside, freezing my balls off in the truck while she 'thinks'."
Jaxon rubbed his hands together. It really was going to get quite cold tonight. He'd have to run the truck every now and then to warm up. Hell, he'd have to run it for a while now to get completely dry. His clothes were still damp. Thank God he'd even had clothes to put on after ruining the ones he'd been wearing when he dashed from the cave earlier. He always kept spare clothes in the cab. His lifestyle sometimes depended on it.
"Dude. That's bad." Micah sounded much more sober this time. *"How long do you think she can hold out?"*
"How should I know? I've never been mated before." Jaxon knew he sounded snarky, but hell, he wasn't particularly social right now. He didn't need any ribbing. *"I hope it's not too long or freezing will be the least of the problems my balls endure."*
"I hear ya," Sergius said. *"Keep us posted. We've got everything covered here, so don't worry. Keep your eye on her. I don't like to think about what McKinney is up to, but I wouldn't let down my guard for even a second."*
Jaxon asked the question niggling in his mind. *"Do you think it's possible he did die in that cave? Like, maybe his body disintegrated or something after I left?"*
"No idea. I called several family members in Virginia to see if anyone had any experience with vampires. None of our immediate cousins or aunts and uncles knew a thing, but they were going to ask around and contact some more distant friends and family in Canada to see if any of them had any light to share. If I hear anything I'll let you know," Sergius said.
"Kay. Well, you know where I'll be. Until Bri comes out of that apartment, I'll be on constant vigil right here…in my nice, comfortable warm car…in the parking lot…yards away from my mate's nice warm bed…the one she's occupying…alone."
"Good luck with that," Micah added.
Jaxon sighed and turned the key in the ignition to warm up the cab. *Please, God, let my wonderful mate see the light…soonish*.

Chapter Twelve

Brianna leaned against the door to her apartment as soon as it snicked shut and slumped down until she sat on the floor. Her hands shook. Her heart pounded. She was more tired than she'd ever been in her life, while at the same time her body thrummed with pent-up energy.

What the hell was wrong with her? What if Jaxon was right? What if she couldn't stand to be apart from him?

No. She refused to believe all that mumbo jumbo. She was a human for God's sake. Sure, she'd had to face the fact that humans were not the only beings inhabiting the earth. The world as she'd known it yesterday had expanded exponentially. But surely she could resist the allure of one very sexy man and regroup for a few days in her own surroundings. Nobody could possibly need sex as bad as Jaxon had insinuated after what she'd done in the last thirty-six hours.

God. Has it only been that long? Somehow it seemed she'd met Jaxon months ago, not yesterday morning.

Brianna put her head in her hands and leaned over her bent knees. She was too tired to move, both emotionally and physically. Drained.

And her brain wouldn't stop running on the fumes left to power it. Her tank had to be almost empty.

She needed a shower, a hot meal and her bed. And she wasn't entirely sure in what order she was going to put those tasks.

Her stomach took that moment to growl. Fine. Food first, then.

Brianna lifted her head and stared toward the kitchen. It seemed farther away than it had yesterday. She considered crawling the distance but then decided against it. She didn't know much about Jaxon's true connection to her right this second, and she didn't need the added embarrassment if he was spying on her.

It seemed like she was getting better at blocking him. After all, he hadn't communicated a single syllable since she'd shut the door. But, on the other hand, he could be humoring her.

Would he really sit outside in his truck until…?

Dragging herself to standing, Brianna decided to make the trek toward the kitchen first. Ten or so steps later, she was peering into her freezer as if it might contain items other than the ones she had personally stocked it with.

She didn't care. All she needed was any random red box of a single-serve meal. Without looking, she snatched the one on top and ripped it open.

Ah, her favorite. Chicken parmesan. About a half a serving of it as far as she was concerned, but it was a start.

Brianna popped the tray into the microwave and wandered down the hall. A quick shower was her specialty when dire situations called for immediate results. She could be in and out in the five minutes it took for the frozen meal to cook and head back to the kitchen to retrieve it before it cooled.

Brianna stripped her clothes off as she walked down the short hall, letting the pieces fall wherever they landed. She didn't care right now. Hell, she didn't know when she might care again. Her brain was overloaded.

Shower, eat, sleep. Don't think about anything else.

By the time she reached the bathroom, she was naked. Without opening the shower door more than the few inches necessary to fit her arm inside, she turned the dial all the way to the left and then stood back to wait for hot water. It needed to be hot. Scalding would be perfect.

A quick glance at the mirror made Brianna pause. God, she looked awful. Like she'd spent the day fighting a forest fire or something. Her face was smudged so bad with soot she could barely discern what her natural coloring was.

Her gaze wandered down to her chest. Her nipples beaded as she watched. Was it cold in here? She knew better than that. The second her eyes landed on her breasts, thoughts of having them worshipped by Jaxon flooded her mind.

Brianna jerked her gaze toward the shower. Steam seeped out the top and clouded the glass door. Heaven.

As she stepped into the decadent stream, Brianna sighed. *God, that feels good*. She stood for several moments, letting the water stream down her body, washing away more than the grime of the day. She hoped to wash away the stress too. One vampire. Three wolf shifters. Not to mention a forest fire. If not for the rain, she didn't know how long she could have continued to keep up that pace and fake like she was just as strong as all the men.

Food. Bed. Brianna grabbed the shampoo and lathered her limp hair. She'd feel one hundred percent better just washing the drooping locks. As soon as she finished with her hair, she let her hands roam down her body, gliding easily over her skin and spreading the suds from the shampoo.

With her eyes closed against the onslaught of soap, she gasped when her hands skittered over her nipples. Her knees nearly buckled at the contact, the unexpected friction stiffening her spine and dragging her into a more wakeful state than she would have thought possible.

How could she unintentionally arouse herself? She'd never before been accidentally aroused by her own touch.

Brianna sucked in a breath and ducked beneath the hot water, letting it rinse away the soap until she could safely open her eyes.

With her head tipped down, she gazed at her chest again. Just like moments ago in the mirror, her nipples were puckered, standing out, demanding attention.

Brianna grabbed the soap and tried to divert her gaze, washing her legs instead. She started at her feet and worked her way up. Just leaning over drew attention to her chest. Her breasts felt inordinately full, achy, as they might during sex. Desperate.

As she stood and set the soap back in its dish, she let her hands wander up her thighs and moaned when she reached the apex. Oh God. This wasn't happening.

She was too tired and hungry right now to masturbate in the shower. It had to be Jaxon's fault for insinuating she couldn't handle being away from him. He'd planted the idea and she was just acting on the power of suggestion.

In any case, what he didn't know wouldn't hurt anyone. The last thing she needed tonight was his smug smile clouding her dreams.

And the easiest way to fix the problem was to act on the impulse. Brianna spread her legs as her arousal increased. She ran a finger between her lower lips and over her clit. Her eyes shot open wide. Holy fuck! Her knees threatened to buckle from that one swipe.

Brianna leaned back against the tile wall of the shower for support. The move brought her upper body out of the direct line of the spray. She gripped the wall with one hand. Well, perhaps *gripped* wasn't exactly the right term. Could a person actually grip a wet tile surface? She wasn't entirely sure she could remain standing.

Seconds went by as she tried to catch her breath. One swipe? Jesus. She needed to come so bad she couldn't move until she did. And she'd had so many orgasms in the last day and a half she couldn't even count them. How could she even begin to be aroused by a goddamn shower?

Brianna reached between her legs and flicked her middle finger over her clit again, drawing out a loud moan she couldn't remember ever emitting before. She let her head fall back against the tile and her eyes drifted shut to close off the world so she could concentrate on nothing but her own pleasure.

She didn't touch her begging nub again yet. She wanted to draw out the experience. Enjoy it for at least thirty seconds—because that's about how long she imagined she could hold out.

Raising both hands, Brianna pinched her nipples and twisted them simultaneously, enjoying the pleasure-pain she induced. She then ran her flat palms down her breasts and abdomen until she reached her shaved mons again. Using one hand to hold herself open, she plunged two fingers into her core.

Again she gasped and leaned forward. No way could she remain standing, and she didn't have to. She let her body slide down the wall until she sat on the warm tile. Water sprayed around her, not hitting her face, but landing on her legs and bouncing across her body.

Her knees flopped open wide and Brianna fucked her needy pussy with the two fingers that had started the job. Oh God. She was going to come. Now. Fast. Furious.

With her free hand, she flicked her clit over and over in rapid succession while she pumped her fingers inside her. She knew her body well. A slight twist of her hand, and she was able to drag her bent fingers over the elusive spot that drove her completely bonkers.

That was all it took. On a loud groan, Brianna came, her juices pulsing around her fingers as she continued to pump them as deep as she could. The sensation of her pussy gripping her own hand made her sigh. She usually needed a vibrator to her clit to come so hard so fast.

The bliss was short lived. Flopped with her legs widespread in the corner of the shower, Brianna caught her breath and opened her eyes.

She needed more. *Fuck*.

It hadn't been enough. Not by a long shot. There was no real comparison to the long thick cock she'd enjoyed several times recently.

No fucking way was she going to admit defeat. She needed to buck up and clear her head and eat and sleep. Tomorrow she could face her weird new demons. Not tonight. If she let that man into her apartment, she'd never get a chance to think clearly about the implications of their relationship.

Who met a man in a cave in a dire situation and then never separated from him again? Not any normal woman she knew. If one of her friends did that, she'd think they were completely insane.

Brianna dragged herself to standing and finished washing as efficiently as possible. Minutes later, she stood in the bathroom drying off and wrapping the towel around her hair.

She did her best to ignore the ache in her stomach that demanded release. She didn't even look down at herself or glance in the mirror, knowing if she did she'd find a splotchy red stretch of skin covering her body—a sure sign of her arousal.

"Shit," she muttered out loud as she wandered to her room. She donned a pair of panties and a tank top and headed back to the kitchen. The microwave had long since finished cooking and now sat beeping every thirty seconds to alert her to its uneaten contents.

Sure enough, the meal was lukewarm. Brianna didn't have the inclination to care right then and scarfed the tiny black plastic container of food without tasting a thing.

In less time than it took her to shower, considering the interruption, she finished the meager dinner, brushed her teeth and slid in between the cool sheets of her bed.

Under normal circumstances she hated that first moment when the bed was cold and she wanted to be warm.

Tonight was different. Her skin was on fire and the cool material actually felt welcoming.
Brianna snuggled under the covers and consciously relaxed every muscle in her body. She could do this sleep thing. No doubt she was tired. Now she was clean and fed too. Deep breaths. Cleansing. Freeing. Relaxing.
Okay, not relaxing…
When she closed her eyes, all she saw behind her lids was Jaxon. As though he were in the room, she could feel his hands wrapped around her body, smell his outdoorsy clean scent, hear his breaths rise as he nuzzled her neck. Hell, the backs of her eyelids even showed a film of his sexy body rising over hers, his eyes burrowing deep into her soul as he slid into her needy, wanting pussy.
Brianna moaned and gripped her legs together. She had to get that man out of her brain and rest.
Taste. She'd left out that one sensation. She licked her lips, remembering the flavor of his skin. The taste of his tongue inside her mouth.
She had to quit this right now.
Brianna grabbed the second pillow from the other side of the bed and flung it over her head. As though that would block out the images. The memories.
If they hadn't already fucked several times, would she still be able to envision so clearly what every second of their joining was like?
As she lay there breathing, as heavily as if she'd just had sex, she listened to the silence. Niggling in her mind was the possibility she wasn't completely blocking Jaxon as she would like. She was so new to the concept she doubted she had the capability to keep him out of her head entirely.
Minutes ticked by. If she had a wall clock, she could count them to occupy her mind. She had no such thing. Her hands itched to reach between her legs again. Her tank top had risen in her restlessness until it nestled just below her breasts. She didn't dare tug it back down for fear the material would rasp across her nipples and drive her further into the torturous world of denial she'd created all by herself.
In fact, she didn't move a muscle. She kept her hands to her sides and gripped the sheet in her fists to hold still. Inhale. Exhale. Repeat.
Wetness dampened her panties. It dripped from her pussy of its own accord. She squirmed against the wetness. A huge mistake. The lace of her panties rubbed against her clit to drive her crazy with need.
Fuck.
"Jaxon. You win. If you can hear me, get your ass in here. I can't fucking sleep without having your cock buried inside me at least once." She bit her lip and waited to see if he'd respond. Could he truly hear her? It was a test in a way. A test of her sanity with regards to the man who was supposedly watching her apartment from his truck. Was he perhaps a figment of her imagination?
Apparently not. And furthermore, the man couldn't possibly have still been in his truck. Less than two full breaths later, there was a knock at her door.
Damn.
She hadn't considered that. Now she had to get out of bed and go let him in.
As she rose, she promised herself this meant nothing. Just because she liked having him with her…just because his cock filled her to perfection and she wanted to test that theory again now…just because she needed him as bad as she needed her next breath…it meant nothing. She could sleep with him again tonight and still walk away tomorrow.
Definitely.
For sure.
She hoped…

Jaxon's cock ached like never before. He'd been standing outside Brianna's door for several long minutes, knowing she would call to him at any second. How could she not? The little nymph was driving him crazy. He'd known she wouldn't be able to ignore the pull of their mating. He'd known she would call him inside eventually. Hell, he'd even known he needed to tread lightly where her feelings were concerned. This entire concept was foreign to her. It wouldn't help for him to be smug about it. No brownie points would be earned there.
What he hadn't known, or considered, was how poorly his little human would be able to block him while she came around.
For nearly half an hour he'd been on the fringe of her emotions, hovering right there with her while she masturbated herself to completion on the shower floor. He'd had to take his cock in hand while she did that and bring himself to orgasm, visualizing her firm naked body—legs spread, water cascading over her, her eyes rolled back in ecstasy.
After he cleaned himself up with the pack of tissues he was relieved to find under the seat, he'd attempted to tuck himself back into his jeans, hoping for his mate's sake she could rest after the all-consuming orgasm that racked her frame.
At least if she slept for a while, she could let him back into her world with her head held high. But such was not the case.

Instead, she still craved him. When she'd climbed between her sheets and began to visualize their mating, Jaxon had hit his head on the steering wheel while he groaned in frustration.
He'd known then she wouldn't make it through the night. Without a good hard fuck, she wouldn't be able to relax.
In the cold evening air, Jaxon had left the warmth of his car and ambled toward her door, grateful no one was around to see his attempt at a normal stride with his dick at full attention once again and bulging into the front of his jeans.
When and why and who on earth decided it was a good idea to put men's zippers right in front of their cocks? Didn't anyone consider how painful the metal teeth would be for a man consumed with arousal who tended to go commando? Geez.
Adjusting himself and glancing around to make sure no one was watching him, Jaxon had made his way to his mate's door and let his head fall against the cold glossy paint.
And waited.
Finally, she called to him. It jarred him a bit. He'd expected a phone call, not a mental connection.
Jerking upright, Jaxon rapped his fist three times against the door.
He smiled when his shocked mate climbed out of bed. She really needed to learn to block. She had no idea what she did to him with that head of hers running a mile a minute.
The door whipped open.
Jaxon sucked in a deep breath. He shouldn't have been shocked. It wasn't as though he had no idea what she'd been wearing. She'd screamed it through the connection when she'd stepped into the white lace panties and then slipped the tight-fitting tank over her head.
She'd screamed it again as she lay in bed, desperately trying to deny him while she squirmed against the lace material of her panties, her nipples rasping against the tight cotton tank top.
Still, he was stunned. She was so gorgeous. So hot.
Her chest heaved as she stood there. Her nipples poked forward, their dents in the tank calling to him.
He had a difficult time getting his legs to move as he stepped into her apartment, her space, her haven—the only thing she had that was all hers before this moment when he entered it with the intention of debasing every surface inside as quickly as possible.
Impervious to the blast of cold air he brought inside with him, she stared at his face. And bit her lip in that way that drove him insane.
"You shouldn't open your door to any random knock without looking through the peephole, baby," he admonished. He pushed the door closed behind him with a soft snick and turned the deadbolt without looking.
She ignored his ribbing and stepped back as he stalked forward. He tugged his jacket off and dropped it on the floor. The scent of her arousal filled the entire apartment. He took a deep breath and had to strain to keep himself from howling. Later he would need to shift and run free. He could howl all he wanted in wolf form and work out any pent-up energy then.
Not now. Now was for fucking.
Hard. Fast. Rough.
Later there would be time for slow and gentle.
Brianna's hands went to her throat. Her skin was blotchy with lust, giant pinkened areas that he wanted to lick until she moaned. He hadn't had her since this morning.
Brianna's glazed eyes lowered to his cock. He knew the moment her gaze landed on the object of her desire. She stiffened and squeezed her legs together. Why did women do that? Were they unaware the action would only make things worse, rubbing their pussy lips together and adding friction to their clits?
It must be instinctual, but it certainly wasn't logical.
Brianna backed into a wall, bonking her head in the process. She didn't seem to notice. Her gaze never left the spot where Jaxon had managed to zip his jeans, though the button still hung open.
When she licked her lips, he moaned and closed the distance between them in one long stride, pressing his body against hers. He straddled her head with his hands against the wall and took her mouth possessively. Angling his head, he deepened the kiss in an instant, swallowing her moan of relief and tasting every delicious crevice of her mouth. Her minty toothpaste dominated her personal flavor right now, but it wasn't unpleasant. In fact, he liked the taste.
Jaxon aligned his body with hers and increased the friction between them, his cock nestling against her stomach. He pushed one thigh between her legs and nudged them open, spreading them as far as he could. Brianna gripped his shirt with both hands and held on to him as though otherwise he might slip out of her grip and get away.
She broke the kiss, tipping her head to one side to take deep breaths. "I need you, Jaxon. Now. Please don't fuck with me. Just do it. I'm not in the mood for foreplay."
"Well." He nibbled across her neck to whisper in her ear, "Since you've already come wickedly at your own hand in the shower, I guess you're probably still primed for my cock."
Brianna stiffened as he knew she would. In a way he'd invaded her privacy. But, in reality, she'd shouted it to

him herself. She just didn't realize it. And in truth, Jaxon didn't feel right keeping the secret of her lack of blocking skills to himself. It seemed like a lie to him.
He felt obliged to tell her he'd been there. Too bad he hadn't actually been able to watch in person, but close enough.
"I suck," Brianna finally muttered. She relaxed marginally but didn't release his shirt.
"Oh, baby, I hope so, but it has nothing to do with your new status as my mate. That will take time. It's difficult even for a wolf shifter to learn to keep some thoughts to themselves. You're human, Bri. It'll take a while.
"Plus, it's nearly impossible for new mates caught up in the frenzy. With your mind foggy with lust, it's tough to concentrate on anything else, especially keeping your mate out of your head."
Brianna slackened a bit more. "I suppose you know everything."
"Mostly, yes. And the next time you masturbate in the shower, I want a front row seat. That was the hottest thing I've ever experienced and I wasn't even physically here."
He tipped his head back and stared into her eyes. She smiled. "I'll consider it."
"Oh, I didn't ask you to consider it. I'm actually demanding such an audience. Don't even think of touching your pussy with those itchy fingers in the shower again." He nibbled her lower lip. "I'll know," he continued. "I might just spank that sexy pink ass of yours for insubordination if you do."
Unsure what sort of response his words might elicit, Jaxon was more than pleased when his little mate tensed. Her pulse increased where he now licked a path down her neck. He could smell her arousal amp up a notch. Oh, she was so perfect. He'd mentioned spanking her before. Her reaction was no different this time.
"Spread your legs farther, baby." Jaxon pushed against first one and then the other with his thigh. Through her dainty lace panties, her moisture seeped into his jeans.
With one hand, Jaxon grasped the corner of sexy white lace and yanked.
Brianna gasped.
"I'll buy you another pair," he mumbled. "Can't wait. Need you. Now."
When Brianna lowered her hands to reach for his zipper, Jaxon bucked away from her touch. If she so much as grazed a finger over his cock right now he would come before he entered her. And he badly needed the warm tightness of her pussy surrounding his dick.
In an instant, he grabbed both her hands, wrapped her wrists in one of his palms and reached to hold them over her head.
With his free hand, he jerked the zipper down on his jeans. His cock sprang forth, the release a welcome feeling. In record speed, he shimmied his jeans down enough to fully free his erection. The offending denim fell to the floor. His feet were trapped with his boots still on and his jeans now around his ankles, but he didn't need that part of his body.
Jaxon let his gaze wander up Brianna's body until he stared into her eyes. He wished they didn't each have a shirt on, but he couldn't take the time to do anything about that minor impediment.
In one graceful swoop, Jaxon released the grip on his mate's wrists, grasped her firmly around the middle, lifted her several inches off the ground and then settled her on his cock until she was completely impaled.
Brianna screamed in shock, loud enough to wake the neighbors. She wrapped her legs around him, hugging him against her.
Holding that position for a moment, Jaxon hoped to rein in his arousal enough to enjoy the sensation at least for a few thrusts. "Baby, you might want to lower your voice. The neighbors are going to call the cops." His words were husky to his ear. Anything to get his mind off his cock for a few seconds.
Brianna squeezed her lips together and nodded.
Jaxon lifted her frame off his length as leisurely as he could stand and then settled her back down on him.
She moaned. Her head rolled against the wall. Her pupils disappeared up into her head.
Gritting his teeth, Jaxon finally let go. He thrust into his mate with abandon several times. He wasn't going to last. "Come for me, Bri, baby."
Brianna bucked her hips toward him.
"That's it, baby. Rub your clit against me. Use the base of my cock to make yourself come."
Brianna arched her back and ground herself against him. He watched her face, not lifting her off his cock again. Wanting her to come before he did. One more thrust and he would be done for.
"Bri, look at me," he demanded.
The slits in her glazed eyes widened and she tipped her head down to meet his gaze.
"Come. Now."
His mate clamped down on his cock with her pussy as she let her lips fall open and screamed, "Jaxon."
Jaxon lifted one hand to clamp it over her mouth. Her eyes widened. She had no idea how loud she was when she orgasmed. He loved it, but the neighbors really were going to get suspicious if she kept it up.
He didn't need that arm anyway. There was no need to lift her off him again. The pulsing of her pussy around his cock sent him careening over the cliff with her, and he shot his come deep inside her, reveling in the grip she had on his length.
Moments later, when he could finally breathe again, Jaxon released his grip on his mate's mouth. "Sorry. You…"

Brianna blushed. “I don’t scream.”
Jaxon smiled and leaned his forehead against hers. When she let her gaze meet his once more, she smiled that mischievous tilt of her lips that told him she knew the lie when it left her lips.
“Think you can sleep now?” he asked.
“God, I hope so. I was so tired earlier. I just couldn’t…” Her voice trailed off and he didn’t force the issue.
He understood anyway. No need to make her feel embarrassed about her inability to resist him.
“Perhaps if I join you in your bed and hold you, you can rest?”
“Sounds perfect.” Brianna squirmed against him.
Jaxon bent his knees and lowered her to the ground. When he pulled out, he already missed her warmth.
Down, boy. Later. The woman needs rest.
Without a word, Jaxon tugged off his boots, stepped out of his jeans and pulled his T-shirt over his head.
Brianna didn’t move, as though the show were mesmerizing.
He left his clothing right where it fell and reached for his mate. During a long languid kiss, he inched her tank up her body. When he broke the liplock, he tugged her shirt over her head. He wanted her naked body against his while he held her.
In a swift motion, Jaxon lifted his mate into his arms and carried her down the short hall to the bedroom. He eased her onto the bed and left her there while he headed for the bathroom. Moments later he returned with a warm washcloth in hand. Brianna stared at him, her eyes half-mast. She was already half asleep.
With great care, Jaxon wiped between her legs. She spread for him with little coaxing, her knees lying bent and open. God, he loved this woman.
Jaxon climbed in next to his mate, pulled her sexy body against his chest and tugged the blankets over them. He brushed damp curls away from her face. Her hair had still been wet when she went to bed. “Sleep, baby. I’ll be right here.” He kissed her temple and relaxed against her, listening to her breathing as she succumbed to her exhaustion. Moments later, he went with her…

Chapter Thirteen

Brianna opened her eyes to total darkness. Thank God. She wasn't finished sleeping by a long shot. She twisted in the sheets to snuggle in deeper, hoping she was still groggy enough to go right back to sleep. When she tried to turn over, she came up short. She smiled. Right. Jaxon. His arm was flung over her middle. And he wasn't asleep either. His fingers grazed the bottom of her breast.

"Did I wake you?" he mocked.

She squirmed beneath his hand. "I'm up now."

"Wanna play?" His infuriating hand didn't stop rubbing her skin.

"Isn't that what we do all the time?"

"Remember I told you I wanted to tie you up?"

She swallowed. "Uh huh."

"I'm gonna do that now." His hand moved. *Fuck*, the blankets disappeared too.

"Blindfold." That word was spoken close to her face and his lips brushed hers as he tied something over her eyes.

His fingers skimmed down her arms and grabbed both hands to pull them over her head. "I'm glad you keep scarves so handy around here."

Another pull proved her arms were now secured to the headboard. Damn slotted headboard.

"Don't deny the effects, baby. I can smell your arousal increasing." Jaxon leaned back and stopped touching her.

Now she had to endure the rustling on the bed next to her, holding her breath against whatever other weapons of assault he planned.

"Spread your legs, baby." When she didn't move fast enough, he added, "Wider. I want to see your pussy glistening with need."

She did as he said, wishing for all the world he would simply fuck her senseless fast and hard like last night. Take the edge off. Somehow she knew that would not be the case.

Feather-light touches smoothed across her torso and up to her breasts. When whatever he was using grazed her nipples, she arched her back and moaned.

"Watch those noises, baby. It's still early. The neighbors are really going to be concerned after hearing you scream in ecstasy last night. I don't think they could take another round of that so soon."

She didn't think she could either. Though she wasn't thinking about the screaming so much as the torture. Goose bumps covered her body. Her nipples pebbled to hard points she didn't need to see to ascertain.

"Ah ah ah. Keep your legs open, Bri."

She hadn't even realized she'd lifted her knees to gain purchase with her heels.

With a sigh, she obeyed the command and let her thighs flop wide apart.

The thought of him staring at her so intimately brought a flush across her cheeks.

Jaxon situated himself between her legs. More rustling next to her on the bed. "You have an interesting collection of sex toys, love."

What? Oh God. She moaned again, this time in embarrassment.

Jaxon chuckled. "Yep, I rummaged through your bedside table a bit. It wasn't like I had to dig deep. You've never even used some of this stuff. It's still in the packages."

Shit.

A buzzing sound hummed through the air. "What a tiny little bullet. Do you use this out in public, baby? Stuff it in your pussy and let it work you over when you aren't even home?" He didn't wait for an answer, thank God. "And this? Wow. I'm surprised."

She could only imagine what he held up. Her cheeks flushed even more thoroughly. They'd be a deep red by now.

"If I remember correctly, I only managed to get one finger into that tight rear hole of yours before you gripped around it. What were you planning to do with this?"

Brianna groaned. All her secrets were out. Spread out on the bed beside her while she could do nothing to hide from her private fantasies—the ones that weren't so private anymore.

The rip of hard plastic and cardboard reached her ears. *No no no*. He was not going to use her own butt plug on her.

"Oh, but I am, baby. I would have done so anyway in the near future, but now that I know you were planning to do so yourself before you met me, I won't wait. Now is good. Don't you think?"

A pop made her flinch. Her senses were so heightened she could discern the sound of her lube being opened.

"Draw your knees back, baby. Keep them wide, but pull them up toward your chest." A gentle nudge made her comply. "There, like that. Now hold still while I work your ass a bit to accommodate this plug. You didn't start small, did you?"

Jesus, Mary and Joseph. She didn't know a thing about plugs. She'd purchased it on a whim one day last year and hadn't thought about it since. Who knew what size it was?

With one finger, Jaxon circled her forbidden entrance briefly, rimming closer and closer until he pressed inside

her. He fucked in and out with that finger several times and then added another. The sensation increased tenfold. Two fingers did not just double the penetration. The space they occupied was much wider when he scissored them inside her.
Brianna grit her teeth. It felt so wrong, almost violating, while at the same time, moisture gathered at her sex. She couldn't concentrate with wanting him inside her so bad.
Jaxon set his free palm over her clit and pressed down while he worked her ass. He didn't rub but tortured her poor nub with the pressure.
"I'm gonna insert the plug now, Bri." His fingers disappeared. "Press out while I push in. It'll ease the way."
Push out? Was he kidding?
"I promise you'll love the sensation of having your ass filled while I take your pussy with my cock. It will hurt less if you push out while I press in."
Bri stiffened. Could she go through with this?
"You can do it. Relax." Jaxon leaned forward and kissed her lips. "Deep breath and then I'm going to push it home."
Brianna inhaled slow and deep and then exhaled just as gradually. On the exhale, Jaxon eased the plug into her. She cringed when the wide section passed the outer rim of muscles, but as soon as it was fully seated, she relaxed into the feeling. It wasn't bad. Weird. Different. Strange. But not as uncomfortable as she'd thought.
Jaxon released her, lifting his hand from her clit briefly. A new sound filled the room—a low buzz. Not her bullet this time. She rolled her eyes around in their closed position as though searching her head for some clue as to what he held now.
She didn't need to think long. The object landed for a moment on her clit with no warning. Just as fast, it disappeared. "What a cute little butterfly," he teased. "It even has straps. Do you wear this out in public too?"
No. She did not. It simply came that way.
"I might like the idea of you dining next to me at a restaurant wearing this. I wonder if they come with a remote? That way I could control your orgasms. Hmmm."
His words alone were torture. She was so close to coming, one tiny touch would push her over the edge.
"Let's get the first one out of the way," he whispered.
Brianna moaned. She tugged her knees together. The act made her even more aware of the plug in her ass.
"Uh uh. Did I say you could do that? If you can't follow simple directions, I'll have to force you."
Brianna sucked in a breath and pinched her lips together. *Force me?* Oh God. Her pussy wept, moisture wetting the juncture of her thighs as she squeezed them tighter. Damn her body for betraying her while Jaxon made such dominant suggestions.
The bed dipped in several places. What was he doing? He disappeared.
"I thought we agreed that I could be dominant in the bedroom. This is a bedroom. Right?"
Was she supposed to answer that? She nodded when a pause of several seconds passed.
"Spread your legs, Bri," he commanded, his voice stern and coming from her left.
In slow motion, Brianna did as she was told, letting her knees fall apart. Her legs trembled.
"Better." Suddenly his hands were on her left knee. A soft material looped around it and he tugged. What was it? A scarf maybe?
The rustling of fabric made her turn her head toward him. She held her breath as her leg pulled almost painfully toward where he stood. He'd tied her knee to the bedpost! Brianna swallowed hard. *Fuck*.
Moments later, Jaxon shuffled to the other side of the bed and did the same to the other leg, stretching her wide open farther than she could have imagined possible.
When he finished he climbed between her legs again. "Next time you won't close your legs." Without warning, he swatted her clit with a few fingers.
Brianna flinched. *Oh. My. God*. The mixture of pleasure/pain pushed her to a new limit she'd never considered. On the second swat, she screamed.
"What did I say about all that noise?" Jaxon paused. The instigator of her sexual torture just sat there while his words sank into her brain.
"Sorry," she mumbled.
"That's nice, but it doesn't change the fact that I've reminded you several times and the neighbors are still sleeping. Open."
What?
"Open your mouth, Bri."
She bit the inside of her cheek. Could she do this? Let this man she'd known for just over one day control her this way? The answer was clear. She trusted him with her life. And…she had never been this turned on.
She let her jaw slacken.
"More."
As she stretched her lips farther apart, Brianna was aware of every tingle in her body. Her ass clenched around the plug. Her pussy tightened. Her clit throbbed.
Suddenly her mouth was filling…with what had to be the large rubber dildo she herself had purchased, sealing

this unknown future fate.
"I won't push it all the way in this time, but next time I won't be so lenient."
Brianna's eyes watered, not with tears, but more with the stress of having such a large cock inside her mouth. It was bigger than a normal cock.
"I can't believe you own something like this." He tsked. "It's huge. Do you like a huge cock, Bri?"
She didn't answer.
He blocked her so well, she could barely get into his head, but right then she could hear him chuckling inside her mind.
"Don't want you to spit it out now do we?" Another scarf of some sort tickled her naked chest, teasing her nipples into new points. Brianna swallowed again and the dildo lodged in deeper before Jaxon anchored it with the soft material. "Lift your head a bit."
It only barely registered in her mind that she even had the ability to deny him.
"You can always say no, Bri. You know that right?" He paused, his hand on her cheek. *"Talk to me."* He spoke the rest into her mind.
"Yes."
"All you have to do is tell me to stop and I will."
"Okay."
When she lifted her head a few inches, Jaxon tugged the scarf around her and tied it off, securing the rubber phallus inside her mouth. She bit down. At least now she wouldn't hurt herself when she bit.
"Perfect. Now where were we? Oh yeah."
She had no idea where "we were". So many things had happened in the last few minutes, it all jumbled together. Her reality centered on how badly she needed to be fucked.
Brianna braced herself. A soft humming reminded her of the tiny vibrator. The butterfly mentioned before she'd clenched her knees together landed on her clit and Jaxon held it there. The vibrations made her knees shake. She could feel the intense orgasm building deep inside her.
"Come, Bri." Jaxon stuck two fingers into her core and pushed them against the plug in her ass.
She shot off like fireworks. Even from the darkness behind the blindfold, she swore she saw bright colors.
"Good girl." Jaxon waited until her pussy stopped clenching his fingers and then set the butterfly aside. Instantly, he straddled her and slammed into her.
"Oh God. Jax. That's so fucking good." It was just what she needed. Him filling her to the hilt.
He was right, his cock felt magnificent stuffing her with the butt plug at the same time. And every sense was heightened by the blindfold and the gag.
He pistoned in and out of her several times. The rough way he slammed against her clit brought her to the edge of the precipice once again.
"You like that," he mumbled. "You're right. It feels fantastic." He paused. "Know what would feel even better?"
There's more? She couldn't imagine where his mind was going now. She just wanted him to keep moving. She was so close to another orgasm. She whimpered behind the gag.
He pulled out.
No, no, no! She screamed the word over and over through their connection.
"Yes. I think you're ready."
Ready for what? She'd do anything to come. Well, almost anything.
"This." Without warning, Jaxon pulled the plug from her ass with a pop. She cringed. What? Why? It felt so good having him in her pussy while the plug was in her ass. So full.
There was a moment's pause. Brianna held her breath. Her mind went wild. She was out of ideas.
A dip in the bed. A rustling. Her frustration over the unknown mounted. Her pussy clenched, begging him to reenter.
"I like this one." He seemed to speak to himself.
Which one? Which one what?
"You have so many vibrators."
Fuck. Seconds ticked by. She didn't have to wait long. Another dildo plunged into her pussy. She knew the one. Why? Why didn't he just take her with his cock? It was larger. It was…human.
A small click sounded and the new vibrator swirled in circles inside her, its motor moaning in the silence of the room. Brianna bucked. Well, not bucked exactly. There wasn't room for that.
The vibrator was called a rabbit. And the damn extension pressed against her clit. So close. She moaned into the gag again.
Before she could form another thought, Jaxon positioned his dick at her rear entrance and pushed into her. Oh God. Her mind screamed no. She couldn't take him like that. Not with the dildo in her pussy. Not with…
A muffled groan escaped her lips as he slid all the way in. So tight. Fucking fantastic. Even better than when he'd been in her pussy with her ass plugged.
So forbidden. She felt the flush cover her chest and neck, and then she ignored it. The feeling was too exquisite to care about propriety right then.

He pulled almost out and then slammed back in. Again. And again.
Brianna tipped her head back. She breathed deep through her nose, but she couldn't keep the orgasm from crashing through her, gripping both the vibrator and Jaxon's cock.
"Not gonna last…" he muttered as she milked him. He held himself right above her body as he plunged into her with abandon. His chest grazed her nipples as he rocked back and forth.
Brianna came again, yelling out, even though her noises were muffled.
Jaxon came right behind her, groaning around his orgasm as he pulsed inside her.
Heaven. Nothing had ever been like this in her life. There was no comparison and she'd be a fool to turn down an offer of a lifetime of sex with this man.
When Jaxon was spent, he slumped along one side of her. Between deep gasping breaths, he spoke. "I'm glad you're starting to see things my way, Bri. I don't think I could have taken it if you sent me away again today."
With one hand he pulled off her blindfold and she blinked into the dim room. She stared at the expression of pure adoration on Jaxon's face, his eyes twinkling, his lips curled up into a small smile. He reached under her head and tugged off the scarf. She spit the rubber cock out of her mouth. She didn't even realize she owned so many scarves.
"I found them in a drawer."
"Can you at least attempt to stay out of my head?" she mumbled. "It's so invasive."
"Not really. You have to learn to keep me out. It doesn't really work the other way around. I could pretend not to 'hear' you sometimes, but that's cheating really. I'd feel like a liar." Jaxon glanced down at her body and sat back a few inches. "Do you know how incredibly sexy you are trussed up like this?" He ran a fingertip down her body, over one nipple, and then across her clit.
Brianna tried to lift her torso, but it was no use. She was completely at his mercy. "Please…"
Jaxon glanced up at her face, his eyes twinkling even more. "Please, what? Please tease you some more? Or please release your hands and legs?"
He lifted up on one elbow as he spoke and reached to untie her wrists. "Anyway, yes, I borrowed a few silk scarves." He smiled down at her.
"Of course you did." He "borrowed" a hell of a lot more than scarves this morning.
Scooting farther up the bed, he released her knees next.
Brianna stretched herself out and purred.
"You okay? I wasn't too tight, was I?" He massaged her arms and leaned in to take her mouth with his.
After a long kiss that melted her heart, he muttered into her ear, "I hate to rush you, but we need to leave soon."
"Where are we going?" She glanced out the window. "What time is it?"
"Seven. We need to head back to the farm. My brothers have information and we need to meet with them ASAP."
"What kind of information?" She twisted her wrists to get the blood flowing back to her fingers.
"The vampire kind."
"Do you really think he's not dead?"
"Not sure. But judging by the urgent request they communicated right before I woke you up, I'd say my family knows."
"Okay, then. I guess we need to go." Brianna lifted her sore body off the bed and stood staring down at him. "I'm gonna take a quick shower."
Jaxon nodded. "Will you wear the plug today?"
Brianna raised an eyebrow. "In my ass, all day?"
"Uh huh. I want to spend the day knowing I put that plug in you and watching you squirm against it." His grin was almost a smirk.
"I thought the bondage and dominance thing stayed in the bedroom."
"It will, mostly. My idea of dominance extends only to sex. I love that you are an independent woman, strong and smart. I would never trample over your professional life." When she raised the second eyebrow to meet the first, he continued, "Well, except where your safety is concerned. Listen…" he stood next to her and gripped her shoulders with both hands, "…if I thought you didn't like it that would be another story. But you love when I command your body sexually. You can't deny it. So humor me. Let me make you feel good. Put the plug back in after you shower."
Brianna blew out a breath and turned to leave the room. She'd consider his words. *Consider*. She wasn't ready to consent defeat yet. Damn him for being right. Just the thought of having that object inside her all day made her pussy weep.
After a luxuriously uninterrupted shower, Brianna stepped back into her bedroom to find Jaxon grinning at her.
"Come here, babe."
She stepped toward him, gripping her towel around her. His voice had a way of luring her anywhere.
He bent her over the side of the bed when she reached him and whipped the towel off.
She shivered, not so much from the cool air, but from his high-handed manner as he set a firm hand on her lower back, nudged her legs apart and circled the rim of her ass with a finger. When had he gotten the lube?

Brianna braced herself as he pressed the cool tip of the plug against her tight hole.
“Push out, babe.”
She held her breath and scrunched her face as he slid the phallic object into place. When she exhaled, she realized how peculiar it was going to be walking around in public wearing the thing. Did Jaxon know how aroused she would be with that plug constantly reminding her of him?
“You look beautiful. I love knowing you’re wearing it. No one else will know.” He kissed her on the back of the neck and stepped away. “Breakfast is ready. Meet you in the kitchen.”
Brianna dressed quickly and joined Jaxon at the table. The man had cooked. He wasn’t kidding.
“God, that smells good.” Bacon and eggs covered a plate, toast on the side. “Where’s yours?”
Jaxon patted his stomach. “I couldn’t wait. Sit. Eat. I’m going to borrow your masturbation chamber for a few minutes. I’ll be right back.”
“Ha ha,” she called after him. She couldn’t imagine sitting with the plug in her ass. She was in so much trouble.

Chapter Fourteen

When Jaxon pulled his truck up to the house, he finally let go of Brianna's hand. He hadn't stopped touching her the entire drive. "Guess we need to take care of some business first, but then I want to retire to my room for a few days and see how many ways I can make you scream."

His mate blushed. Her cheeks looked so cute when she did that. Her pale skin and blond hair made the red stand out.

Jaxon rounded the truck and took Brianna's hand once more. Without releasing her, he stepped across the gravel and climbed the steps to the front porch. With a deep breath, he opened the door.

"Hey. 'Bout time you guys got here. What were you doing?" Sergius teased. The question didn't require a response.

In fact, Juliana swatted Sergius on the arm. "Leave your brother alone." She gave him a stern look, her eyebrows furrowing together even though she didn't quite wipe the mirth from her face.

"So what's the news?" Jaxon took a seat on one of the room's couches and tugged Brianna down practically on top of him. Technically she was next to him, but there was no air separating his thigh from hers.

Sergius, Juliana and Micah all sat around the coffee table.

Sergius began. "I got a call from Uncle William early this morning. They apparently took our request seriously because since yesterday he seems to have contacted everyone he's ever met and compiled some information for us."

"That was fast," Jaxon said.

"Anyway, there don't seem to be too many vampires out roaming this planet. Just a handful—that anyone knows of. A few in Canada, South America, Asia…you get the point. And over the last hundred years they have rarely caused any problems."

"Has anyone successfully killed a rogue vampire?" Jaxon asked.

"No one is sure." Sergius shook his head. "But many have tried. The most important thing I learned was that our friend Keeton McKinney is without a doubt alive and well somewhere. A rusty metal stake will not do the job. Others have tried. Vampires have the uncanny ability to regenerate, even their hearts. However, he's most likely in a weakened condition somewhere licking his wounds, both the mental and the physical. It'll take a while for him to resurface, according to Uncle William's contacts.

"Every method of elimination we've ever heard of in myths has been attempted. All have failed with the possible exception of one."

"What's that?" Jaxon leaned forward.

Even Micah, who had remained silent until then, angled his head toward their oldest brother.

"Fire. No one is quite certain, but the wolf pack living in Northwestern Canada believes to have eliminated their local threat with a contained fire. They trapped a vampire, surrounded him against the edge of a steep mountain and burned him alive. At least that's what they think. They never found a body and they haven't heard from or seen him since."

Jaxon gasped. "God. That would explain McKinney's hesitation to get close to flames."

"True. Assuming he knows of the danger," Micah added. "Just because fire might be an effective method of killing them, doesn't mean McKinney is aware of the threat."

Jaxon nodded and turned back to Sergius. "How long ago did this happen?"

"Well, that's the clincher. It's only been a few months. If the flames didn't kill their vampire, it's possible he's still lurking around somewhere, recuperating or planning his next attack. There's no way to be sure."

Brianna pressed her hand into Jaxon's thigh. "It's certainly better information than anything else we have."

Juliana agreed. "That's for sure. Now all we have to do is figure out how to accomplish such a monumental task and execute it."

Sergius stood and headed for the kitchen. "I'll make coffee." He turned back to the room. "The important thing is that everyone is safe for now and we undoubtedly can count on having a few months' reprieve from the likes of Keeton McKinney before we need to be on the defensive again. That gives us time to research and plan."

Jaxon nodded. He exhaled a breath he'd been holding for seemingly two days since he'd met his mate. She stared up into his eyes. For now, she was safe. "Brianna…" He turned to face her head on, grabbed her hands and rubbed her palms with the tips of his fingers. "You need to move in here. I can't protect you when you're at your apartment."

She nodded and whispered, "Okay. I get it." She swallowed and he watched her throat working.

"And, as for your job…" Would she balk about that too?

Yes. She would. "I'm not quitting my job. I worked hard for that and I love it." She shook her head.

When Jaxon tensed, she gripped his hands tighter.

"Listen, I fight forest fires. I love my job." She glared at him before continuing, "Don't get your panties all in a wad. It's a part-time job. I'm on call when they need me."

Jaxon imitated his mate and swallowed also. "What do you do when you aren't fighting fires?" How had this not occurred to him before now?

Brianna smiled. "Several things. Part-time firefighters in the Appalachians don't make enough money to pay the

bills. I also teach wildfire classes at the center for Southern Area Wildland Fire Training. And I'm finishing my degree in forestry. Online," she added. "I figure the next best thing to fighting fires is learning how to prevent them in the first place."

Jaxon grabbed his mate and tugged her against him for a giant hug. What more could he ask for right now? His mate was safe. She intended to spend her days hovering over a computer inside the protection of his home. And the best part? She'd always be available when he wanted…needed…her sexy body.

"Just so we're clear," Brianna began, "don't think you can walk all over me when it comes to my life. I'm strong-willed. You won't win. Ever." She narrowed her gaze.

Jaxon tried to breathe normally. His mate was not in any immediate danger. If she got called on to fight a fire, he'd just have to shift and follow her. In the meantime, he'd pray for rain. Lots of it.

"I'll try to be reasonable when it comes to your feelings about safety, but I'm not a china doll you can keep hidden away. If I was, you wouldn't even like me."

The woman had a point.

Liking her wasn't really an issue right now. Jaxon was quickly falling head over heels in love with her. The only thing that would make his life perfect would be if she felt the same.

"Oh, but I do, Jax." She tipped her head to one side. "I'm as in love with you as you are with me."

When he froze, she continued, "What? You thought you had all your personal thoughts completely contained from me?" She giggled. "Hate to burst your bubble, but when you think as hard as you sometimes do, you slip up too. I can read you like a book."

Still stunned, he leaned back.

"Oh, stop it. Don't worry," she mimicked, "you'll learn to block me better soon."

Epilogue

Brianna stared at her computer screen, not seeing a word. Her mind wandered to the last few weeks. She had settled into a routine. Jaxon hadn't wasted any time moving her into his wing of the house. She didn't really have much in her meager apartment to begin with. Between teaching wildfire classes and taking her own online courses, she'd been stretched thin financially. Without the responsibility of rent, she could worry less and concentrate more on her goals.

She didn't like it at first, Jaxon helping her out so much, but she'd had to relax and focus on more important issues.

Juliana was an angel. The woman made her feel more welcome than Brianna could have imagined. Juliana was fighting her own battle against Sergius to gain more freedom. She wanted to lead more group hikes and work more hours than he was willing to consent to. "Safety" was a word both women cringed over several times a day. It gave them a camaraderie and something to talk about as they got to know each other.

It wasn't that the men were being unreasonable. There was, after all, an unknown entity in the way of a very angry vampire out there somewhere. Both women were leery about his presence. However, they were also strong-willed individuals who wanted to lead their lives. The push and shove between the men and women followed a very fine line.

"You okay, Bri?"

Brianna startled at the sound of Jaxon's voice behind her. She twisted from her spot in front of her computer and found Jaxon sauntering toward her. Every time she laid eyes on him, he still made her squirm. She must have been truly lost in thought to have not sensed his presence.

"Just thinking." She reached for him and wrapped her arms around his waist when he got close enough. His warmth comforted her.

"Good thoughts, I hope?" Jaxon gripped her shoulders from above and massaged.

Brianna moaned. She hadn't realized she'd been so tense. "Piecing together the last few weeks. I can't believe it's been only fourteen days since we met. Seems like forever. My life is completely transformed." She angled her face up toward him.

"Mine too, baby."

She inhaled long and slow and released her breath on a sigh. "How long did you say this mating frenzy thing would last? I can't concentrate." She gripped him around the waist tighter, pressing her cheek into his stomach and inhaling his scent. She had the urge to pop the button of his jeans with her teeth and tug the zipper down. "I can't study when you are around," she mumbled into his shirt.

"And I'm not helping matters, am I?"

"Nope."

"Maybe if we…"

"Don't even say the words out loud, Jax." Brianna released her hold on him and pushed his body away from her. "I need to study."

"It didn't look like you were studying when I came in."

"Yeah, well, I should have been. I'm behind."

Jaxon's fingers still lingered on her neck.

"Give me half an hour and then I'm all yours."

His eyebrows rose along with the smile that spread across his face. "Promise?"

"Would it matter?"

"Not really, but I love it when you're eager and willing. I always feel a bit guilty when I lure you away from your work with only carnal intentions."

"Sure you do." She peeled his hands from her neck and leaned back. "Thirty minutes and then I'm yours."

Jaxon took her cheeks in both hands and leaned in for a kiss. "I'll be back," he mumbled against her mouth.

"Half an hour." His promise lingered in the air as he padded from the room.

Brianna stared at his back. There was no way she was going to be able to study, but she just smiled. Perhaps instead she could use the time to dream up a way to make him burn as much as she was right now…

Keeton McKinney awoke in his apartment with a start and bolted upright before immediately collapsing back onto his bed.

"Motherfucker that hurts." He gripped his chest where it still ached from the worst wound he'd ever experienced.

He glanced at the clock. It was the middle of the night. How long had he been lying here? Thirteen? Fourteen days? He needed to feed. Every time he awoke he relived that day in his mind.

Once he'd managed to unpin himself from that goddamn iron stake, he'd hobbled deep into the forest and gotten as far away from the cave as possible before slumping onto the ground and resting when he couldn't go another step.

Then the rain had fallen, large welcome drops drenching him, rinsing away the blood and dirt that had accumulated all over his body. The other benefit of the downpour was to mask his scent. He was much harder

to track in a deluge. Of course the wolves were too, but he didn't have the energy to track a flea after the beating he'd taken.

If he hadn't been so pissed and sore, he'd have laughed.

The audacity of that wolf to think he could kill Keeton with a rusty metal stake? Ha.

But, damnit, the pain had been intense.

Keeton was even angrier with himself than Jaxon. Why had Keeton been such an easy target? It had seemed so cut and dry when he'd planned and executed this murder. He hadn't been thinking clearly. It should have occurred to him that Jaxon could shift and escape. You can't just tie a large wolf up with a knot and expect him to stare at it when all he had to do was shift and untie himself. Even two weeks later he was still kicking himself in the ass for his own stupidity.

It seemed the effort to mask the wolf's ability to communicate for an extended time at long distances had rendered Keeton's judgment a bit lax. His focus on his prey had kept him from thinking things through clearly. He would have to work on that before he struck again.

It was wonderful he was able to block telepathy. Perhaps there were other abilities he could tap into of which he was as yet unaware. In which case, he really needed to be able to make sound decisions simultaneously. Unlike that day. The blocking must have drained him and left him vulnerable.

Obviously, judging by Jaxon's flight from the scene, those wolves had no idea how to kill a vampire. That information would come in very handy in the future. Unless… Keeton had been incoherent for a while before he'd regained consciousness. It could be that Jaxon simply fled for his life, not caring whether or not Keeton was actually dead. Who knew?

Hell, if it hadn't been for the massive fire in Chicago in the late 1800s, even Keeton himself wouldn't have known how to kill a vampire. He'd unexpectedly been in the right spot at the right time and that information had changed his life.

There was nothing more to do but wait and regenerate. It would take months for Keeton to be back in full force. Meanwhile, he would plot. Because those wolves had pissed him off for the last time. Their days were numbered. And he wasn't going to be nice about it anymore. Their deaths were going to be cruel, ugly and messy.

Keeton tried to relax into the mattress. His chest pounded with the pain of regenerating tissues. He closed his eyes. He needed more sleep. He needed to feed. In that order. And then…he needed a plan.

About the Author

Becca Jameson lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with her husband and two kids. When she isn't writing, she can be found reading, editing, scrapbooking, running, swimming, biking, or taxiing kids all over creation. She doesn't sleep much…or sit down often…but she loves to be busy! Unlike many other authors, Becca had never written a single word until a few years ago. After enjoying several years on the editing side of the business, Becca decided to give writing a try. Now she can't stop! And the voices in her head are clamoring to get out faster than she can get them onto "paper"! Still experimenting with both contemporary and paranormal genres, there is no telling what she may come up with next. To learn more about Becca Jameson, visit her blog at www.beccajameson.com, email her at beccajameson4@aol.com, or tweet her @beccajameson.

Look for these titles by Becca Jameson

Now Available:

Durham Wolves
Rescue in the Smokies

Coming Soon:

Freedom in the Smokies

Only one will win the right to call her "mate".

Rescue in the Smokies
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Durham Wolves, Book 1
Sergius Durham and his brothers are legendary trackers in these parts, and only the local sheriff knows why. They're wolf shifters, attempting to live quietly on their horse farm. A difficult task when they're summoned every time a hiker goes missing.
Serg knows there's something different about his latest case the moment he touches her left-behind clothing. She is his mate, and nothing will stop him from finding and claiming her—except maybe the repeat-offending nuisance of a vampire who lured her off the trail.
Juliana Polanski isn't sure how she got so lost, but there's no mistaking her instant attraction to her rescuer. No denying the passion that explodes between them when rain drives them into a cave for shelter—or at his home, in his bed, even after the crazy, improbable truth of his heritage comes out.
Yet Serg knows the danger isn't over. At any moment Julianna could be kidnapped right out of his arms—by the only creature the Durham brothers have never been able to track.
Warning: This book contains hunky shape-shifters living in the mountains, hot steamy sex in caves, mind-blowing oral, mild bondage and wild abandonment in front of mirrors.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Rescue in the Smokies:
A strong whiff of his mate made Sergius lift his head.
She was close. She was also alive. If he could have sighed audibly in wolf form, he would have.
Serg ran. Fear of what he would find made his blood boil.
He pushed through a grove of trees and suddenly she was there, right in front of him, sleeping on a bed of leaves, curled up in a tight ball under a shiny Mylar cover.
He stood for several seconds, staring at her. His chest heaved from the mad dash to find her. He took a deep breath in and held it.
She was slight compared to him. Long, gorgeous, red curls feathered out in every direction, some covering her face.
The urge to lurch forward and nuzzle her made his front paws twitch.
He needed to shift and get her to safety, but he also wanted to burn this moment into his memory, the second he first saw his mate. His jaw clamped down on the pack he carried, his dry mouth reminding him of its presence.
Finally, he backed away from her several yards, hiding himself amongst the bushes he'd come through to let the change take him back to human form.
In two minutes, it was over and he was dressed. And this was why he always carried the cumbersome pouch.
She was so still.
He crouched beside her. Her breaths were shallow, her face totally relaxed in deep sleep. He laid a hand on her shoulder. "Juliana?"
His fingers shook where they'd made contact with her warmth, shockwaves traveling up his arm even through the jacket and whatever she wore underneath. The urge to haul her into his embrace made him tense. He needed to know she was all right. Every bit of her.
She startled awake and bolted upright. "Ohmygod," she gasped. A strangled sound left her throat.
Her gaze met his from only a few inches away, green eyes like deep pools of water reflecting her shock, her fear and her relief all at once.
"Are you okay?"
She smiled up at him, cute dimples forming on both cheeks. "I am now." She inhaled, releasing it slowly.
Her heart rate slowed under his palm after the initial surprise. He could feel her pulse in her neck, the swish of blood as it coursed through her.
"Are you injured?"
"Only my pride." Her pale face tipped back again, her cheeks now flushed. "How did you find me? Where am I?"
"You're a long way from where you left the path, that's for sure. Scores of people are combing the woods searching for you." *In a completely different direction*. But she didn't need to know that right now. "How did you get so far from where you started?"
"A man recommended I take a shortcut. When it got late I backtracked. I must have taken a wrong turn, because before I knew it, it was dark. I walked for a little longer and finally saw a light in the distance." She dipped her head down, her face no longer visible to his perusal. "How embarrassing. I hike hundreds of miles every year. I've never gotten lost before. I-I'm not sure how this happened."
"It doesn't matter. You're okay now. Everything is going to be fine. Did you walk all night? You must be exhausted. Hungry." He was rambling. He never rambled. She had him tongue-tied. No, he'd never acted like

this even as a youngster. Wolves didn't fall all over themselves quite like humans did. Not until they met their mates, apparently.
She giggled. The sweetest sound he'd ever heard. "I think I'm okay. Relieved you found me. Wasn't sure what I was going to do if I had to keep walking all night again."
Why had she chosen to travel by night and sleep by day? Sure, it was a better idea as far as warmth was concerned, but not many people would think of such a thing under stress.
Sergius stood and extended his hand to her. She rose alongside him, steadying her slight frame. But her grip sent his mind whirling. Every hair on his body felt electrified. His heart raced. And damn if his c**k didn't jump to attention.
Lord, she was half a foot shorter than his six feet. And might weigh one fifteen, one twenty, soaking wet.
He could feel the firm muscles on her arms where his hand had landed as they stood. She was strong, apparently both physically as well as emotionally. She hadn't started crying as he would have expected and didn't appear to have spent the night crying either. Her eyes weren't puffy, but weary. Stress lines marked her face.
"Why did you walk all night?"
"Well, the light for one. I thought it was a campfire, but it always remained elusive. I was sure if I followed that damn light, there had to be people around wherever it led when I got there. The strange thing was it was like a mirage. It seemed to keep moving farther away the closer I got to it. Exasperating, really." She chuckled. "Now it seems absurd. Maybe I imagined the damn thing."
Her brow furrowed and she bent to examine herself and brush off the twigs and leaves sticking to her body.
Serg reached to pull a leaf from her hair and tucked the unruly strand back behind her ear. When his thumb brushed her cheek, a shock jolted him. She jerked her gaze up to his and sucked in a breath.
She was so beautiful, even with tangled hair and a streak of dirt across her chin. Her round face was pale against his darker hand, a light sprinkling of freckles above her button nose. Sergius let his thumb travel across her cheek again, cupping the side of her head with his palm. His gaze traveled around her face, landing finally on her heart-shaped pink lips, which quivered as she licked the dryness away and tucked the bottom one inside, biting it between her teeth.
Her breath rate increased, in and out through her nose, while she dented that bottom lip with the tight grip of her front teeth.
Did he turn her on? He hadn't been around mated couples for so long he'd forgotten what it was like when wolves met their mates.
His own heart was racing, threatening to pound out of his chest. He tried not to breathe too often or too deeply, because every inhale dragged more of her sweet essence into him, driving him crazy with the need to take her.

She was ready for his steel, but not for his flesh.

Mistress of the Stone
© 2012 Maria Zannini

Luísa Tavares has a list of sins the length of the Antilles, but there's no time to repent for them now. When a pockmarked Frenchman hands her Papa's ring—still attached to his severed finger—she orders the *Coral* back to the Caribbean, despite her father's earlier warning never to return.

It's Luísa's luckless fate that the only man who can help her is a blasted Inglés pirate hunter who's more dead than alive and locked in a curse he doesn't want lifted. Worse, his feral sensuality sparks a hunger she can't ignore.

Xander Daltry hadn't planned on kidnapping this wild woman—or succumbing to his uncontrollable desire for her. But he needs Luísa and the moonstone she wears around her neck to rescind a witch's spell. His sister, long dead, and others like her have been cursed to remain in the mortal plane for eternity. Only the stone can set them free.

The only way to convince the reluctant pirate queen to help him is to withhold one small bit of the truth. For if she learns who really betrayed her father, the longing in her fiery eyes could easily turn to murderous wrath…

Warning: Contains a pirate queen with a sacred gem, a werewolf with an agenda, an island where nothing is as it seems, and a hero with a Jolly Roger that'll make you purr like a kitten.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Mistress of the Stone:

Xander awoke with the delicate arm of a woman across his midsection. He looked down and smiled to find Luísa lying next to him.

He scanned the dim room. His sister wasn't here as far as he could tell. Even invisible, she usually manifested a faint mist of effervescence.

It hurt to move, but he managed to turn so he could face his bunkmate.

She was a lovely she-cat. Her skin was smooth and tanned, and her hair was the color of Brazilian mahogany. Her soft, pouty mouth begged for kissing. But so young.

Inácio Tavares had raised his daughter as a pirate to protect her. A bold scheme if ever there was one. How could a father know that decision sealed her fate?

He pushed a curl of dark hair off her face.

She'd enter the tomb for him. He was sure of it. But he had to get her through the jungle first, before Saint-Sauveur retook their trail. The merged stone could only be used once and only on the blood moon. He had no right to choose who was worthier of freedom, but he was willing to take that license if it meant saving his little sister from an eternity without rest.

The curse of the werewolf was an act of God. There was no guarantee the moonstone would even help the lycan. But it would help the lost souls. It was Luísa's ancestor and that cursed stone that had trapped the dead on this island in the first place. Only the stone and the Sorceress's descendent could set them free. And both were within his grasp.

Luísa stirred momentarily, looking like a flower stretching its petals outward.

Xander felt unusually guilty. This wasn't her fight. It wasn't her burden, but without the girl's help, their suffering would have been for naught.

A monkey's rowdy chitter redirected his attention. He looked up at an unshuttered window above their makeshift bed. There, looking quite the dandy, was Koko, Sibyl's Capuchin monkey.

He was a reckless little fellow with warm brown eyes that looked like pools of melted cacao and a grin that always betrayed his wicked intentions. The saucy monkey was a thief—and a good one too.

Koko wound his way down to Luísa's side. He seemed as much in awe of her beauty as Daltry, but it was the moonstone pendant she wore around her neck that caught his fancy.

With Luísa on her side, the only thing Koko could see was the glimmer of silver surrounding the watery blue stone, but that seemed enough to lure the naughty monkey into more nefarious deeds.

It began with a little paw gently pulling her hair out of the way so he could see his prize. Luísa turned around then so that she lay flat on her back. The little heathen grinned with delight.

The pendant reburied itself under her shirt leaving Koko with only one possible solution. With his tail hooked around the base of the window, he rolled his body until he hung upside down. Once in position, he unbuttoned the top button of her shirt, looking up at Daltry only once to make sure his deed wouldn't risk intervention.

Daltry felt a similar lascivious grin creeping on his mouth. He perched his head on one hand and, like a grand potentate, waved permission to Koko with the other.

Koko widened his mouth to a toothy grin, a wet excited breath escaping through his teeth. The monkey snapped a perfectly English salute before pawing furiously on a second button.

Daltry began to have stirrings of his own. His wounds were healing, but it hurt to take a deep breath. That didn't seem to stop his sex from returning a firm salute of its own.

The depraved little beast, (the one with monkey breath), wormed his way down to the third button even though he could easily cup the prize in his greedy hands.
It was then Luísa woke up. Her eyelids fluttered a bit before they opened, but when they did they flew wide, her soft pouty lips following suit, screaming a slew of curses Daltry had never heard from a woman before.
She jerked to a sitting position even while Koko jumped back, mimicking her screams octave by octave, his little hands shooting into the air in submission.
Daltry, who had been showered with loosened monkey fur and spit when Koko made his hasty retreat, barked a laugh that ended with a painful wince. He didn't care. The look of horror on both these heathen creatures was worth the suffering.
He choked back his laughter when Luísa smacked him with her grass-woven pillow.
"Were you going to let that beast undress me?" She screeched at him like a wheel about to come off its pins.
Daltry caught his breath and held on to his sides. "Come now, luv. It's not as if this love affair would ever last. He only wanted you for your treasure."
Luísa smacked the pillow straight at his face and jumped up, grabbing her shirt closed as she did so.
Koko, ever the accommodating mercenary, clapped his little hands at the magnificent beating, then saluted Luísa on a job well done.
"I'm not through with you either, little man," she said, pointing a finger at the monkey.
Koko clasped his paws together and hung his head in a penitent pose. He lifted his eyes only once to see if Luísa was still watching.
Her mouth twisted to a smirk and then a full grin before she broke into laughter.
"Blasted monkey. No doubt he belongs to you."
Daltry sat up against the wall and gestured to the monkey. "You could say Koko is his own man, but he always has an eye out for pretty girls, especially those wearing shiny baubles."
"Bah!" She barked at Koko, shoving her hands at him.
Koko returned the compliment by jumping on the mat between them and hooting at her.
Luísa crossed her arms. "You don't impress me, beast."
The monkey seemed to think about this for a moment before he raced up her leg and into the crook of her folded arms, bussing her cheek with a kiss of apology.
What little resolve she had left washed away in an instant. "You little imp," she said and cradled him in her arms.
Koko leaned his head against her chest and sucked his thumb.
Luísa pulled out the pendant and showed it to him. "You see. It's not much. A worthless blue stone on a silver chain. My boots cost more."
Koko listened to her intently while fondling the jewel. At long last, he seemed to agree with her assessment and gave her another kiss before jumping out the window.
Xander snorted a laugh. "Do your lovers always leave you so quickly?"
"You're not funny. That hairy beast scared the devil out of me."
Daltry didn't smile. "It seems I've given you cause to know worse."
Luísa swallowed visibly. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way. Your sister told me about your affliction. It startled me at first, but I understand now."
"It's not an affliction. Being a werewolf isn't the curse. It's not knowing when the change will come on that causes us grief. We can't control it—not on our own anyway."
"That's why you use the wolfsbane. To keep you from turning involuntarily."
"Yes. But it's a false blessing. The wolfsbane is addictive, and it takes more and more of that vile weed in order to control our urges. That's why so many of our kind live here, where we won't frighten anyone should the change take us unaware."
"But you don't live here. I've heard stories of you sailing the seas for years."
Daltry looked away. "Yes. After my sister…" He looked up, his brow furrowed in anger. "My sister—"
Luísa knelt down and put her hand on his arm. "She's dead. I know. She told me. She said Saint-Sauveur killed her."
"Aye, and that devil has stayed out of my reach since then. It takes a whole army to watch his back, and every were-tribe on the island recognizes him as pack leader." His hands curled into fists. "But I've not forgotten my oath. I'll have his wolf's head if it's the last thing I do on this Earth."
"Then we both have a score to settle. I want Saint-Sauveur too. He has my father, and I intend to get him back."
"We'll get your father, luv, then I'll get you both off this island." He sat up straighter and squinted in the dim light, trying to locate his sister, but it seemed he and Luísa were alone. "Why isn't my sister here?"
"She said she had to gather allies for you."
Daltry grunted. "Allies! Damn that girl. She's wasting her time. She's probably gone to visit Jovis, the werewolf leader on this island. I wish she had waited for me to wake up. I don't like her going alone."
"No disrespect, but I don't see that there's much that can harm a ghost. I'm sure she'll be fine."
"Aye. You're right, of course." He sighed in resignation. "She's suffered so at my expense. If I had been there for her—"

“Someone was with her. She said she didn’t die alone.”
He huffed at her. “So she tells me. But she refuses to name this guardian and that vexes me.”
Luísa’s quirked her mouth into a lopsided grin. “Sibyl lit up when she spoke of her companion. Methinks it was a paramour—and she doesn’t want a troublesome brother giving him grief.”
Daltry nodded. “I knew she’d been seeing someone before she died. I suspected it was someone from the pack. Sibyl caught the attention of every werewolf on the island.” He barked a laugh. “I was always running them off.”
“You love your sister very much.”
“Aye, I do. She’s the only kin I have who hasn’t turned her back on me. If Saint-Sauveur hadn’t reached you first, I would’ve stolen you off the *Coral* and brought you here myself. I want only to give Sibyl peace. You understand, don’t you, Luísa?” He shifted and looked at her hesitantly. “I’m not asking for myself, but for her.”
Luísa fussed with the pendant at her breast. Hesitantly, she raised her eyes, then planted a soft kiss on his cheek. “You saved my life, Xander Daltry. Man or wolf, I owe you a debt.”
“Luísa, you should understand the risks.”
“I understand family. And I understand duty. I still think you have the wrong woman, but lead me to this second moonstone and I’ll gladly do what I can.”
Daltry felt his apprehension evaporate. “Bless you,” he whispered.
Luísa fingered the knotty weave of the grass mat bed. She glanced up at him before casting her gaze elsewhere. “You’re probably hungry. I’ll see what I can muster.” She stood up, careful to step around him.
Daltry scrunched the blanket around his loins. He was uncomfortably aware of an erection that refused to diminish.
“Sibyl usually keeps tea for me in that little gray jar above the hearth.”
Luísa rolled her eyes. “Yes, well, I’m a little suspect of her tea.”
Daltry rubbed the back of his neck. “Hmm…I thought she slipped me something extra. But not to worry, the sleeping powder is something she adds to the water.”
Luísa picked up the clay jar and unwrapped the cloth covering. The crumbled remains of chamomile lined the bottom of the bowl. If they were lucky, she might get two cups out of it. She brought it over for him to sniff. “Are you sure this tea is safe?”
He took a shallow whiff and then a deeper one. “It’s safe.” He looked up at her. “Did she drug you too?”
“Yes. She wanted to make sure I stayed put.”
“My sister is nothing if not resourceful. The tea leaves are harmless though. She’d not keep the two ingredients together.” He readjusted the coverlet to better hide the growing appreciation of his houseguest.
He had to stop staring at her. But he couldn’t help it. Soft blush cheeks and the warm embrace of her smoldering gaze kept him prisoner. Even the scent of her inspired him with carnal thoughts.
The need for a mate gnawed at him. He’d not mated when he should have, and Luísa’s proximity reignited the primal urge.
A woman had been selected for him, a werewolf like himself, but he had no conscious desire for her, except for the savage ache that drove all of them. Luísa was different. He wanted her, needed her—not as a wolf, but as a man.
His common sense told him not to threaten the only chance he had to save his sister’s soul, but the animal side of him, the part that knew only passion, wanted this woman beneath him. The hairs on his hands grew incrementally.
Luísa came toward him with a fine china cup and weak tea. Her eyes seemed to see through him, perhaps preferring that to acknowledging his nakedness.
“What’s it like,” she said. “Being a wolf?” She sat at his side, student to his every word. There was an eagerness in her voice and the need to know. She picked up a soiled rag and scraped at the crusted blood on his arm. “Does it hurt to change?”
“A little. You get used to it.” The rag skimmed across the hair on his arms, teasing it with a delicious itch.
Harder, Luísa. Harder.
“It must be lonely—living like that.” She paused her ministrations, and her breaths grew shallow, suddenly aware of her proximity to him.
“There are more of us than you know. We live among the common folk every day, though I dare say, we keep our distance. We’re in no hurry to meet the hangman’s noose.”
Daltry put down his tea then took her hand, pressing it gently against his chest. Her touch—even through the cloth—seared him, and yet he couldn’t bear to let her go. “Do I still frighten you?”
Her gaze flitted to the floor and then the hearth, everywhere but to him. “That depends. You don’t plan on changing into a beast right now, do you?” She tried being flippant, but it only served to make her look more self-conscious.
Daltry rubbed a callused finger along her chin. “There are many different types of beasts, kitten. Not all of them dangerous.”
She lifted her eyes hesitantly. Instead of censure, she wore a look of puzzlement. Her lips parted, anticipation and fear lacing her expression.

She saw through him, he was sure of it, but she didn't understand the wildness inside. *A virgin.* This girl, a child who had seen the world in all its rawness, was as lost as a lamb. And now this lamb lay within reach of a wolf.

He leaned toward her and inhaled her fragrance, lifting her face until their lips were a breath away from each other. He nuzzled her and felt her stiffen when he pulled her into his arms.

For a moment, she refused to speak, even to breathe, hanging on to one heartbeat.

"Xander," she whispered.

"Don't be afraid, Luísa. This wolf won't hurt you."

Fire in the Smokies

Becca Jameson

His commands ignite flames in her that rival any forest fire…

Durham Wolves, Book 2
When Jaxon Durham isn't raising thoroughbreds with his brothers, he's using his heightened senses to search for missing hikers in the Smokies. This time the call is for a firefighter gone missing on the front lines.
In his wolf form, he's the first to track the firefighter to a cave, but he's stopped cold by a stunning realization—it's his mate. To his relief, the body covered in fireproof gear is female.
Brianna White can't decide if she's died and gone to heaven, or unconscious and having a delicious dream, when the wolf standing before her shifts into a naked man. Either way, she can't resist the urge to go along for the ride. She never expected to fall so instantly, and so hard, for the sexy hunk.
But an old enemy is lurking beyond the walls of their refuge. The clock is ticking while Jaxon races to evade the deadly threat, even deadlier flames, and overcome the stubborn will of a woman who's not sure she's ready to give up life as she knew it.

Warning: Dark, sexy wolves in the Appalachians evoke steaming sex in a cave, light bondage and dominance, various plugs and vibrators, and an interesting masturbation chamber…

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