

Siren Publishing

Ménage Amour

The background of the cover features a close-up of a man and a woman about to kiss. The woman has long, wavy blonde hair. The background is a soft-focus image of a natural steam vent, with white steam rising from a rocky, dark landscape under a blue sky.

Steam

Tymber Dalton

TASTY
TREATS

STEAM

Tasty Treats

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MENAGE AMOUR



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STEAM

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DEDICATION

For my husband, who's *my* princess Prozac.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

While standalone, this story is the sequel to *Boiling Point* (available in the *Tasty Treats Vol. 3* anthology). It is also a prequel to *Trouble Comes in Threes*, the first book in the *Triple Trouble* shape-shifter series. The events in this story take place immediately following *Boiling Point*, but a couple of years before *Trouble Comes in Threes*. If you'd like to read more about Ain, Brodey, and Cail Lyall, and Micah Donovan, you can pick up the *Triple Trouble* shape-shifter series from Siren-BookStrand.

STEAM

Tasty Treats

TYMBER DALTON

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Prologue

Brodey Lyall stood in front of the sliders and looked out at the backyard. A late March weather front had passed through earlier that afternoon. Rain fell in sheets, rippling the pool, casting the woods beyond in a greyish green hue. An hour before sunset, he didn't even feel like a Friday night run.

He didn't feel like anything except shit.

He wished he could erase Kimberlie's voice from his mind, the image of tears sliding down her cheeks, her hazel eyes red from crying.

The sound of her voice as she pleaded with him to change his mind. The sound of her sobbing as he turned his back on her and drove away in his truck.

Closing his eyes, he took another long pull of his beer. His third in fifteen minutes, not nearly enough to numb the pain—yet. The three cases he'd stocked in the fridge might be enough to put him into a damn good drunk that night.

Worse, he could still smell her on his shirt, and he didn't have the heart to take it off, or to shower.

His younger brother, Cailean, walked into the living room. "Brod, you okay?" he quietly asked.

The eldest of the triplet shape-shifters, Prime Alpha Aindreas, apparently had enough sense to stay the hell away.

“No, Cail. I’m not. Fucking. Okay.”

After a few minutes, Cail stepped closer. “You’re not alone, you know.”

Brodey didn’t respond.

“I’m sorry,” Cail said.

Brodey tried to ignore him.

“We tried, Brod. You know we did. I’m sorry.”

Brodey finished the beer, crushed the can, and dropped it to the floor where it joined the other two empties. He picked up another he’d left sitting on the end table, popped the tab, and took a long swallow. “Where is the fucking Prime prick anyway? Too chickenshit to come home?”

“That’s not fair, and you know it.”

In a movement almost faster than Cail could follow, Brodey turned and launched the nearly-full can at him. A stream of foam arced across the living room behind it. Only the fact that the alcohol slowed Brodey’s reflexes allowed Cail to step out of the way.

“Fuck you!” Brodey screamed. “You assholes didn’t have to do the dirty work!”

Cail’s jaw clenched. “April 20, 1937. Bangor, Maine, asshole. Celeste.” He crossed the room in four strides and grabbed the front of Brodey’s shirt. “Fuck. You. You’re not the only one who’s had to give up love because she wasn’t our One, and you damn well know it. The problem is, now it’s *you* having to deal with it. Fucking sucks, don’t it?”

Brodey shoved him. Cail was ready for it and threw him to the hardwood floor where he loomed over Brodey. Cail’s brown eyes darkened to nearly black in his anger. “You think you’re hurting now, two *hours* later?” he snarled. “Try waking up each morning and lying in bed every night thinking about her for nearly seventy *fucking* years, asshole, and then get back to me. Try that shit with Ain, he won’t

show you an ounce of pity. Been over a hundred years for him. At least your girl is still alive. Ours have been in their graves for decades or longer.”

He stormed out the front door, slamming it behind him. One of the fan-shaped windows set into the heavy oak cracked from the force.

Brodey stared at the front door as Cail’s words rang in his ears. He dropped his head to the floor and sobbed.

Chapter One

Lina sat at the table and blearily watched Zack and Kael, who were bent over one of the prophecies. Already on her second cup of coffee, she'd climbed out of bed fifteen minutes earlier after extricating herself from between her men.

Jan and Rick Alexandr, her mates, were still upstairs, sound asleep in their huge bed.

Zack looked up and winked. She blushed. Last night, after a wild and woolly roll in the hay with Rick and Jan to celebrate their first official night in their new home, more new powers had cropped up to screw with her mind.

Life with dragon shifters. Welcome to Hell's Happy Acres.

Zack reached across the table and wrapped his fingers around her hand. Barely dawn on a Saturday morning and he was wide awake. When she knocked on his door a little after six, he'd already been up nearly an hour.

"You doing all right, Goddess?"

"Don't call me that," she grouched.

"She's not awake, Z," Kael chided him, not looking up from the prophecy scroll. "You of all people should know better than to bust her balls before she's awake." Kael glanced across the table and smiled. She really liked him despite envying the fact that he was now Zack's mate. Being handsome must be a dragon shifter trait. Brown hair and green eyes a different shade than her own, with a sculpted body. A cousin to her mates, he would get to spend the rest of his life in Zack's bed.

Something that, up until eight months ago, Lina assumed she'd be

doing.

“Sorry, sweetie,” Zack apologized. He sat back in his chair. “There’s nothing in this prophecy about sudden funky new powers. This is the next prophecy in the timeline. I mean, we know you’re going to gain a lot of powers, but we don’t know what or when. We’re flying blind in that respect.” He took her coffee cup and refilled it for her.

“Terrific. What the hell am I supposed to do?”

Kael shrugged. “We’ll figure it out. Oh, I talked to Uncle Andel this morning. They’re expecting us for the big Gathering next week.”

Lina hadn’t met the mysterious Uncle Andel yet, although she’d heard her men talk about him quite a lot. “Is being an early riser a dragon thing?”

“Obviously not,” Zack snarked. “Not with those two bozos still asleep upstairs.”

Kael ignored Zack’s quip. “He’s in Yugoslavia right now. Time difference.”

“Oh.” Lina wrapped both hands around her steaming coffee mug. “What Gathering?”

“Out in Yellowstone. I need to tell Jan and Rick about it.”

“Tell us about what?” Jan mumbled as he entered the kitchen and made a beeline for the coffee pot.

Lina’s heart fluttered at the sight of her dragon shifter mate. Wavy blond hair, ice blue eyes, pale skin, and a drool-worthy bod. Janek Svarog Alexandr formed the ice and earth half of the Elemental twin brothers. Usually the calmer and more level-headed brother, his temperament fitted his elements. He poured himself a mug of coffee, then leaned in and brushed a cool kiss along the back of Lina’s neck.

“Good morning, lovely,” he murmured, sliding into the chair next to her.

“There’s a Gathering next week,” Kael informed him.

Jan leaned forward and rested his forehead on the table. “Nooo.”

Kael smirked. “Oh, yes.”

“What’s wrong?” Lina asked.

Kael grinned. “You want to tell her?”

Jan shook his head without lifting it. “I don’t need this shit right now.” He finally sat up and looked at her. “I know you’ve been wanting to meet our family, but I was hoping for a less...”

“Overwhelming?” Kael helped out.

Jan shot him a dirty look. “*Busy* venue.”

Lina felt a surge of agitation wash through her. She clamped down on it. Until she knew what havoc her newest batch of powers could wreak, it was best she not get upset. “Answers, please.”

Kael didn’t speak. Jan sighed and turned to Lina, lacing his fingers through hers. His touch, as usual, felt comfortably cool. “A Gathering is like a business meeting, family reunion, political summit, and sometimes a speed-dating session all rolled into one.”

“Then what’s the big deal?”

“It’s all shifters. Not only dragon shifters. Canines, felines—everyone. Most of the shifter races will send representatives.”

“Whoa.” She tried to absorb that information. Before now, she’d specifically told them not to overwhelm her with too many shifter details over the past eight months. Especially since she’d taken over Callaway and Associates following her former boss Edgar’s impalement at the bottom of her pool after he tried to kill all three of her men. Zack being one of “her men” as far as she was concerned. “Canines? You mean...werewolves?”

Kael cleared his throat. Jan shot him a dirty look. “No, not werewolves. Don’t call a wolf shifter that, they’re liable to go batshit on you. Werewolves are totally different.”

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “Okay, back to the topic at hand. I have to drop everything and traipse out to Yellowstone for this Gathering? Why can’t you guys go? We’ve got five huge commercial jobs right now.” Callaway and Associates was the architectural design firm where the Alexandr brothers met Lina when they went for a consultation on building their house.

“Goddess has to go,” Zack snarked. “You’re sort of going to be the dragon shifters’ star attraction.”

“Zack!” Kael and Jan sharply scolded him.

Lina’s jaw clenched. “Don’t. Call me. That.” She didn’t care what the stupid prophecies and Baba Yaga said, she didn’t feel like a friggin’ goddess.

She felt like a woman about to lose her mind.

Rick appeared in the kitchen doorway. “What’d Zack do this time?” He leaned in and kissed Lina with lips that felt scorching hot on his way to pour himself a cup of coffee. Jarek Stribog Alexandr’s straight black hair, warm amber eyes and tan skin set him drastically apart from his twin brother. The fire and air half of the Elemental twins, his hot, quick temper matched his hot, hard body. Yet for Lina, he would turn himself inside out to make her happy. Both brothers would.

“He’s busting Lina’s chops before she’s had a full pot of coffee,” Kael said.

Rick laughed. “Dude, that’s seriously asking for trouble.” He sat on Lina’s other side. “What’s going on?”

Kael filled them all in. A huge shifter Gathering, to be held at Yellowstone National Park that week. The Elders of their dragon shifter *flagyer* decreed attendance was mandatory.

“They want to meet Lina,” Kael said. “And perform your binding Ceremony.”

Lina sat up. “Our *what*?”

“It’s like a—” Kael was drowned out by the other three men suddenly being struck by coughing fits.

She glared at Jan, then Rick. “What did you say, Kael?”

Rick, a man she’d never seen scared, looked horrified. “Nothing.”

“Right, nothing,” Jan agreed.

The fact that the two brothers readily agreed to anything other than the fact that they loved her heart and soul made her immediately suspicious. She looked at Kael. “It’s like a *what*?”

“Wedding.”

“WHAT?” The dragon shifter men eased their chairs away from the table in preparation to run.

Only Zack held his ground. “Sweetie, it’s a dragon thing.”

“I don’t give a shit what the hell it is, nobody’s marrying me off just because some old fart dragons say so!”

This had been a major point of contention for Lina throughout her unconventional relationship with the brothers. The State of Florida decreed only one man and one woman could be married. Knowing her two men, they would kill each other before giving ground and voluntarily allowing the other to become Mr. Pavlina Zaria. Therefore, she’d decided neither would marry her. She hyphenated their last name to hers, and they’d each given her a beautiful ring—she’d made them draw straws for which ring would go on which hand so it was totally fair—but that’s as far as she’d go. She didn’t need a wedding certificate to prove her love for her men, or theirs for her.

“It’s not really a wedding,” Zack insisted as the dragons stood. As Lina’s Watcher and life-long friend, he was the only one with the gift to calm her. She’d accidentally set fire to a tree two weeks earlier when she waded into an argument between Jan and Rick over what kind of car to buy her. They’d managed to piss her off. Before she knew it, the men were running for hoses.

Since that little pyrotechnic display, the men were very careful about not upsetting her. Especially since she had no idea how she’d done it.

“What is it if it’s not a wedding?”

Zack’s face grew serious as he stood and slowly rounded the table. The other men backed away to the safety of the kitchen doorway. “It’s like a commitment ceremony, babe.” Zack reached out and took her hands, prompted her to stand. “Sort of like a dragon hand-fasting ceremony. For all three of you.”

Lina felt her anger bubbling close to the surface and focused on Zack’s calming brown eyes. He backed them toward the door leading

outside to the patio. She let him lead her.

“Why do we have to do it? Don’t I get a say in it?”

He didn’t break contact with her gaze. He released one of her hands and turned the knob, pushed the door open, and led her to the brick patio, recapturing the hand he’d released along the way.

“Of course you get a say, sweetie. No one said you don’t.”

She tried to focus on his calm, steady voice. “But they’re ordering us to do it, aren’t they?”

“Well, they want to have it when everyone will be there to witness it. Sort of a two for one.”

Wrong thing to say. Anger took over again. “So, they want to make it convenient on them? Fuck them!”

“Shh, sweetheart, calm down. It’s okay. That’s not it. It’s a special thing. You’ll be the guest of honor. They’re doing it because you’ll be there. I know it’s short notice, but otherwise they’d have to wait until nearly winter, when the summer tourist season winds down. Right now it’s March. They’ve got special pull there. They want to welcome you to the family.”

Lina stared into Zack’s sweet brown eyes. Last night, when her newest powers took hold, she’d had an out-of-body experience and travelled downstairs into Zack and Kael’s bedroom.

Kissed Zack and told him she loved him.

He maneuvered them to the far side of the pool, safely away from the house. “I love you too, baby doll,” he whispered, low enough the three men gathered in the kitchen doorway couldn’t hear. “I will *always* love you.”

Her eyes widened in surprise.

He pulled her close and touched his forehead to hers. “Don’t you get it?” he whispered. “I’m your Watcher, you’re my Goddess. We’ve been together for only that damn bitch Baba Yaga knows how long. This life, I get to help you fulfill your destiny. No, we don’t get to sleep together this time around, but that’s okay. You’ve got those two brutes over there who love you, and I was lucky enough to find a

fantastic guy who loves me. We'll be okay."

Her bubble of anger popped. She sobbed against him. "I'm sorry, Zack. I don't want to hurt you."

He rubbed his chin in her hair. "You'll never hurt me. I'm your Watcher. Seems like I warned everyone I'm your official ledge-talker-offer dude."

"That's not what I meant," she whispered.

He chuckled, then looked down at her, forcing her to meet his gaze. He stood six inches taller than her five-six. "Baby, I need to let you in on a little secret. I'm in your brain the way you're in mine. I know about your life sentence from Baba Bitchhead."

She sniffled. "You do?"

He stroked her chin. "Yeah. I know you tried to keep it a secret from me. Please don't feel guilty. It's okay. Just because we don't shack up together in this life doesn't mean you shouldn't enjoy what you've got." He tipped his head toward the dragons. "I know I bust their balls, but they're good guys. They love you. I couldn't have picked better men for you if I'd gone on Craigslist and tried." She snorted with laughter, prompting a smile from him. "There's my girl."

They'd spent lifetimes together throughout the eons, with Zack as her Watcher, marrying her, dying when she did, being reincarnated every life to be together. Lina didn't remember any of it until the Alexandr brothers walked into their lives eight months ago and fulfilled both their prophecy and Zack's.

She didn't know before then that in every life Zack remembered and actively took care of her, fulfilling his role as her protector. Had the Alexandr brothers not shown up this time around, when she turned thirty-five Zack would have married her again and they would have lived happily ever after until the next go-round.

To save Zack's life after Edgar shot him, Lina had agreed to Baba Yaga's terms. In exchange for her men—including Zack—finding happiness, Lina agreed to whatever cruel torture Baba Yaga would put her through.

The cruelest torture of all—to know Zack would never again be hers despite their countless happy years together.

Zack sat on a stone bench by the pool and pulled her into his lap. Even with her size sixteen frame, he picked her up as if she weighed nothing. Since her powers had awakened following her initial mating with the brothers, and now since his mating with Kael, Zack had come into his own supernatural strengths.

“Sweetie, what do you see out there?” he asked, pointing to the backyard.

She shrugged. “Thirty some-odd acres of mosquito-infested Florida woods. Why?”

“Imagine a butt-load of shifters all in one place. Free to run around. Some need to hunt really big game. Know what they’ve got a ton of in Yellowstone?”

“Bison. Elk. Moose. Bears.”

“Right. Know what else they have in Yellowstone?”

“Tourists?”

He snorted. “Not that.”

“Be a little more specific.”

“Lots of wilderness. Open spaces. Places to run and shift and be yourself and never see another soul. They have two Gatherings a year, spring and fall. No one wanted to drag you out there for the last one because we all knew you felt overwhelmed. Okay, yes, the *flagyer’s* communication skills suck, I’ll give you that. I promise I’ll have a heart-to-heart chat with good ole Uncle Andel about not springing shit on you.”

She knew the dragon men still watched from the safety of the kitchen doorway. She snuggled closer to Zack, enjoying the familiar feel of his arms wrapped around her. Before her life did a huge, crazy one-eighty, she thought Zack was gay, enjoyed spending several nights a week with him, and was thoroughly convinced she’d be marrying him at age thirty-five. They’d jokingly made a pact in college to get married if they were still both single, a pact she’d

thought would come true.

“Is Kael okay with this? He’s not jealous of me, is he? I don’t want to cause problems.”

“No, sugar, he’s not jealous. Remember, he grew up with the prophecies. He knows I’m your Watcher. He knows I love you.”

She closed her eyes and breathed deep, feeling calmer. “They’re scared shitless I’m going to set fire to something, aren’t they?”

“A little ass-puckering fear’s a good thing to instill in a man sometimes, babe. It’ll help you keep them in line.”

Chapter Two

Brodey sat the breakfast table, a nearly-full bowl of Cheerios in front of him. He should eat. He needed to eat.

His stomach and his raging hangover begged to differ.

Ain walked into the kitchen, his expression guarded. He studied Brodey for a moment with his grey eyes. "We need to talk."

"Fuck you."

Ain pulled out a chair and sat. "I want you to go with Cail and Micah to the Gathering next week."

The original plan was for Brodey to stay behind at their Arcadia, Florida, cattle ranch and supervise the operations while Ain, Cail, and their cousin, Micah, travelled to Yellowstone.

"Fuck. You."

Ain sighed, kept his voice quiet. "Brod, please. Don't make me edict you."

Brodey glared at him. He tried to focus his bloodshot green eyes on his elder brother. "I'm Beta Alpha. Prime Alpha should be there."

Ain took a deep breath. "Please. Go, hunt, take out your aggression toward me on a bison or something."

"Get away, in other words."

"Yeah."

Cail stood in the doorway. Brodey looked at him. "I suppose this was your idea?" Brodey asked.

"No, it's Ain's, but I agree." Cail crossed the kitchen and sat with his brothers. "We didn't want to make you break up with her. You know that."

Yes, Brodey knew. In the sober light of a Sunday morning, he

remembered how quiet Cail had been after he took Celeste home that final evening.

How Cail disappeared for two weeks, shifted, roaming the woods around their Maine Clan compound. Sometimes at night Brodey had heard Cail's plaintive, heartbroken howls.

How, decades before that, Ain had stoically remained silent when Brodey admitted he felt zilch for Janine, even though Cail had liked her.

Triplet Alpha shape-shifters. What the fuck did they do to piss off the Goddess to deserve this? They could sleep with anyone they wanted, sure. But for their mate they needed a One.

Because they were triplet Alphas, the *same* One.

It was difficult enough for an Alpha shape-shifter in their Clan to find their One. Much less for three Alphas to agree on the same One.

He also knew his brothers were right. They couldn't have faked liking her if they didn't feel it. He'd held out hope, dating Kimberlie for three months, falling head-over-paws in love with her. Dammit, how much more perfect could she be, a shifter, for chrissake! Okay, a feline shifter, but still.

Cail, even though only fifteen minutes younger than Ain, was the Gamma Alpha. "Brod, please come with us. Micah's already arranged a poker game. I'm not saying it'll make you forget, I'm saying it'll give you something else to focus on. Come on, bison! Since when did you turn down an opportunity to hunt something that big!"

Brodey picked at his Cheerios. Two hundred and thirty-four years old and still single. He was tired of it. Tired of being alone. When he found someone to give his heart to, he couldn't even do that. Not unless his two brothers felt the same way.

"Whatever," Brodey quietly said as he stood and dumped his bowl in the sink. "I don't care."

* * * *

Ain drove them up to Micah's house in east Tampa that evening. The men's flight out of Tampa International to Denver would leave at four a.m. the following morning. Ain had already briefed their cousin about Brodey's bad mood. Micah Donovan was a first cousin through their mother's brother. He had dark brown hair and pale, ice-blue eyes. A little shorter and slimmer than them, he had the typical lithe wolf shifter body.

Brodey disappeared into the guest room and closed the door behind him. Ain waved Micah and Cail outside to talk without Brodey hearing.

"He's fucked up," Ain said. "He's never been through this before, like we have."

"I've never envied you guys less than I do right now," Micah said. "Poor bastard."

"Not much to do about it," Cail said. "Ain and I tried. We really did. That woman's a total bitch. We couldn't stand her. *And* she's a feline shifter."

"I think I just threw up a little in my mouth," Micah said, looking disgusted.

Ain laughed. "Hairball?"

"You'd think he'd know better than to get hooked up with a cat. They're good for friends, not family." Micah ran a hand through his hair. "What was going through his head?"

The three men looked at each other. "Brodey the Bonehead," they all said.

* * * *

Lina sat with a death grip on Zack's right hand. Rick and Jan had agreed to Zack's request to fly to Denver on Sunday, spend the night there, and then tackle the shorter flight to the Yellowstone Regional Airport in Cody, Wyoming, on Monday.

They'd also agreed to back the hell off and let Zack handle Lina.

“Why didn’t we drive?” she whispered, her fingers tightening around his. “Why the *hell* didn’t we drive?”

“Can you imagine several days cooped in a car with Frick and Frack? You’d be frying their asses before we hit Atlanta.”

She looked into his eyes and laughed, marginally relaxing. “Promise me we’re not going to die.”

“It’s an easy flight, sugar.”

“Can I have a drink? Please? Five or six?”

“No. I don’t need a drunk Goddess to wrangle.”

Jan and Rick nervously hovered nearby. Kael, the only calm one, was put in charge of making sure they didn’t miss their boarding call. Never having flown with Lina before, Rick and Jan thought Zack exaggerated her terror of air travel.

One of these days, they’d learn to listen.

* * * *

Brodey’s mood didn’t lift during the flight to Denver. He didn’t speak during their layover, he just sat in the gate area and stared out the windows. Across from them he noticed four men and a woman. One of the men sat next to her. She had a death grip on his hand.

Scared shitless.

The two men standing nearby watching them looked familiar. Brodey closed his eyes, more to take his mind off his own troubles than anything else, and took a mental sniff.

Dragons.

His eyes popped open. Now he recognized them, the Alexandr brothers.

So who’s the chick?

Curiosity got the better of him. He stood and walked over, offering the terrified woman a friendly smile. He ignored the men, including the fourth, who walked over at his approach. Another dragon, he sensed.

She was beautiful. And, he suspected, more than taken, if he read the situation right.

Still...

He knelt in front of her. "Hi there."

* * * *

The hunky, green-eyed guy knelt in front of her. Jet black hair, hard body. Button up chambray shirt, tight faded jeans over his scuffed and worn cowboy boots. He'd been sitting with his twin and another guy and watching her off and on for a few minutes.

There was something odd about him, but she couldn't put her finger on it.

His eyes held her gaze. Zack went still next to her. She suspected he would have said or done something if this was a bad thing.

"Brodey Lyall." He held out his hand.

She hesitantly shook. "Lina Zaria. Alexandr," she hastily added. "Lina Zaria-Alexandr."

The man glanced at Jan, Rick, Kael, then Zack, before returning his attention to her. "Yellowstone?"

She nodded.

"Afraid to fly?"

She anxiously nodded.

He smiled. Something about the gesture soothed her. "May I?" He pointed to the empty seat on her other side, but he looked at Zack when he asked.

Both she and Zack nodded.

He sat. When she glanced across the way, she noticed the two men he travelled with now intently watched their interaction.

"Ever been to Yellowstone before?"

She shook her head.

He started to tell her about the park, about the landscape, the history. His heartfelt narrative sucked her in, capturing her attention

and, yes, feeding her desire to see the park from his eyes. The way he told it, she almost smelled the pines and heard the water in the river, the sound of the geysers erupting. Forty minutes later, when their flight was called, she'd relaxed, smiled and even laughed a couple of times. Zack might have actually regained feeling in his hand as her grip loosened.

Brodey stood and started to walk away when she reached out and touched his hand. She felt a nearly overwhelming wave of sadness threaten to capsize her.

She realized it came from him. This time when she looked into his eyes, she felt his crushing despair, barely constrained.

Grief.

"Thank you, Brodey," she softly said. Now she understood. He'd sensed her nervousness and tried to keep her mind on what lay ahead, not her fear of the flight. "Will we see you there?"

He smiled and glanced at Jan and Rick. "Probably, if you guys are supposed to be at the poker game."

Behind her, she felt Rick and Jan relax. "Dude, that's where I know you from," Rick said. He reached over and shook Brodey's hand. "Dammit, it's been a long time."

Rick and Jan followed Brodey and chatted with him for a moment. Kael hung back with Zack and Lina.

Zack arched an eyebrow, curious.

"He's really sad," she whispered, fighting tears at the memory of his pain. She'd felt it as if her own. Another new funky power? "Something really bad just happened to him, yet he took the time to help me relax."

Zack smiled. "I know. I felt it, too. He's a good guy."

"Is he...one of us?"

He nudged her forward toward the line queuing to board. "No, sugar. You just met your first wolf."

* * * *

Brodey ended up sitting across the aisle from Lina and the man she kept a tight grip on. Zack Armstrong wasn't romantically involved with her, but there was something going on between them. Zack also wasn't a dragon shifter.

Jan and Rick, the two guys who kept nervously watching her like they expected her to explode at any second, felt like her mates. They weren't treating her like a little sister, not from the looks Brodey caught them giving her.

The fourth man, Kael, kept his eyes on Zack.

And they say wolves are weird?

Brodey occasionally offered Lina a friendly smile. Cail had ended up with the window seat. Halfway through their flight, Cail nudged Brodey and sent him a thought.

"What's going on with her?"

Brodey shrugged and closed his eyes to nap. He didn't know. Their Code of the Ancients decreed they couldn't get involved with someone else's mate. But when he touched Lina's hand...

For the first time since telling Kimmie goodbye, he'd almost felt normal. Not like he wanted to jump Lina's bones. Calm, settled. Peaceful.

He gave up trying to figure it out.

They parted ways at the Cody airport, each group renting vehicles to make their way to the park. At the baggage claim area, Lina finally let go of Zack and walked over to Brodey. She offered him her hand. Again he felt that sweet, calm sensation settle over him.

"I hope we get to spend time together in Yellowstone," she said.

He smiled. "Me too."

Only reluctantly did he let go.

* * * *

She desperately needed a bathroom break. Not just to pee, but to

decompress. Alone in the bathroom, the icy temperature of the water coming out of the tap shocked her when she splashed it on her face.

“How was your trip?”

She screamed as she turned. Baba Yaga, in her incarnation of a middle-aged woman, stood there in navy blue slacks and a grey blouse, not a hair out of place.

“What the hell are you doing here?”

She coldly smiled. “Zaria, I am always around. Did Zack not tell you that?”

“What do you want?”

“To tell you you’re doing fine and to trust your instincts. They will serve you well over the next few days.”

Lina’s heart raced in her chest. The last time she’d faced down this...woman, it’d been eight months ago, after agreeing to Baba Yaga’s terms to save Zack’s life. “What is going on?”

“You are embarking on a journey. I told you once you’d completed the connection with your men that you would face changes and trials. Took you long enough to figure that out, Goddess.”

Lina blushed. The “completed connection” in question was asking her men to take her at the same time the other night. Damn great sex, but also apparently the trigger to releasing her new powers.

She thought about Brodey. “Why did I feel that way about Brodey Lyall?”

Baba Yaga changed back to the crone. “You are a compassionate Goddess. You feel the pain of others. Such is your lot in life, and only one of the many things you can do.” The crone disappeared.

Fuck. She sooo didn’t need this.

Zack drove the rental SUV, only because Lina couldn’t stand the almost instantaneous bickering that cropped up between Jan and Rick over who would control the keys. She grabbed them from the rental car counter and thrust them at Zack, effectively ending the argument.

Kael rode in the second row of seats, reading through paperwork and talking to Zack, while Lina hunched in the passenger seat and

watched the scenery flow past. She couldn't quit thinking about Brodey and his accurate description of the park. Like a writer.

Her mind returned to his mood, his crushing sadness. What had he been through? Almost like someone died. She couldn't wait to be alone with Zack to ask him about it.

Zack relegated Jan and Rick to the third row of seats. Lina felt bad about that, but only a little. PMS had crept up on her. Zack sensed it and assured her she shouldn't feel guilty. The nearly full moon also played a role in her unease, he said.

They arrived at the east entrance, where Zack and Kael had a brief discussion with the ranger on duty. He waved them through after Zack produced a special pass and paperwork. As they pulled away, she turned and noticed another vehicle stopped at the gate. Brodey and his brother, she suspected.

"What's the deal with the park entry?"

"Last week of March, we get special treatment," Zack explained. "It's their changeover time between winter and summer lodging."

"How many people are going to be here?"

"I heard at least a hundred. Not all the shifters come. Just the bigwigs."

"Brodey, his brother and that other guy are important shifters?"

"Their brother, Ain, is on their pack Council. The guy with them is their cousin, Micah Donovan. The Lyalls are from Arcadia, about ninety minutes south of us."

"Really?"

"Yeah." He grinned. "Small world, ain't it?"

"What about the people who work here? Do they know about us?"

"We're the 'special family reunion' that shows up twice a year and pays out the balls for the privilege. That's okay, the park is run by the vampires anyway—"

"Whoa." She felt a dizzy spell coming on. "Vampires?"

"Yeah, but don't let it worry you. The movies are all wrong. They don't drink blood. They're pretty nice people."

Snow still blanketed some of the higher peaks, but the roads were groomed for vehicles. When they arrived at the Old Faithful geyser basin before dark, Lina noticed no snow on the ground despite the sharp chill in the air. They checked into their rooms in the Old Faithful Lodge cabins. Each cabin was composed of four rooms opening to the outside. They had two of the four, and it turned out Brodey's group had the other two.

That relaxed her for some reason.

Zack stopped her before she mounted the steps to the room she shared with Rick and Jan. "You all right, sweetie?" he softly asked.

Her men already took their bags inside. "Yeah. I think I'm ready for some alone time without charbroiling them."

Zack smiled. "I'm right next door. Bang on the wall if you need me."

Inside, Rick and Jan didn't speak as she closed the door behind her and sat on the double bed. A tight squeeze, but since they would only be there six days, she figured she'd manage.

"I won't blow anything up," she promised.

The men relaxed and smiled before sitting next to her on the bed. "Sorry," Jan apologized. "Zack warned us to keep our mouths shut until you were safely settled."

"Yeah," Rick agreed. "Who says we never listen to him?"

She fell back on the bed and closed her eyes. Rick and Jan stretched out beside her. "I'm so tired. Please tell me we can sleep late?"

Jan reached over and tucked her hair behind her ear. "Yep. Nothing until after lunch tomorrow."

At that, her stomach growled. "Right on cue," she grumbled.

Rick laughed and rested his palm over her tummy. "You want us to bring you something, or you want to go eat? They're having a buffet over in the lodge in an hour."

As tired as she felt, she still wanted to see a little of the place. "I'll go." She looked at Rick, his warm, amber eyes focused on her. Then

she turned her head and looked at Jan. Ice blue eyes meant only for her. “You know, I’m not liable to set fire to anything right now.”

Jan smiled and traced her jaw with his finger. “Well, at twenty thousand feet, we didn’t want to take any chances.”

“Not that we think you’re out of control,” Rick hastily added, “but we know flying was stressful—”

“And since the Goddess of making grown men shit their pants isn’t sure where the off button is on her freaky new powers, yadda yadda. I know.” She smiled. “It’s okay. Did you say an hour?”

Jan nuzzled his lips along the side of her neck, finding the spot behind her ear that melted her. “An hour to have some relaxing fun.”

Rick needed no coaxing. He slipped his hand under her shirt. “Maybe we could relax you two or three times.”

She loved these two guys despite how much they sometimes frustrated her. She hooked a leg around Rick’s thigh and kissed him. Behind her, Jan nibbled the nape of her neck with sinfully cool lips, making her shiver.

Working together, the men quickly stripped her of her clothes before shedding their own. *Who said they can’t work together like a well-oiled team?* she thought, suppressing a smile. Rick lowered his mouth to her left breast, teasing and sucking her nipple. Jan’s hand slipped down her body, between her legs.

She rolled over and wrapped her lips around Rick’s cock, which tasted sinfully warm and sweet in her mouth.

He moaned as he gently fisted her hair. “Oh, Jesus baby, you know I love that!”

She swirled her tongue around the head, swiping along his slit and exploring the ridge. He sucked in a sharp breath as she tasted his salty pre-come. “You keep that up, I’ll explode,” he warned.

Lina lifted her lips from his cock but licked down the sides where she palmed his sac and ran her tongue along it, teasing him the way she knew he loved.

Blindly groping, her hand found Jan’s cool cock and she wrapped

her fingers around it and tugged until he moved closer. She grabbed Rick's cock and held it, keeping him in place as she turned her attention to Jan.

His stiff shaft felt cool in her mouth as she explored it with her tongue, his taste subtly different but still as good. Rick's hand slid down her back, between her ass cheeks, until he plunged two warm fingers into her drenched pussy and stroked.

Lina moaned around Jan's shaft, prompting a moan in reply. "Oh, babe, that's so fucking good!"

She laved her tongue over his cock and balls, then switched back to Rick once she brought Jan close to the edge. Back and forth she alternated between warm and cool until both hard cocks pulsed in her hands, desperate for release.

The next time she engulfed Rick's cock, Jan broke free and changed position to kneel behind her. "You're a tease, lovely. I can't take this anymore. I need to fuck you or I'm going to lose my mind."

Rick's hands plunged into her hair again as he rocked his hips against her. "Hurry up," he said, his voice tight. "I want to finish inside her." He made her let go of his cock and shifted position so he could again suck one of her nipples into his mouth. He nipped at her, making her moan as more hot sparks shot straight to her clit.

Jan's hard cock brushed against her ass. She wiggled herself into position until she felt the thick, cool head pressing against her wet pussy.

Rick switched to her other breast, using his hand to continue teasing the first. Then Jan rocked his hips, sinking his cock all the way to the hilt inside her, making her moan. He rolled them onto their sides so she faced Rick.

Jan's fingers stroked her clit, knowing when to torment and when to relent. The cool sensation in sharp contrast to her hot body slowly drew her closer to release.

"You gonna come for us, baby?" Jan whispered in her ear. "I want to feel your sweet pussy squeezing me when you do." He nipped at

her earlobe.

Lina squirmed, impaled, unable to make him go faster as he took control and slowly plunged into her. She buried her fingers in Rick's hair, holding on, every motion he made only adding to the heat inside her.

Rick switched positions, his stiff cock now rubbing against her clit instead of Jan's fingers. "When he's finished, I'm going to fuck you good, baby," he whispered against her throat. "We're gonna make you feel so good."

She whimpered, wanting more, wanting it now. "Please fuck me!"

The men found a familiar rhythm, knowing her body. Jan thrust while Rick pistoned his hips against her, every stroke gliding his cock along her sensitive nub. She closed her eyes and rested her forehead against Rick's shoulder, needing release now more than ever, a powerful vortex of desire sucking at her.

Jan's large hands clamped onto her hips. "Come on, baby," he whispered. "Don't tease me, give me what I want. Let me feel your sweet body squeeze my cock."

She gasped, trying, struggling, the cool feel of his skin a sharp contrast to the inferno within her and Rick's hot flesh pressed against her front. Then Rick played with her nipples again, tweaking and pinching them. She bit down on his shoulder to suppress her scream as her body exploded, her orgasm milking Jan's climax from him as he thrust hard and deep.

"That's it," Rick whispered. "Come for us."

Jan finished with one last stroke and she felt his cool release rush inside her. His arms around her waist, he pulled out and almost immediately Rick slid in, his forehead pressed against hers.

She trembled in their arms, feeling loved and sexy beyond measure as Rick kissed her, his thrusts deep and fast. Lina raked her nails down his back and hooked a leg around his. She didn't want to be any place but here, between them, her men.

She fucked him back as hard as he gave her, loving the feeling of

his hot shaft inside her. As his movements quickened, she dug her nails into his ass, grinding her hips into him, triggering his orgasm. He let out a cry as his hot seed pumped into her, and she once again felt complete.

Sated and now thoroughly tired, Lina relaxed in their arms. Jan cradled her against him as Rick nuzzled his head on her chest. She brushed her fingers through Rick's dark hair as he caught his breath. Hot and cool, together a pleasant mix of sensations. They hadn't spent a night apart since that first night eight months earlier. No matter how much the brothers sometimes bickered, they always put their differences aside for her, for this. No games, no power plays, just the three of them as one together.

Sublime.

A calm, post-orgasmic bliss washed over her. She could sleep for a week, it felt like. They dozed, starting awake when Zack knocked on their room door.

"You guys heading for dinner?"

Lina didn't open her eyes and was about to say no when her stomach loudly growled. Jan and Rick laughed.

"We'll be there shortly," Rick called out. He sat up and kissed her. "Let me wash up real fast and I'll give you the bathroom."

She nodded, then cuddled with Jan while she waited. The only cool thing about her ice dragon was his flesh. His heart, soul, and love burned strongly for her.

His fingers lightly trailed up her spine. "What are you thinking, lovely?"

"Not much. Trying not to think. Not thinking doesn't get me upset."

He softly laughed. "Maybe that's a good thing. Rick and I can keep our testicles that way."

She reached between his legs and goosed him, making him jump. "You mean these? Oh, honey, I don't want to fry them. I've got too much use for them."

* * * *

If Cail and Micah noticed how quiet Brodey acted during dinner, they didn't mention it. Brodey watched Lina and the dragon shifters out of the corner of his eye. He'd noticed his calm faded when leaving his cabin room. Then when Lina walked into the lodge, the feeling returned.

He didn't know what it was about her, but he hoped he could spend more time with her.

Chapter Three

The next morning, Lina couldn't sleep late. She awoke before the men and braved the extremely small and temperamental shower. After ten minutes she finally coaxed hot water out of it, enough to bathe and shave her legs. Although in the tiny shower stall, shaving proved tricky.

It was still grey outside, the time difference from Florida waking her before dawn. When she stepped outside her breath frosted. She shivered despite her jacket.

"Morning."

She turned, startled. Brodey leaned against the side of the cabin, a cowboy hat pulled low over his eyes, one booted foot resting against the cabin wall. His green eyes sparkled with mischief.

"Good morning," she said.

"Breakfast?"

She nodded.

He stepped forward and offered her his arm. "May I escort you, or would that piss off your guys?"

She laughed and slipped her arm through his. "I couldn't care less if it pisses them off. I suspect you're a gentleman."

He cocked his head, amused. She spotted a little of the wolf in him from the gesture. He still seemed sad, but it was as if some of that lifted when around her. If for that reason alone, she would walk with him. They slowly made their way across the gravel driveway toward the lodge.

"You know, I've been called a helluva lot of things in my life, but rarely that."

She snugged his arm closer. "Have them talk to me. I'll set them straight."

They detoured to the boardwalk. Old Faithful's steam increased. "I think it's gonna blow soon."

"I know how it feels," she softly said.

He laughed. "So what's your deal? You're not a shifter."

"No." She looked up at him. "Honestly? I'm not sure what the hell I am. They say I'm one thing, but I don't feel like it. I just feel like me."

"What is it they say you are?"

"You'll laugh."

"No, I promise." The geyser pumped out more steam and started gurgling. This early in the morning, the valley was still cloaked in deep purple shadows and they had the show to themselves.

"They say I'm a goddess reincarnated. That I've got a bunch of prophecies to fulfill."

"Goddess, huh? No shit? Special powers and your own parking space come with that gig?"

She laughed loud and hearty. The pleased smile on his face was worth it. "No, but I did accidentally set fire to a tree."

His eyes crinkled with amusement. "Cool party trick. Not sure how you did it, huh?"

"Nope. I got pissed because Rick and Jan were arguing. Suddenly, it was pine tree flambé."

"No wonder they looked like they were shitting bricks on the plane." He maneuvered her over to the benches and sat with her. When she shivered, he took off his jacket and draped it over her shoulders.

"Thanks. Won't you be cold?"

He shrugged. "Nah, we're pretty tough. Cold doesn't bother me. Not like this. This isn't cold. Now Scotland, and later Maine? Let me tell you about ball-shriveling cold."

Old Faithful let loose. Lina watched, enthralled by the sounds, the

sight, even the smell of the eruption. Steam boiled everywhere in the cold morning air.

“That’s beautiful!” she breathed.

“Yep. Never fails to amuse me.” He looked at her. “So Zack, what’s his gig? He in charge of feeding you the princess Prozac so you don’t charbroil people?”

“He *is* the princess Prozac. Long story. He’s my best friend and even more than that. He’s my Watcher. I don’t even understand it all. He’s got a way of keeping me calm. He always has.”

“Good to have a friend like that. I take it Kael is his…” He didn’t finish.

She smiled. “Yep. ‘His’ sums it up without needing further labels.”

Brodey stared out over the geyser basin. She studied his profile, his black, scruffy hair a little longer than his brother’s. And his brother had brown eyes, not green.

“Cail and Kael. That could get confusing,” she joked.

“Yeah. Gonna have to call them C and K.”

“What happened to you?” she softly asked. “Why are you so sad?”

He blushed and looked down at his hands. “Long story.”

“I can feel it. I don’t know why. I think it’s the freaky goddess gig.”

He took a deep breath and let it out again before quietly speaking. “You make me feel better when I’m around you. Not like I want to jump your bones,” he quickly added. He turned red. “I mean, not that you’re not beautiful, but that wouldn’t be respectful—”

“I promise I won’t have a wolf roast,” she teased.

He laughed again. “Thanks.” He stretched his long torso, stood, and offered her his hand. “Want breakfast?”

“Yeah. That’d be nice.”

* * * *

The staff was still setting out the buffet. Lina returned Brodey's jacket, and they settled on a couch in front of the tall floor-to-ceiling windows looking out over Old Faithful. She didn't feel a need to break the comfortable silence between them. Then she spotted Zack through the windows, racing toward the lodge with a frantic look on his face.

Brodey laughed. "Holy crap, he looks scared shitless."

"He means well."

Zack burst through the door, relief washing over him when he spotted her sitting with Brodey. "There you are!"

"Don't worry, dude," Brodey snarked. "I didn't let her blow anything up."

"I'm fine, Zack." She patted the couch on her other side. "Brodey and I watched Old Faithful."

"Oh." She felt Zack's gratitude toward the wolf shifter. "Thanks."

Brodey stood and stretched again. "Well, I'll let you guys eat—"

"Please eat with us," Lina asked.

Brodey thought about it for a moment. "If it's okay with Zack."

"Goddess gets what Goddess wants," Zack quipped.

Lina smiled. "Then it's settled." Zack stood with her, and she hooked her arms through theirs.

They staked out two tables and pulled them together. Cail and Micah arrived first. Other members of the Gathering had congregated in little groups. A flock of six young women, tall, thin, lithe, and long-haired, walked in and headed for the buffet.

Micah and Cail both sat up and took notice. Brodey rolled his eyes.

"Who are they?" Lina asked.

Brodey, sitting on her other side, leaned in. "Gazelles."

"Is that a girl band or something?"

He snorted with amusement. "No, gazelle shifters. Really rare, actually. Watch." The women all chose leafy green salad for breakfast

and withdrew to a far, quiet corner of the lodge common area, warily watching the others in attendance.

“Why are they so rare?”

“Think about it. Dragon shifters. Wolves and canines. Bears. Cats of various ilk. There are others, but what do those all have in common?”

She frowned. He looked at Zack, who immediately answered. “Predators.”

Brodey nodded. “Yep. Not many prey shifters. They don’t have the defense mechanisms. There are some, sure. Equines, Selkies, things like that, but the majority of shifter races are apex species.”

They watched as a tall, beefy guy strolled over to the gazelles, sat down, and started talking to them. As one, all the women leaned away, their eyes widening. After a moment of them not speaking, he reddened, then stood and left the lodge.

“He’s a tiger.” Brodey snorted. “Cail, Micah, good luck grabbing a piece of those ladies. They’ll be running before you can even get your names out.”

“Fuck,” Micah muttered.

“Imagine that hunter’s surprise,” Zack snarked. ““Dude, I nailed Bambi! No, really, this chick’s name was Bambi!””

Brodey burst out laughing, long and hard. Lina smiled because she felt a little more of the wolf’s pain lift.

Rick and Jan finally showed up with Kael.

“This’ll be one confusing poker game tonight,” Micah said. When the dragon men looked puzzled, Micah pointed. “Kael, and Cail.” He pointed at his cousin.

“K and C,” Brodey quipped as he grabbed his empty dishes to take them away. “Now all we need is the Sunshine Band.”

* * * *

The men finalized their arrangements for the poker game, then the

wolves departed. Before Lina asked about their own itinerary, an older man entered the lodge's common area, followed by four large, muscle-bound men.

Lina didn't miss how her three dragons immediately sat up straight in their chairs. A few other eyes around the room followed the men's movements. Unfortunately, they approached Lina.

Jan, Rick, and Kael stood. Lina sought out Zack's hand and held on tight. The older man looked hard, grizzled. A long scar twisted down his face from between his dark amber eyes to below his chin. His gaze focused first on Jan, Rick, and Kael, then her.

"Is this her?"

Zack squeezed her hand. She didn't know if to calm or warn her.

Jan spoke up. "Andel Watersson, this is Lina."

She felt...something from the guy. She wasn't sure what. Like a grey cloud around him. She'd withhold judgment on this dude for a while.

Uncle Andel studied her for a long moment. "She is a quiet one."

"Fuck you, buddy. I didn't ask to be dragged out here." She stood to leave, her nerves on edge. Zack reeled her in.

The man broke into a smile. "That's more like it!" She noticed his thick accent. He sat across the table from her. "I hoped our Goddess would be spirited."

"You want spirit? I'll show you—"

Zack squeezed her hand again. "At ease, kiddo." He slung his free arm around her shoulders and looked at Uncle Andel. "Dude, you so don't want to torque her now, trust me. Two words: spontaneous combustion."

He nodded, looking pleased. "Advice taken, Watcher."

"At least someone's listening to me."

The men sat and talked for a few minutes. Lina tried to ignore them. Petty? Sure. First vacation she had in years, in one of the most beautiful places on earth, and she had to spend it sucking up to dragon elders? *And* they insisted on her going through with this Ceremony on

their time table, not hers?

Fuck that shit.

She didn't blame her men, but it still chafed her. She'd never asked for this gig.

Thirty-odd people gathered in the lodge's common area, most of them in small groups which she assumed meant they were related in some way. One man sat off in the far corner, by himself, studying the rest of the groups. Darkly handsome and vaguely familiar, she couldn't place him.

Three more people entered the room and made a beeline for their table.

Great.

The woman in the middle looked ancient, much older than Uncle Andel, but her emerald green eyes appeared keen. She'd pulled her grey hair into a tight, low bun. A man and woman flanked her, assisting her over to the table where she sat next to Uncle Andel.

The woman's gaze never wavered from Lina. "Is this her?" She spoke with a thicker accent than Uncle Andel.

"*Her* has a name, you know," Lina shot back.

Zack closed his eyes and muttered something under his breath as he squeezed Lina's hand. Jan, Rick, and Kael looked like they wanted to crawl under the table.

The woman smiled. "I'm sorry, dear, of course you do. Are you Pavlina?"

"Yes, that's me. Goddess of Snark and Incendiary Outbursts."

"I'm sorry this has been such a trial for you."

Lina clamped down on a wave of rage that washed through her. Those happened pretty frequently since the other night, but combined with her PMS, they sometimes threatened to take her over.

"You all have *no* freaking clue how hard this has been on me. Fucking psycho guy I thought was my friend for years, killed my parents and suckered me into thinking he liked me. I worked my ass off to help him build his business, then he nearly killed Zack! Now

I'm dealing with these powers, I'm supposed to save the goddamn world or something, and you all can't even tell me how to not randomly blow shit up!"

Lina stood. Zack stood with her. "I'm in Yellowstone National Park, and by god—*goddess*—I'm going to see the freaking place!"

"Then you should go see it," the woman calmly said. "These men don't need you right now." She looked at Uncle Anandel, who'd gone beet red in the face. "Do you?"

"No, ma'am."

The older woman stood and waved off her two companions. She slowly walked around the table and latched onto Zack's other arm. "Let's walk outside. It's beautiful weather today."

The woman, it turned out, was Bertholde. "I am the *flagyer's* Seer."

Lina liked this woman a lot more than she liked Uncle Anandel. "How old are you?"

Bertholde laughed. "Eight hundred and fifteen, give or take." They took a seat on the benches in front of Old Faithful again, only with Lina seated between Zack and the Seer. "I wanted to have a word alone with you, Lina."

Lina pointed to Zack. Bertholde smiled. "He is your Watcher. He doesn't count."

He snorted. "Gee, thanks." Lina elbowed him.

"Do you know what I do?" the Seer asked.

"Nope. They told me you can't give me the Powerball numbers."

"Lina, you shall be the breath of fresh air we've desperately needed. No, I don't see like that. The short version, and even your Watcher doesn't know this, is there was once a tribe of Seers, my kin. We predate many of the shifter races. In the early days we allied ourselves with them. Over the ages we became a part of the shifter race we committed ourselves to, and we mated with them.

"There are not many of us left, unfortunately. The wolves, felines,

and bears still have them. As do the dragons. There is another dragon Seer besides myself, but he couldn't be here this week."

"What does this have to do with me?"

"I foresaw your arrival, dear." Bertholde's eyes studied Lina's face. "You are very much like I pictured you in my dreams. The prophecies might come to pass in a month or in many millennia. What is important for you to remember is to enjoy your life. And your men."

At that, Lina blushed. She had nooo problem enjoying her men.

"I also wanted to talk to you about the wolf."

"What wolf?"

"The one you have grown close to." The Seer looked out over the geyser field. "He is in a lot of pain. You can—*should*—help him. He is at a crossroads. If he chooses wrongly he will destroy not only his life, but his brothers' happiness as well."

"Help him how?"

Bertholde smiled and patted Lina's thigh. "Follow your instincts, Goddess."

Lina let Zack walk her back to the cabin after a stroll around the geyser basin. Jan and Rick soon joined her in their room.

"Sorry I acted rude to your uncle."

Jan sat next to her on the bed. "No, that's okay. You should have heard the ass-chewing Bertholde gave him for not keeping you better informed."

Rick nodded. "Classic!"

That evening, after more super-secret shifter shit meetings, Lina accompanied the four men to the lodge. Brodey, Cail and Micah were already there, saving them a table. She didn't miss the smile Brodey seemed to save for her, or the way his eyes lit up when he saw her. It didn't feel romantic either. She couldn't say what it felt like, but she liked it.

She sat between Zack and Brodey while they ate. After the staff cleaned up the buffet, Lina sat off to the side and watched from a

comfy seat near the huge stone fireplace as the poker game got underway. She brought a book, but she felt so tired she kept losing her place. Three more men joined the game. After a while she realized she'd dozed off in her seat when she looked up. A man had seated himself across from her.

He smiled. "Hello." The man she'd spotted earlier.

She'd swear she'd seen him before, but couldn't for the life of her place him. "Not in the game?"

He shrugged. "Didn't want to intrude."

"Do you play?"

"Oh, sure—"

"Hey, Zack. Can you deal this guy in?"

From somewhere, Zack had come up with a cowboy hat, which sat rakishly on his head. He held the deck of cards in his hand. "Sure, sugar. Send him on over."

Something flashed across the guy's face. Annoyance, maybe? Then it disappeared. "Thanks, Lina." He headed to the table as Cail pulled another chair over and sandwiched the newcomer between himself and Kael.

Lina curled up to nap again when a stray thought flitted through her mind. *How the hell did he know my name?*

Chapter Four

Another day, another boring bunch of bullshit meetings. To Lina, it seemed most of her job entailed being introduced to people whose names she'd never remember, smiling a lot, and trying not to look bored. Sort of a Supernatural Miss America for the fat chick who could randomly blow things up.

At least she'd been able to spend a little more time with Brodey. He didn't seem as sad as when she first met him in the Denver airport.

Micah scheduled a second poker game for that evening following dinner. The strange man showed up again, and turned out his name was Lenny. She hadn't found out which shifter group he belonged to.

Lina tried to get into her book, but she felt nervous, antsy.

Caged.

She looked up after nearly an hour of play. Brodey and Rick laughed at something, but she felt a tense current in the air, she could almost taste it. Lenny wasn't smiling, although everyone else at the poker table was. She held the book up, as if reading, with her attention now fully focused on the game.

Lenny's gaze looked dark as he accepted the cards Micah dealt. His pile of chips had dwindled substantially from when he first sat at the table. After a few rounds of bidding and calling, Rick laughed.

"Ooh, dude. Sucks to be you." He reached out and scooped the mound of chips to him.

The banter continued, with Cail and Kael jumping in and deliberately adding to the craziness. Rick, Jan and the other shifters at the table played on the name confusion. After two more hands, Lenny threw in his cards. He stood and muttered something in a language

she didn't understand before he stormed out of the room.

Lina walked over to the table and stood behind Rick and Jan, resting a hand on each of their shoulders. Brodey sent her a smile from across the table. "What's wrong?" she asked.

Jan patted her hand. "Guy got steamed."

Rick snorted. "Brod, I'll play poker with you any time, dude."

Brodey grinned. "Hey, if you can't run with the wolves, stay on the porch." He had also amassed quite a large pile of chips.

"What does that mean, he got steamed?" Lina asked.

Zack stretched, reached over, and rubbed Kael's shoulder. "Your two boys and your new best friend were running a mind fuck on him."

"Guy's weird," one of the other men, Doug, a cougar shifter, chimed in. "Don't know who invited him to the Gathering, but I wish they'd uninvited him. Creepy."

"Yeah," agreed Oscar, a tiger shifter. "That boy's not right in the head."

Rick scooted away from the table and pulled Lina onto his lap. "Well, looks like the game's breaking up early. How about the three of us go get a little naughty?"

She threw her arms around his neck. One of the really nice things about the Gathering, she'd discovered, was the fact that multiple mates were not unusual. She didn't have to worry what other people thought about her loving up on both of her men. "Sure."

* * * *

After the game, Brodey sat on the lodge porch. He pushed his cowboy hat down on his head and leaned back in the rocker, propping his boots on the porch railing.

"Come with us, Brod," Micah said. "It's bison!"

"They're asleep. Unless you want to go bison tipping, I'll pass. Catch me in the morning. Hunting a bison at night is like shooting fish in a barrel, dude. Not very sporting. You want to hunt bear or run

with the wolves or something, I'm game."

Brodey watched his brother, cousin, and two of the feline shifters who'd been in the poker game walk down the gravel path toward the cabins. He appreciated their concern, but he felt better than he had in days. He still hurt, and he still felt guilty as hell about turning his back on Kimberlie. At least he'd quit thinking about killing himself.

He waited a while, then returned to the cabin. There he stripped, noticing his jacket where he'd left it hanging over the back of the chair. It still smelled like Lina.

Lucky bastards. Did Rick and Jan understand exactly how lucky they were to have found their One? Then again, that kind of wishful thinking got him in trouble in the first place.

He stepped outside and pulled the door shut, stashed the room key under the steps, then shifted and headed for the geyser basin.

* * * *

"Okay, when you said naughty, I thought you meant sex."

Lina stood on the boardwalk at West Thumb Geyser Basin and watched Rick and Jan strip. Nearly midnight, the area was closed but they'd parked outside the gate and ducked through.

Jan pulled her to him. It was far too cold for her to get undressed. Her breath frosted in the air as they stood on the boardwalk by Yellowstone Lake. "Oh, sweetie, we will do that later for sure." He deeply kissed her, then took a running start and did a flying cannonball into the icy cold lake.

He popped to the surface laughing. "Come on in, Sparky!"

"Fuck you, Frosty." Rick wrapped his arms around Lina and kissed her, stirring more than a few fires in her body. "I've got other plans." He released her, then ran down the boardwalk toward Abyss Pool and leapt in.

Lina squeaked in terror, knowing that spring was one of the hottest in the park. Hot enough to kill the average human. But as his

brother had, Rick popped to the surface, laughing.

“Don’t even think about stepping off the boardwalk, babe,” he called out to her. “It’s not safe.” He proceeded to do a backstroke from one end of the hot spring to the other.

She walked over to railing, almost afraid to look. “How can you be swimming in there?” As a dual Elemental dragon shifter, Rick’s forté was fire and air. Except for taking showers and the occasional dip in the pool with Lina, he preferred to stay dry.

He grinned. “It’s like bathing in the bowels of Hell,” he said before he dipped his head under the water again. “Hot springs are different. The minerals and stuff in the water, the heat, it helps recharge me.”

“Oh.” She looked over at Jan, who swam back and forth near shore. The water in the lake couldn’t be warmer than forty degrees. Since he controlled ice—meaning water—and earth, he lived for the cold and wet conditions.

While the men swam, Lina circled the boardwalk and read the tourist signs in the light of the nearly full moon. Rick and Jan called taunts to each other as they enjoyed splashing around. Lina yawned. Had she known this was what they had in mind she would have stayed at the cabin and slept.

Or gone for a moonlit walk with Brodey.

She blushed, grateful for the darkness to hide her red face. She didn’t feel romantically attracted to Brodey, and instinctively sensed he didn’t lust after her either. She still didn’t want her men to get the wrong impression. She felt drawn to Brodey and remembered what Bertholde said.

She shivered, her breath steaming in the air. “Guys, I’m cold. I’m going to sit in the car.” Both men protested, wanting her to stay, but she held her ground. “Seriously, stay in, splash around. Take your time. It’s okay, honest. I’ll curl up on the back seat and take a nap.” She found the keys in Rick’s jeans and started up the boardwalk toward the parking lot.

As she neared the bookstore, she heard soft rustling in the woods nearby. Feeling watched and more than a little creeped out, she stopped. She paused, waiting, then heard the soft snort of a bison.

Shit.

Signs everywhere in the park warned about bison and other wild animals. Then again, she could terrify two dragons. A shaggy, overgrown cow shouldn't be too hard, right?

She turned around and screamed as a hand clamped over her mouth.

* * * *

Brodey lapped the geyser basin, sticking to the boardwalk and paths, going for speed and not tracking. He wanted to wear himself out, collapse in bed, and hopefully not dream. He ran until after midnight, until his tongue lolled from his mouth. Cail and Micah weren't back yet when he returned.

Instead of making him feel better, he felt worse, antsy, edgy. Not being able to figure out why only exacerbated the feeling. He took a hot shower and lay in bed. Sleep wasn't forthcoming. No good distractions like TV, either, because the room didn't have one.

He rolled over and buried his head under the pillow and tried to ignore Lina's scent on the jacket hanging feet from his bed. She wasn't in her room with her men, because he didn't feel the sweet calm that lulled even him to sleep when she was around.

* * * *

A cloud drifted over the moon, dimming the light. Something hard and round jabbed her in the ribs.

"If you don't cooperate, I'll kill your men," the coarse male voice whispered.

She nodded, terrified.

The man pushed her in front of him down the boardwalk, heading back toward the lake as darkness cloaked their progress. She heard Jan and Rick still splashing and having fun as they grew closer. By the time they reached where the men's clothes lay in a pile on the boardwalk, the moon reemerged.

The leather-gloved hand didn't leave her mouth.

Fuck, now I really wish I knew how to blow things up! She felt too scared to try.

The voice called out, "All right, boys. Everybody out of the pool."

"What the fuck?" Rick yelled.

Jan was closer. She saw the murderous look on his face as he climbed out of the lake and made his way to the boardwalk. "Son of a bitch! Lina, you okay?"

She tried to nod, but the arm attached to the hand over her mouth clamped down, preventing movement. "She's fine," the man said. "Fight me, and she won't be."

* * * *

Rick climbed out of Abyss Pool and raced to Jan's side. Despite his hot body, his heart nearly froze when he spotted the gun pressed to Lina's side.

He held up his hands. "Dude, whoa. Calm down. If this is about the poker game—"

"No, it's not about the poker game, asshole. Shut the hell up. If you two try anything, I'll kill her."

"*Dude, can't you do anything?*" Rick silently, desperately asked Jan.

"No, we're too close to the hot springs. The steam's fucking with me. I can't get closer to the lake without him hurting her. Can't you do something?"

"There's too much water in the air. I need to dry off before I can make fire."

Lenny removed his hand from Lina's mouth and fished around in his pocket for something, then handed it to her. "Very slowly, walk forward. I want them cuffed together, around one of the hand rail posts." He called out to the men. "You try something, anything, I guarantee you I can put a bullet in her back before you get me. Ask yourself if it's worth it."

Jan and Rick slowly stepped forward. Lina's eyes looked wide and terrified.

"It's okay, baby," Jan whispered. "Stay calm."

She nodded.

"I want you two assholes to sit, stick your arms through the railing, and let her cuff you around the post."

Jan glared at the guy, but both he and Rick did as ordered. With trembling hands, Lina hooked one side of the cuffs to Rick's wrist, the other to Jan's.

"You realize we will rip your fucking head off if you hurt her, right asshole?" Jan asked.

Lenny grinned. "You can try. I'm not as stupid or cocky as my brother."

Lina turned, stunned. "That's who you are! You're Edgar's brother!" Now she remembered. She'd never met him, but she saw a picture of him once, years ago. He supposedly lived overseas and was older than Edgar.

She had an idea what his plan might be. He must be a cockatrice, like his brother.

"Close those cuffs tight, Lina. You leave them loose so they can get out, I'll shoot you."

She clicked the cuffs firmly around her men's wrists. They didn't look like normal handcuffs. They appeared slightly tarnished, like silver instead of stainless steel, and bore intricate engravings all around them.

"Good. Now back up and come here. Slowly," Lenny warned.

She stared at Rick and Jan. Would she ever see them again?

Jan's eyes bored into her. "We *will* get you back safe, sweetheart. I promise," he whispered. "I love you."

"I love you, too," Rick echoed.

Shivering in the cold, she nodded and jammed her hands into her pockets. That's when she realized she still had the car keys. She quickly dropped them onto the pile of clothes and hoped Lenny didn't see her do it.

He didn't.

He grabbed her again, the gun firmly pressed into her side. "Good luck getting out of those cuffs, assholes. Had them specially made."

Rick and Jan pulled on the cuffs. "Fuck!" Jan swore.

Lenny laughed. "Yeah, charmed silver. You can't shift while it's on. Just one of the tricks up my sleeve. I did some homework, found out a few things my brother didn't." His fingers bit into Lina's upper arm as he pulled her with him. "Now if you'll excuse me, I've got me a goddess to bang."

Leaving Rick and Jan screaming, Lenny forced Lina up the boardwalk, across the empty parking area, and to his truck parked in front of their SUV. He'd already flattened two of their tires.

He put a pair of similar cuffs on Lina and shoved her into the front passenger seat. "I will shoot you if you run. Then I will go back and shoot them. You play nice, all three of you will live."

"You're not going to let me live. Why lie about it?"

He grinned. "Honey, if this works and I end up with your powers *and* theirs? It's the ultimate fuck you to let you three live." He grabbed her chin and kissed her as she thrashed and pulled away from him. "Then I can show up anytime out of the clear blue sky, take you and screw your brains out whenever I want, and those two assholes can't do a thing about it." He slammed the truck door shut and walked around to get behind the wheel.

* * * *

The men struggled against the cuffs for almost an hour. They tried to shift and couldn't. They tried to pull them apart, to at least break the chain, and nearly broke each other's wrists in the process.

"Fuck!" Jan screamed, kicking at the post.

Rick went still and quiet. "Hold up." He looked at the hand rail. "I think we can slip through." He tried to press his way between the slats in the railing, finally made it through to the other side where he stood on the ground. "Okay, you do it."

Jan forced his body through, struggling, finally making it as Rick grabbed him under the armpits and hauled him through. They climbed the railing and grabbed their clothes, pulling on their pants and then running for the SUV, where they saw the flat tires.

"Son of a bitch motherfucker!" Jan screamed as he kicked the side of the SUV, leaving a huge dent behind.

* * * *

Zack rolled over, eyes open, sleep draining from his system. Kael snuggled firmly against him, softly snoring.

He listened, then carefully untangled himself from Kael, stood, and walked to the window. Nearly two in the morning, Jan, Rick, and Lina weren't back yet.

He felt nervous, edgy.

Pulling on jeans, he walked outside and around the corner to Lina's room and knocked to make sure they weren't there, despite the SUV being gone.

No answer.

Toe-tapping jitters set in. *What the fuck?*

He returned to his room, woke Kael, and pulled on the rest of his clothes. Then he walked around the other side of the cabin to Brodey's door and knocked.

After a moment, Brodey opened his door. "What?"

"I'm sorry. I know it's late, but can I borrow your truck?"

Brodey looked instantly awake. “What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know. Lina and the guys aren’t back yet. Something’s not right.”

“You sure they’re not just getting their freak on, or out hot potting?”

“Please?”

Brodey sighed. “Hold on.” He reappeared a moment later and handed Zack the keys. “Hope she’s okay.”

“Thanks.”

Zack and Kael piled into the truck. “Where are we going?” Kael asked.

“I don’t know.”

Zack stopped at the intersection to the main road. He closed his eyes and tried to feel, to sense, to hear.

Nothing.

“Did they say anything?” Zack asked Kael.

“Jan mentioned something about Rick and him wanting to go swimming.”

Zack turned east and floored it. Jan wouldn’t go hot potting, by the very definition of the term. Rick would.

Jan would, however, enjoy a cold swim. To the best of Zack’s knowledge, only one place close by offered easy access to both pleasures, where the men could safely have Lina with them without worry for her safety.

* * * *

Lenny headed north on the main road. He seemed perfectly comfortable driving like an insane person at a high rate of speed in the dark on the narrow park roads.

“Took me weeks to get everything ready,” he crowed. “Just had to wait for you to show up.” He slowed and took a turn onto a dirt park fire road that quickly climbed and wound through the woods. She

braced herself against the dash to keep from being bounced around.

After what felt like hours of cross-country driving, Lenny finally stopped the truck and walked around the back. He shouldered a large backpack, then yanked Lina from the cab. "Come on, Goddess. We've got a hike."

He shoved her in front of him, up a rough trail.

"Where are we going?"

"Walk, don't talk." He shoved her again.

She tried to summon anger, but fear controlled her. *Fuck! Right about now would be a good time for Baba Yaga to appear with some helpful advice.*

Nothing.

She lost track of time but knew they hiked for a couple of hours just from the position of the moon. In the cold and high altitude, she felt winded, exhausted. She stumbled at one point and was slow to stand.

"Walk, or I'll fucking drag you."

Slowly climbing to her feet, she glared at him. "I'll enjoy watching them kill you."

"You can shut your mouth, or I can shove my cock in it to shut you up."

"I'll bite it off."

The gun reappeared. "Oh, really?"

Her face reddened. She turned back to the trail. With the cuffs on her wrists, she couldn't shove her hands in her pockets to warm them. Maybe whatever the cuffs were made of stopped her from using her powers, too.

Then again, maybe having no fucking clue how to use her powers stopped her from using them.

At one point he pulled her off the path and took the lead. As dawn broke, they entered a tiny clearing where a tent had been set up in the lee of a rocky outcropping near a drop off.

"Inside."

She crawled through the flap. He had a small altar set up. Statues and unlit candles, bundles of herbs, and a small syringe of clear fluid.

She curled up in the far corner. He might rape her, but she'd fight him tooth and nail. "What's that for?"

He smiled and grabbed the syringe. "To keep you quiet until tonight, Goddess. I need the full moon." He plunged the needle into the side of her neck.

Lina's world dissolved into darkness.

Chapter Five

Even cuffed together, Rick and Jan managed to change the flat front tire, although it took them half an hour to do it. They'd drive on the rear rim to return to the cabin for help. Their cell phones were useless.

When they spotted headlights, they charged into the middle of the road to flag the vehicle down. It pulled in behind them. Zack and Kael jumped out.

"What the fuck?" Zack screamed. "Where's Lina?"

The brothers talked over each other. "Stop! Jan, what the hell happened?"

He quickly told the short version. Zack's terror grew. "Fuck! We've got to find her!"

"Don't you think we know that?" Rick screamed back.

"Can't you tell where she is? Can't you track her? She's your mate for chrissake!"

Kael grabbed the tire iron from Brodey's truck. With Zack using the tire iron from the SUV, the men managed to break the chain between the cuffs, separating the brothers.

"You're her Watcher!" Jan yelled. "Can't *you* track her? What do we look like? We're dragons, not fucking bloodhounds!"

The four men froze and looked at each other. As one, they all yelled, "Brodey!"

* * * *

Both Ford vehicles used the same tires, one thing in their favor.

They threw the spare from Brodey's truck on the SUV and raced back to the cabins. As early dawn caressed the sky, the men tumbled from the vehicles. They charged up the steps to Brodey's door, pounding on it and calling for him.

"What the hell!" Brodey threw the door open and looked at the men standing there. They looked terrified. They looked...

He didn't feel at all calm. "Where's Lina?"

As one, the men tried to tell the tale. He spotted the broken cuffs on the brothers' wrists and held up his hands. "All right, guys, stop. Zack, what happened?"

Zack quickly spilled the tale. By this time, Cail and Micah had appeared. Brodey pointed at them. "We need horses or ATVs or something. And two-way radios. Cell phones are iffy at best around here. Go get Doug and Oscar. Don't tell anyone else, because we don't know if Lenny had help. I know we can trust those two." Cail and Micah nodded and set off at a run.

He looked at the brothers. "You need to get those damn cuffs off."

"We tried." Rick held up his arm. "This was the best we could do."

Brodey pushed past them and got the tire iron from the truck, then walked back to the concrete steps. "Give me your arm. Don't move." He positioned Rick's arm so the cuff lock lay flat on the step. With one swift, sure strike, Brodey drove the pointed end of the tire iron into the cuff lock, breaking the mechanism. He pried it open and Rick pulled his hand out.

Rick rubbed his wrist. "Thanks, man."

Brodey repeated it with Jan. With the brothers free and Cail on his way to wrangle off-road transportation, Brodey pointed at Kael. "Wait here for my brother. All of you meet up with us at West Thumb when they get back."

"Do you think you can track her?" Zack asked.

Brodey glared at him. "I'm a fucking wolf. If he didn't fly somewhere with her, believe me, I'll track her."

“Do you like, need a piece of her clothing or something?”

“No. Start the car. I’ll be right there.” He stepped inside his room and grabbed his jacket. Closing his eyes and fighting his anger, he deeply inhaled. Lina’s face immediately appeared in his mind, her red hair, her beautiful green eyes.

Hang on, sweetie, he thought as he locked the room door behind him. I’m coming.

* * * *

Lenny watched the unconscious goddess. It was tempting to do something to her sooner than tonight, but he’d been warned that for the ritual to work he had to wait for moonrise.

Meanwhile, he needed to move the truck. By the time the dragon boys managed to get free—and he had no doubts they would, the cuffs would only slow them down for a few hours at most—it would be too late for them.

He wrapped duct tape around her ankles and slapped another piece over her mouth.

That’ll hold her.

He walked over to the steep drop off, his shortcut back to the truck. Closing his eyes, he jumped, partially shifting before he landed, taking the brunt of the impact in his legs. Returning to human form, he stood and walked the short distance to where he’d parked.

* * * *

At West Thumb, Brodey instructed them to park exactly where they had been. Then he made them walk him down the boardwalk to where Lenny stood with Lina.

He closed his eyes and inhaled. There was Lina’s scent, sweet and clear. The overlying scent of Lenny’s funk strengthened once he pinged on it. He slowly followed their trail through the parking lot to

the gate.

Brodey unbuttoned his shirt. Now he knew where Lina's scent disappeared, the scent of Lenny's truck. He closed his eyes and tried to sense Cail. He wasn't close, but Brodey didn't dare wait on him to return. Lina's life depended on it.

Brodey tossed his shirt into the back of the SUV. "They headed north. You guys wait here for Cail, then follow me." He kicked off his boots and tossed them in, followed by his jeans. He stretched, preparing to run. Zack, Jan, and Rick looked desperate.

"How will we know where you are?" Zack asked. "Shouldn't we go with you?"

"You'll slow me down. Tell my brother and Micah I'll scent mark when he changes direction. They'll find it. Micah can track me. Cail shouldn't shift, because once he's close enough to me to sense my thoughts, he can relay directions to you guys. Stay with them, they'll get you to me."

He closed his eyes, then thought of one more thing. "Be careful how close you get. We don't want the asshole spooking and killing her if he hears you all. Might have to go in on foot. Can you guys fly or something?"

The brothers nodded.

"Stay with my brother. He'll tell you what's going on. It'll only waste time and resources if you guys get separated. I promise, I *will* find her." He shifted and took off down the road at a full run and prayed it was a promise he could keep.

* * * *

Brodey kept his nose low to the asphalt and ran fast. As the sun climbed, he ignored his hunger and the lure of stray scents to keep following the truck's scent.

Lina.

He cast his mind out, trying to listen for his brother, trying to

sense Lina. He knew he couldn't hear her thoughts the way he could Cail's, but the calm feeling he had around her gave him hope he'd sense her.

When he suddenly lost the truck's scent, he stopped and turned around. A rough fire road curved up into the woods. He lifted his leg. After peeing on the trees on both sides of the fire road, he ran up it.

Here he had the advantage of sight as well as smell. In the dirt, he picked out the newest tire tracks belonging to the truck. Being lesser-used than the main road, the scent was far stronger and not overlapped or diluted. Every time he made a turn or passed a branch road, he marked the trail. At one point he was forced to stop and detour, get a drink from a small, cold spring bubbling out of a rock outcropping, or risk dehydration. Wolf or not, his body wasn't used to this altitude.

By his best guess it neared ten in the morning. Clouds had rolled in from the east, threatening a storm. He only prayed it held off long enough he could find Lina before her scent washed away.

He charged up the road, now little more than a rough track, when he heard the sound of an approaching vehicle. He jumped off the trail in time to avoid being run over by a pick-up truck.

The driver never saw him.

Brodey's heart pounded. It was Lenny's truck.

He turned and started after it when Brodey realized he couldn't sense Lina in the truck. Reversing course, Brodey scampered up the road in the other direction.

* * * *

Cail and the others screeched to a halt behind the SUV. "Where's Brodey?" Cail asked as Micah, Doug, Oscar and Kael tumbled out of the truck's cab. In the truck's bed sat a green Park Service quad ATV.

Zack filled them in. Cail handed the truck keys to Kael. "You drive. Micah, in back with me." The wolves climbed into the bed and the two vehicles pulled out, racing north, Kael driving in the lead

while Cail and Micah hung over the edge of the truck bed, their noses upturned, faces in the wind.

They were still south of Fishing Bridge when Cail and Micah suddenly lost Brodey's scent. Both men pounded on the cab roof and they pulled over. Cail and Micah jumped out and ran to the fire road.

"Okay, here we are," Cail said.

"You sure?" Zack asked.

"Yeah." They unloaded the quad while Micah stripped and prepared to shift. "I'll run the quad," Cail said. "Micah will make sure we don't lose him. You all follow us."

"Can you hear him yet?" Jan asked.

Cail closed his eyes and sent his mind out.

Nothing.

"Not yet, sorry. We're too far away."

Thunder boomed in the east. All the men turned. Dark clouds rolled across the sky, threatening rain.

"Fuck!" Zack said. "We've got to hurry!"

* * * *

Lenny turned off the fire road and drove to a primitive trail head. Probably safe enough to hide the truck for now. Easy to get to later. Looking around, he found himself alone. He locked the truck and stripped, jamming his clothes and the truck keys into a knapsack he hung around his neck. Then he shifted and took off for his hide out. A storm was coming, and he wanted to get back before the rain started.

* * * *

Brodey's heart sank when he felt the first icy drops of rain hit his back. When the bottom dropped out and rivulets turned the primitive truck track into a small river, he found it harder to follow the scent. As the rain poured, soaking him almost through to his dense

undercoat, he realized tracking would be nearly impossible.

Thunder cracked directly overhead, startling him. *Fuck*. He investigated several side paths and found no evidence of a vehicle. Slogging through the muck, the trail finally opened into a clearing wide enough a truck could have parked. Taking a chance, Brodey sniffed around in the mud.

The slightest whiff of a sweet scent came to him. His head popped up.

Lina.

He circled the clearing three times as the storm's fury increased around him. Finally, he thought he caught a hint of her scent on a bush near a faint path. With no other lead, he followed it.

* * * *

The four-wheel drive truck bogged down in the deep mud. They'd given up on the SUV ten minutes earlier, abandoning it on the trail behind them. Zack sat behind the wheel, trying to coax the truck up the steep, slippery slope.

"Fucking rain!" Jan swore as he and Rick struggled with Kael, Oscar, and Doug to push it free. Between the steep incline and the storm, it was obvious the vehicle wouldn't make it.

Micah shifted back, shaking his head. "I can't smell him anymore. We can keep following the road, but I can't guarantee I'll find him if he leaves the path, even with scent marking."

Cail shut off the ATV and closed his eyes. Still no hint of Brodey's whereabouts. He didn't know what to do. "How are you guys at tracking?" he asked Doug and Oscar.

Oscar shook his head. "Hearing and eyesight. Smell, not so much. Better than the average human, sure, but if you guys can't track him, I damn sure can't."

Doug shrugged. "Ditto."

Jan kicked the truck. "Fuck this shit! We can't stand here with our

thumbs up our asses! Lina's out there somewhere with that psycho!"

Cail turned to him. "Then what do you suggest we do? My brother's out there too! He's the best tracker there is. If anyone can find her, he can. I guarandamntee you if Brodey finds that fucker, he'll kill him. He's her best goddamned chance right now."

* * * *

Lina struggled against the drug's grip. She sensed Lenny moving around in the tent, but it was like her eyes and muscles didn't want to cooperate. As upset as she felt, she was unable to summon the energy to get enraged enough to hopefully set fire to something.

Preferably Lenny's testicles.

At one point she was aware of Lenny peeling back one of her eyelids and speaking to her.

"Still alive there, Goddess? Don't worry, you don't have to be awake for this, just breathing. You might enjoy it more if you sleep through it anyway."

She thought about Zack, about Jan and Rick. Even about Brodey. They had to be coming for her, but the drugs negated all hope of her fighting or escaping. Lina took a deep breath and tried to focus, tried to recreate the out of body journey she had a few nights earlier.

Concentration proved difficult. After another few breaths, she took the risk of letting herself sink back under the drug's grip and sent her mind out again. The storm raging outside shook the tent, but Lenny took precautions and no water seeped inside.

When Lina opened her mental eyes, she realized she stood outside the tent, in the frigid rain but not feeling any of it.

Fuck, yes! That's more like it. She retraced her steps, happily realizing she could sail down the path without worries of tripping.

In her disembodied state she quickly covered ground in minutes that took her hours on foot. When she ran across the huge, black, green-eyed wolf, she ignored it at first, then pulled up short when she

realized who and what it was.

“Brodey!” she screamed.

The wolf couldn’t hear her. His fur was matted to his body by the rain as he painstakingly followed the path, his nose to the ground, ears flattened as he swept his head from side to side.

Tracking her.

Her heart soared. She knelt next to him. “Brodey!” she screamed again.

He continued, unaware of her disembodied presence.

Fuck! Why could Zack sense her the other night and Brodey couldn’t? She walked around him, screaming at him, when a thought hit her. Maybe it would work.

She reached out and touched his head, wincing as she pushed her ghostly hand through his skull.

Brodey froze, as if listening.

A little sickened, she pulled her hand out. She squatted next to him, threw her arms around his neck, and pressed her lips to his right ear. “Brodey! Please, you’ve got to hear me!”

His body tensed as his head jerked around, looking through, not at her.

* * * *

Brodey stopped short. He swore he heard her. Then that feeling, like someone had slipped inside him, through him, her presence. The calm.

Okay, she’s a goddess. Maybe she’s figured out a new power.

He waited, listening.

“Brodey!”

Faint, but unmistakable.

He shifted back and crouched on the trail as the rain sluiced mud off his body. “Lina?” he softly called.

“Brodey! Can you hear me?”

“Where are you, honey?”

Her faint voice sounded like little more than a dream. He wasn’t even sure if he heard her in his ear or in his mind.

“I’m in a tent! I’m unconscious!”

The thought that this could be some sort of trap flitted through his mind. “How do I know it’s you?”

Lina struggled to think of something to prove it, the effort of staying in touch with him weakening her even further. *“Princess Prozac!”*

“Okay, babe. How do I find you?”

“I can’t do this much longer. We’re at least two miles up this trail, in a clearing.”

Lightning flashed, a loud, thunderous crack splitting through the wet air. Almost immediately, more thunder boomed nearby and he smelled ozone. That strike landed close.

Brodey shifted and ran.

* * * *

The men slogged up the trail on foot despite the storm. They all jumped at the nearby lightning strike. Ten minutes later, Micah shifted to human form. “We’ve got a serious problem.”

Rick, red in the face, screamed, “Why are you stopping?”

Cail held up a hand, his nose in the air. “He’s right. We need to turn back. Right now.”

Zack pushed through them. “Fuck that shit! We need to find Lina!”

Oscar shook his head. “You can’t hear and smell that?”

“Smell what?” the dragon men and Zack screamed.

Micah headed down the trail. “Fire. We need to get the hell out of here. Now. It’s coming this way, and fast.”

Chapter Six

Brodey smelled the smoke. The rain let up even though thunder still rumbled nearby. He charged up the trail, caked in mud and feeling the effects of altitude. He didn't know how long he ran, but when he started feeling calm again, he knew he was close.

It took him another fifteen minutes to locate the clearing. He crawled on his belly, staying on the outskirts, watching and listening. He heard Lenny moving around inside the tent, felt Lina's presence.

He closed his eyes and tried to find Cail. No luck. Then he tried to recreate the brief connection he'd had with Lina.

Inside the tent, Lina sensed Brodey close by and reaching out to her. She tried to respond, but however she'd managed to connect with him before she couldn't recreate it. As the drug wore off a little she could wiggle her toes and fingers. Not wanting Lenny to see that, she listened for him and heard him at the far end of the tent.

She risked barely opening one eyelid. He had his back turned to her as he thumbed through an ancient book. She closed her eyes again and forced her breathing to remain deep and steady despite how cold she felt.

Outside the tent the storm lessened, but Lina had a feeling there was something on the way even worse than the ass kicking Brodey would give Lenny. The jerk had left the gun on top of his duffel bag not too far from her.

Her heart raced when Lenny stood and turned, studying her. Apparently satisfied she still slept, he unzipped the tent flap and walked outside.

Lina forced herself to move. Her arms and legs didn't want to

obey immediately, but she managed to slowly roll over and reach the gun.

* * * *

Holy crap! Is he that much of a fucktard? Brodey watched Lenny step out of the tent and look around before walking to the edge of the clearing, near the drop off. There, he unzipped to take a piss.

Brodey didn't know or care if Lenny was armed. He silently charged across the clearing and hit the dude square in the back. Lenny let out a shocked roar as he went sailing off the ledge.

Shifting in mid-stride, Brodey turned and raced to the tent. "Lina?"

He ducked in and found himself staring into the barrel of the gun. She burst into tears.

"It's okay, babe. I've got you." He took the gun from her and gently peeled the tape from her mouth.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"I don't think he's dead. We need to hurry." Brodey heard a roar from outside. "Oh, fuck."

A dark shadow rose over the tent. "Can you get the rest of the tape off?" he asked her.

She nodded.

"Good. Get free and run like hell. I'll catch up with you. We'll worry about those cuffs later." He winked as he touched his finger to the end of her nose before ducking through the tent flap.

Outside, Brodey came face to face with a... Well, he honestly didn't know what the fuck it was. Fugly, nasty, and mean easily described it. Eight feet tall, two-legged, looking like a frog and a lizard gang-banged a chicken, which then proceeded to lay one ugly-assed egg.

He shot it, but that only seemed to piss it off. The thing took a swipe at him with its reptilian tail, knocking Brodey's legs out from

under him. He rolled onto his back and emptied the gun into it, then scrambled backward as it tried to nail him in the nuts with its tail.

“Lina,” Brodey screamed, “now would be a great time to randomly blow shit up, sweetie!”

Inside the tent, Lina finally freed her feet and stumbled over to the tent opening. Brodey grabbed the cockatrice’s tail and struggled not to let it hit him with one of its clawed, chicken-like feet. Lina felt dizzy, woozy, and more than a little nauseous. She had no idea how to blow shit up, randomly or otherwise. She only knew she feared for Brodey’s life.

As exhausted, sick and cold as she felt, she found it damned hard to summon anger. The cockatrice slung Brodey through the air, slamming him into a lodgepole pine. She screamed and scrambled through the tent opening.

Brodey jumped to his feet, launched himself at the cockatrice, and started pounding on it to keep its attention off Lina. She sank to her knees in the mud, crying, trying to figure out what to do.

When the cockatrice grabbed Brodey by the neck, Lina’s heart nearly seized with panic. With a loud sob she envisioned throwing a fireball at the beast, but only a puff of steam drifted from her cuffed hands.

She gasped. It was a start.

Brodey’s voice gurgled as he desperately struggled to peel Lenny’s fingers from his neck. Lina focused, remembering how pissed she was at her men, how enraged she felt when Edgar shot Zack—and got really mad that Brodey’s life was in danger. Despite the drug’s hold on her system, she even tapped into how unfair it was she had PMS on her vacation. She managed to pitch a ball of energy at the beast.

It squawked and dropped Brodey, swatting at the fire that erupted on its feathered flank. Brodey fell to the ground where he coughed and gasped for air.

Encouraged by her success, Lina felt stronger. She unsteadily rose

to her feet and struggled to focus. “Hey, Brod,” she said.

“Yeah, hon?”

“Original recipe, or crispy?”

The cockatrice looked at her.

“Definitely crispy,” Brodey gasped.

She let loose another blast of energy. That one hit Lenny square in the face. He screamed in pain and fell to the ground, trying to put the fire out. Brodey found a large rock, picked it up and bashed Lenny’s head in.

When the cockatrice lay still and unquestionably dead, Brodey dropped the rock and raced to Lina’s side in time to catch her as she collapsed. He scooped her into his arms and carried her back into the tent. They were both covered in mud, and her clothes felt damp.

“Hey, babe, don’t give up on me.” He rubbed her hands, trying to rouse her.

Exhaustion claimed Lina. “I want to go to sleep.” She shivered.

“I know, sweetie, I know. Let’s get these cuffs off you.” He spotted a key ring on the makeshift altar. Sure enough, a standard handcuff key opened the cuffs. He freed her and scrounged through the stuff in the tent until he found a heavy blanket. She shivered as he wrapped it around her and held her close.

“I’m so cold,” she whispered, her teeth chattering. She huddled closer to Brodey for warmth. “Where’s everyone?”

Brodey now had time to think of that himself without the funky chicken trying to kill him. “I don’t know babe.” A faint scent came to him as the cold breeze pushed through the tent opening.

Oh, fuck.

“Babe, we’ve got to move. Now.”

She closed her eyes and shook her head. “I can’t.”

“Yes, you have to, or we’re going to look like Clucky out there. Wildfire. We need to go. Please, sweetie, you promised me no roasted wolf.”

She opened her eyes and smiled. Then she reached up and touched

his cheek. "You came for me."

"Yeah. Your guys were scared shitless. Lucky for you, I'm a damn good wolf."

"Are they okay?"

"They were when I left them at West Thumb." He pulled her into a sitting position and opened a bottle of water. After a quick sniff to make sure it wasn't drugged, he made her take a drink, then took a drink himself.

"Lenny was smaller than me, I can't wear his pants." He looked around, spotted a knife on the altar, and sliced a section from the tent. He wrapped it around his midsection and tied it in place with a piece of cord. "Hey, haven't worn a kilt in a few years."

"You Scottish?"

"Aye, lassie," he said with a brogue. "Born and raised."

"Frrrrreeedom!"

He burst out laughing. "Yeah, baby. I'm free in this thing all right. At least I'm not flashing you anymore."

"You can flash me anytime." She smiled, but it looked lopsided, drunken.

"Oh, honey, you're cute, but you are sooo under the influence right now." He grabbed a few other items they might need, including slicing more tent fabric, and shoved them into a knapsack. He spied an ancient-looking book. "What's that?"

"He was looking through it." It went into the pack, along with the ceremonial knife and a couple other items from the altar. Her men would need to identify this asshole. Maybe that stuff would help. He shouldered the pack, then pulled her to her feet. The scent of smoke in the air grew stronger to his sensitive nose. "Let's go."

"Where we going?"

He slipped an arm around her waist. "Anywhere but here." He didn't know exactly where they were in relation to Old Faithful, only that they were south and west of Fishing Bridge. He could survive on his own indefinitely in the park. Lina could not.

Brodey tested the wind and prayed they didn't get penned in by the fire. He started down the hill in the opposite direction.

"We didn't come in this way," Lina softly said. Her eyes were closed. If not for Brodey's arm around her, she'd be on the ground.

"I know, sweetie. The other way is the fire."

Wind kicked up, along with more rumbles of thunder. The temperature had dropped again. Brodey had no idea how to keep her warm and dry if another storm broke out.

Her head lolled on his shoulder as he tried to keep her moving, keep her upright. He realized he might have to carry her. "Stay with me, babe, please." He kept moving downhill, into the wind and away from the fire.

Clouds obscured the sun. He thought they were heading west, but with the rough terrain and obscured sun, he wasn't absolutely sure. After an hour she neared collapse and he had to let her rest. He found a deadfall to sit on and stay off the damp ground. She slumped against him, her head in his lap.

"I'm sorry, Brod," she whispered.

He rubbed her hands, her arms, her shoulders, trying to warm her. "It's okay, sweetie. You're doing great."

"Are we safe here?"

"For a few minutes." He felt the wind shift, caught a whiff of smoke. Not near, but too close for comfort. "You rest for a few minutes, then we'll move again."

"Okay..." She was already asleep.

Fuck. He stroked her hair. She was totally taken by two guys who'd die for her, and who were likely going batshit crazy worried about her. She loved them too, no doubt about it.

He sighed, trying not to think about Kimberlie and wishing Lina didn't make him feel so damn...

Calm.

* * * *

Back at the lodge, Jan, Rick, and Zack were going batshit crazy worried over Lina. Kael unsuccessfully tried to keep them calm while working with Cail, Micah, Oscar, and Doug to amass a search party of trusted shifters to go after Lina and Brodey.

The fire, sparked by several lightning strikes, had closed the eastern stretch of the main road from West Thumb to Fishing Bridge. They had no idea where or how Lina was, or if Brodey had found her.

Cail and Kael studied a park map. The fire road wasn't very long on paper, but that didn't mean the guy didn't drive further, or hike in on foot.

With the park staff focused on containing the fire, the shifters were on their own. Uncle Andel and his entourage entered the lodge common area. He immediately started barking orders. A moment later, Bertholde and her posse arrived. She shuffled up to Andel and poked him in the chest.

Startled, he looked at her. "Shut up," she said. She turned to Zack, Rick, and Jan. "She'll be fine."

"What?"

Bertholde nodded. "She'll be fine. She and the wolf need to do this. Together."

Jan and Rick exchanged a glance. "Do *what* together?" Rick asked, his face reddening.

"Hey, what are you implying?" Cail asked, pushing into his face. "My brother is a stand up guy! We don't fuck around with other guy's mates!"

Jan's eyes darkened. "No one said you do, but since you brought it up—"

"Enough!" the old woman yelled. Her voice bellowed throughout the large common area. Everyone fell silent and looked at her. She pointed at Jan and Rick. "You trust your Lina?"

They nodded.

She pointed at Cail. "You trust your brother?"

He nodded.

“Then trust each other. Work together. Your paths are now forever entwined. You have a common enemy and the same goals.” With that cryptic nugget, she turned on her heels and left.

Zack studied her departing form. “Well, isn’t she just a regular little fortune cookie.”

* * * *

Brodey prodded Lina to her feet. She took two steps before her knees folded. “I’m sorry, Brod,” she whispered. “I’m so tired.”

He scooped her into his arms. He didn’t want to alarm her, but the smoke smelled closer. “I know, babe. It’s okay. I’ll carry you.”

She threw her arms around his neck and snuggled her face against his throat. All he had to do to smell her hair was lower his face and...

He focused his gaze on the ground instead, not wanting to trip and drop her.

After a while, he knew the fire was rapidly gaining on them, the smoke now close enough Lina would smell it if she was awake. He continued downhill, hoping for a stream or pond, the small occasional rivulets of water from spring run-off not enough to save them if the fire overtook them.

She opened her eyes at one point, squinting as she looked up. “Why is the sky brown?”

Brodey glanced up. “Smoke. It’s getting closer.”

That woke her. “Put me down, let me try to walk.” He helped her, and they did make better time. Within another hour he heard the fire crackling, trees falling, and even the occasional fire chopper. Unfortunately, those didn’t fly near enough to see them, much less to signal them.

Her eyes widened when they turned and saw smoke drifting over a ridge behind them. “How long, Brod?”

“Not long at this rate. Wind’s up. It’s pushing it to us, funneling it

down the valley.”

“What do we do?”

“We keep going.”

She grabbed his hand and stopped, forcing him to look at her. “You can outrun it. If you shift.”

“No, I can’t, because no way in hell I’m leaving you. Get that out of your head right now.”

She started crying. “I can’t let you die because I’m slowing you down!”

He brushed her tears away. “Hey, who said anything about dying? We’re not dying.” They both looked up at another loud crack. The fire crested the hill and raced toward them.

Lina cried out and grabbed Brodey’s hand. Just then, Baba Yaga and Bertholde’s advice came back to her. *Trust your instincts.*

She looked around. Twenty yards away, a small spring of water emerged from a rocky crag on the hillside. She thought back to the first day with her men eight months earlier, when Baba Yaga tested her before letting her go and handing her more prophecies. “Over there!”

She pulled Brodey toward the water.

“Babe, we can’t—”

“Trust me! Please!” He followed. She glanced over her shoulder. They only had minutes before the fire caught up with them.

She pushed him against the rocks, the water running over him, and wrapped her arms around him. “Hold on to me and don’t let go!”

“What?”

“Just do it!”

His voice sounded quiet, resigned. “Let me stand outside. Maybe I can shield you.”

“We’re not going to die! I can do more than blow shit up.”

“Well, why didn’t you say so?” He wrapped his arms tightly around her, pressing his body along the length of hers.

“Don’t let go of me.”

He snorted. "Yeah, like that's happening anytime soon."

As the fire advanced, Lina struggled to summon strength from within, a counterweight to the rage she felt to hurl the energy at Lenny. With the forest ablaze behind them, heat racing toward them, she settled her mind and focused.

Brodey. He'd come to save her. She had to save him.

With her arms around Brodey, she plunged her hands into the icy cold water and thought about drawing it to her, over her and Brodey, around them. At first she didn't think it was working, until she shivered and heard Brodey say, "Son of a bitch! You're doing it!"

Chilly ice replaced the feel of the fire behind them. As the flames caught up and overtook them, racing around them, she managed to solidify the icy wall, much as she had protected herself against Baba Yaga's fireball that afternoon.

Brodey held on even tighter. "You're doing great, sugar," he whispered. "Hang on, you're doing great."

Lina put everything she had into maintaining their icy cocoon. As fast as she drew water from the crevice, more evaporated from the fire.

As the firestorm raged around them, Brodey nuzzled her cheek. "A few more minutes," he whispered. "Just a few more minutes."

She pictured Jan and Rick and Zack, thought about getting safely back to them, into their arms. About loving them. About Brodey and his brother and cousin, and the brother she hadn't met yet, making sure they were safely reunited.

A mental picture flashed in her mind. She knew it came from Brodey. A woman crying.

Kimberlie.

He couldn't have her, hence the source of his grief.

He should have happiness. Lina withdrew deeper into her mind, tried to see more, to not think about her exhaustion. Then she felt like she stepped through a doorway into a bright, very hot, sunny afternoon.

She was back in Florida, she instinctively sensed. A fairground.

Turning around, she spotted a sign. *First Annual Arcadia Highland Games.*

Brodey and Cail in kilts, standing, talking.

Walking...

Cail catching a scent that Brodey also recognized. Brodey taking off in pursuit.

"Her," Lina whispered, feeling her hold on consciousness fraying.

"What?" Brodey asked.

"You're going to find Her..."

Darkness fell.

* * * *

Near dark, the shifters were no closer to finding Lina or Brodey. They took turns going into the woods. Once night fell, the dragon men shifted to their largest forms and took wing.

Needle in a haystack didn't come close to describing it.

By nine o'clock, the men realized they weren't getting anywhere. Cail made calls to his contacts to get a search plane for the next morning, but that would be iffy if predicted storms churned up. Unable to do anything else that night, the men returned to their cabins and tried to sleep.

Chapter Seven

Lina awoke to Brodey gently slapping her cheeks. “Come on, babe. Wake up, don’t scare me.”

She looked around. Perhaps sensing her unspoken question, Brodey grinned. “You did it! You held on. I don’t know how the hell you did that ice trick, but dammit, you saved us.”

He helped her sit up. Around them, the fire had blasted through and mostly burned out, enough to safely make their way out of the area. Black soot covered Brodey from head to toe. She knew she didn’t look much better.

A rumble of thunder sounded above them, then rain fell. She looked up and laughed. “Gee, thanks! A little late though!”

Brodey laughed with her.

The rain fell, cold, hard and heavy, helping contain the fire as night descended. Once the clouds cleared and the full moon rose, Brodey regained his sense of direction and pointed them southwest, toward Old Faithful. He fed her crackers and water he snagged from Lenny’s tent. He could drink from the streams if he needed without worrying about getting sick. Ditto hunting. He wouldn’t risk her health that way.

They had to sit and rest for Lina’s sake. “How high is this place?” she asked.

“We’re around eight thousand feet. It’s the Central Plateau part of the park.”

“Geez.” She leaned against him and closed her eyes. “I’m so exhausted. I’m sorry I’m whining.”

“You’re not whining, sweetie. You’ve been through a lot. It’s

okay.”

“Tell me about her.”

“Hmm?”

“Kimberlie. I saw her in your mind earlier.”

Brodey hesitated. She wasn't sure he'd answer at first, but then he quietly told her about falling in love with Kimberlie and having to let her go.

“It's my own fault,” he softly admitted. “I knew better. I never should have slept with her when I knew I loved her.”

“Why?”

“I didn't introduce her to Ain and Cail first. I mean, we can fool around as much as we want until we meet our One. Usually I only fool around with girls I don't have any feelings for like that. Then I can't get hurt or hurt them. Any time any of us feels strongly about a woman, we bring her home to meet the others first. If they were to like her, then we know she's our One.” He sighed. “I was sick of being alone. I thought I could make them like her.”

He looked so sad it nearly broke her heart. “You can't kill yourself.”

He blushed, even though it was hard to tell with the soot smeared on his face. “You saw that, huh?”

“I saw you thinking about it.”

“Two's easier to mate than three.”

“It'd break their hearts to lose you.”

“I'm just the bonehead. Everyone says so and I know it. Ain's Prime Alpha. I'm Beta Alpha. Cail's the smart one, he's the Gamma. He'd become Beta and the two of them would find someone.”

“Stop it. You're not a bonehead. If you were a bonehead, you wouldn't have found me. They need you.” She laced her fingers through his. “Besides, you are going to find Her. Soon.”

He looked at her, one eyebrow arched. “What?”

“In the next couple of years. I know it.”

He studied her. “No shit?”

“No shit. Some sort of highland games festival.”

His eyes searched hers. “Will we all love her?”

“I only saw you and Cail looking for her, but I think so. They won’t find her if you aren’t there. You’re the one who tracks her.” She smiled. “Just like you tracked me. And you’ll find her just like you found me.”

He stroked her chin. “Do me a favor? Don’t tell Cail, please.”

“Why? This is great news!”

“Because I won’t make the same mistake I made with Kimberlie. It hurts too damn bad. I don’t want to get his hopes up, or Ain’s.”

“Only if you promise me something.”

His lopsided smile warmed her heart. “What’s that?”

“You will not kill yourself, and that you’ll invite me to your wedding.”

He smiled. “Done.”

They walked for another hour, then Lina had to stop again, finished. “I’m sorry. I can’t go any further.”

“I know. Me either.”

Her clothes were still damp. He worried about her getting hypothermic. They traversed into an unburned section of woods where he found a deadfall far enough off the ground they could both snuggle under it, out of the elements, and he piled pine needles around them. She shivered.

“I need to shift to keep you warm. You snuggle around me, okay?”

“Okay.”

He shifted and she wrapped her arms around him, his furry back pressed against her chest. She dug her cold hands deep into his coat. “This feels good. I might regain feeling in my fingers.”

He chuffed in agreement.

She thought about Rick and Jan and fought the urge to cry. “I’ve never spent a night away from them since we met.” Brodey softly whined in sympathy.

Lina actually drifted to sleep, exhaustion fully taking her. She was hungry, filthy, cold, exhausted, and worried about her men. Not their safety as much as their mental state. They had to be going crazy with worry.

At some point, a loud sound startled them awake. She felt tension in Brodey's body. Then a large shape emerged from the darkness, snuffling and shuffling closer, homing in on them.

Grizzly.

Oh, fuck me! I survived all this shit to get eaten by Smokey the Bear?

Brodey sat up, a low, deep, threatening growl sounding in his throat. Lina tried to squeeze herself further under the deadfall and wrapped her arms tightly around Brodey in fear.

The bear responded with a growl of his own and rose onto its rear haunches. Lina cried out in horror as Brodey broke free and raced across the clearing toward the bear, then shifted in mid stride.

"Wally!" Brodey cried out.

The bear shimmered, then turned into a huge naked guy she vaguely remembered seeing at breakfast one day, who engulfed Brodey in a...

Bear hug.

"Oh my Gawd!" the guy roared in a thick Boston accent. "Brodey, you fucking asshole! Where da hell you been? You know your brother is ripping his hair out crazy worried about you? And the other guys..." He looked at Lina, who still huddled, terrified, under the tree.

Brodey turned, grinning. "Honey, it's okay! It's Wally!"

Lina fainted.

* * * *

She awoke to both men hovering over her. Brodey helped her sit up. "Sweetie, you okay?"

She nodded. "Sorry. I tend to do that a lot when I'm really

stressed since this dragon shifter stuff started. I should have warned you.”

Wally laughed. “It’s okay. Brodey told me you kicked arse, girl!”

“Do you know where we are?” she asked him.

Wally nodded. “Yeah. We can’t hike out tonight. Not with you like this. We need to wait until morning.”

She shivered in her damp clothes. She wasn’t sure she could hold on until morning, as cold as she felt.

Wally blushed. “I don’t mind you snugglin’ up to keep warm, if you don’t mind. I promise I’ll keep my paws to myself.”

She nodded, too tired and cold to worry how it looked. Being dead wouldn’t look much better. Wally shifted and lay down on his side by the deadfall, then patted the ground in front of him with a large, clawed paw.

She curled up against him. Admittedly, he felt nice and warm. Snuggly, albeit a little gamey. Then again, she knew her aroma couldn’t be much better. When Brodey shifted to wolf form and pressed his back against her chest, she started feeling warm for the first time since the whole crazy mess started.

Feeling safe, and with her fingers defrosting in Brodey’s fur, she crashed into sleep.

* * * *

Morning dawned bright, crisp, and cold. The men waited for her to move first before shifting. Brodey donned his makeshift kilt and handed Wally another piece of tent fabric to wrap around his waist.

She blushed. “I need to...go find a tree.”

“Yeah, me too,” Wally said.

The three of them split up to three different trees. They met back at the deadfall a few minutes later. Brodey made Lina eat the last of the crackers and drink more water. There was still one bottle left.

“What’s the book?” Wally asked.

“We don’t know,” Brodey said. “The chickenshit was reading it. Looked important. I figured I’d better take it.”

“Well, let’s go. This way.” Wally returned the makeshift kilt, shifted, and set off down the hill.

Brodey shouldered the pack, laced his fingers through Lina’s, and followed. They hiked all day, sometimes hearing a helicopter or plane but not seeing one. By dark, Lina neared collapse again and couldn’t go on. Brodey picked her up.

“How far are we?” he asked Wally.

Wally shifted. “Another couple of miles. Want me to carry her?”

“Naw, I got her. She’s not heavy.”

Lina sleepily muttered, “You’re delirious. I’m a cow.”

Brodey nuzzled her nose. “You’re the delirious one, babe. You’re talking to a kilt-wearing wolf and a bear.” Wally, who had shifted back to his bear form, snorted with amusement.

She laughed, but a few minutes later she softly snored in his arms. Wally shifted to human form again. Brodey stopped so Wally could unzip the pack and find the other makeshift kilt. He donned it, and an hour later they saw the lights of the Old Faithful complex glowing beyond the trees.

Wally walked up the steps and knocked on the Alexandr brothers’ cabin room door while Brodey held Lina.

The door burst open. Zack, Jan, Rick, and Kael pushed out. “What happened?” Zack asked.

When they spotted Lina in Brodey’s arms, all four men happily yelled and swarmed him.

“She’s okay,” Brodey assured them. “Get her into a hot shower to warm her up, and get some water in her. She may be a little dehydrated.”

Zack shouldered to the front of the pack and tenderly took her from Brodey. Brodey felt a melancholy pang releasing Lina to her Watcher, but he brushed the hair from her face as he let her go.

Drawn by the noise, Cail and Micah rounded the corner and

nearly tackled Brodey. “Fuck me, asshole! Do you know how worried I was?” Cail threw his arms around him and hugged him.

“Thank Wally. He found us last night and led us out.” Brodey started for his room when Rick and Jan stopped him.

Rick’s eyes looked too bright, like he was near tears. “Whatever you need, anything you need, anytime, it’s yours. You name it, we’ll beg, borrow or steal to get it. You’re family, man.” He engulfed him in a hug.

Brodey nodded, too tired to talk.

Jan also hugged him, then they hurried into their room to check on Lina.

Cail had retrieved Brodey’s clothes earlier and found his room key. He opened the door for him and stood in the doorway.

“What?” Brodey said as he stripped off the makeshift kilt and dropped the backpack on the floor.

“You okay?”

Brodey nodded and headed for the bathroom. “I need a shower and a side of bison and a keg of beer and I’ll be fine.”

“What about the guy?”

“Dead.” Brodey turned on the bathroom light and started the shower. He heard water running in the next room, knew the men were helping Lina get cleaned up.

“Want to talk about it?”

“All I want to talk to right now is my pillow as I go to sleep. Wake me up for breakfast, please.”

Cail left.

He stood in the shower and let the water run. Dirt and soot sloughed off him, creating dark streams as it flowed down the drain. He turned and rested his forehead on the back shower wall, closed his eyes, and thought about Lina.

He felt calm. She was close by.

He raised his hand and rested his palm against the wall as a peaceful smile caressed his lips.

* * * *

Lina let the men strip her and help her into the shower. Only one person fit in the tiny shower stall, leaving room for one in the bathroom. Zack pulled off his shirt and reached in to gently scrub her with a soapy wash cloth. She inhaled. Rose-scented soap.

Brodey stood on the other side of the wall, in his shower. She heard the water running. An exhausted smile escaped her as she raised her hand and rested it, palm flat against the wall. After she was clean, Jan and Rick enveloped her in a towel. Zack left, and she was safely snuggled in bed between her two men, who kissed her, held her, stroked her arms and laced their fingers through hers.

“Go to sleep, baby,” Jan whispered. “We’ll talk in the morning.”

Rick kissed her forehead. “Sleep tight.”

She mumbled something as she drifted to sleep.

“What’d she say?” Jan asked.

Rick shook his head, looking puzzled. “I think she said at least we don’t smell like wet bear.”

* * * *

Lina awoke a little after dawn the next morning, firmly sandwiched between Rick and Jan. Jan had one arm draped over her chest and his fingers laced through hers. Rick had slung an arm around her waist and captured her other hand.

Moving slowly and carefully, she wiggled onto her side. Jan and Rick stirred a little, but they must have been as exhausted as she’d been. They mumbled a little in their sleep as she freed herself. When she returned from using the toilet, they’d curled up together.

She laughed. They looked like two puppies.

Fucking Florida time. While physically worn out, she knew further sleep was out of the question. She quietly dressed and pulled

on Jan's jacket since her own lay in a pile of filthy clothes on the bathroom floor. When she emerged from her room, Brodey was rounding the corner of the cabin.

They stopped and looked at each other. Then he opened his arms and she flew into them, softly crying.

"Shh, it's okay," he whispered as he tightly held her. "You're safe."

"Thank you so much." They ended up sitting on the steps to Zack's room. He opened his door a moment later and sat, his arms around them both.

"Welcome to the family, wolf man," Zack snarked as he patted Brodey on the back.

Brodey's eyes looked a little bright, like maybe he was close to tears. "Thanks, man. You guys need to come down to Arcadia. Three thousand acres of pastures and woods you dragon dudes can play in."

"Cool. We'll be taking you up on that. And thank you from all of us for this. We'll never be able to thank you enough."

Brodey looked at Lina, but he spoke to Zack. "Please make sure the guys understand I'm not trying to put moves on her. I love her, but not like that."

"They know."

"I'm his princess Prozac," she joked.

Zack laughed. "Well, they'll *definitely* understand that. Let me get my shirt and we can go eat breakfast. You two have got to be starving."

The men walked with Lina to the lodge, her arms hooked through theirs. Brodey told most of the story since Lina had been woozy or unconscious for some of it. Zack perked up at the mention of the book and other items. "You brought them with you?"

"Yeah. In my room."

"Oh, dude! I love you!"

Brodey smirked. "Sorry, not doing you. You're not my type. Besides, I don't want your Kael roasting my wolf ass for moving in

on his territory.”

Lina laughed and covered her mouth to keep from snorting coffee all over the table. She knew Brodey would be okay. His green eyes were lit with a sweet laughter from within his soul. He still hurt, but he was healing.

Bertholde and her gang entered the lodge and sat across from Lina and Brodey. Her emerald eyes shined brightly, matching her smile. “There’s our wolf. How are we?”

He nodded. “Fine, ma’am.”

She nodded, then looked at Lina. “You did very well for your first test.”

“Did I ever mention I hate pop quizzes?”

Zack and Brodey laughed.

Bertholde nodded again. “Are you ready for your binding Ceremony?”

Brodey gathered his dishes to leave, but Lina snagged his arm and wouldn’t let him go. “Yeah. About that, I’ve been thinking.”

“That’s dangerous,” Zack snarked.

Lina continued. “I want Brodey there.”

Bertholde smiled. “It is your Ceremony, Goddess.”

Brodey turned beet red, embarrassed. “Seriously, it’s okay, I can—”

The old woman laughed, cutting him off. “Wolf, it’s not like the Ceremonies your people have. Relax. It’s like a wedding. Like your people’s recognition Ceremonies, not like a marking.”

Okay, *that* tripped Lina’s curiosity. She turned to Brodey. “What did you think I was going to ask you to do?”

Brodey wouldn’t look at her, just shook his head, his face still red.

“I want Brodey to give me away,” Lina told the Seer. “And I want Zack and Kael—with a K,” she added, “to also be in the Ceremony.”

Bertholde arched an eyebrow. “Really?”

She grabbed Zack’s hand. “He’s my Watcher, right? You guys said we’re together forever like that.”

She nodded.

Lina forged ahead. “Well, he and Kael are mates. That means Kael’s going to be in my life as long as we’re all alive. And Rick and Jan, duh.” She took a deep breath. “Kael and Zack can’t get married. This can sort of be a wedding for them, too. If this is my Ceremony, it’s going to be *my* Ceremony. I want us all bound together.”

Bertholde leaned back, contemplating. “Andel will not be amused. It is not customary. He will most likely bluster and complain about it.” She grinned. “I like it! A very fitting honor for you, wolf. You brought her back to her men, all of them. It is only right you should give the bride away, as it were.”

He stared into Lina’s eyes. “It’d be an honor.”

Rick and Jan hurried into the lodge shortly after, followed by Kael, Cail, and Micah. Before they arrived, Lina swore the others to secrecy about her plans for the Ceremony, wanting it to be a surprise. After breakfast, Brodey retrieved the book and other items from his room. The wolf and dragon shifters and Lina huddled around Zack and Kael in a quiet corner of the lodge while they studied the book.

Kael frowned. “This is some fucked up shit.”

“What is it?” Lina asked.

Zack leaned back and looked at the wolf shifters. “I hope you guys have a lot of room. I think we’re gonna be seeing a lot of each other. Apparently the cockatrice assholes have their own prophecies. They’re swinging into an era of coming after a common enemy.”

“Who?” Cail asked.

“Everyone that’s not a cockatrice,” Kael muttered, disgusted. He stood and stared into the unlit fireplace.

Not sure what was going on, she stood and walked over to him, laying her hand on his wrist. When she did, a surge of grief and vengeful rage washed through her, making her gasp.

Kael’s jaw clenched. “Fuckers killed my family,” he muttered. “We never figured out who did it. Eighty years ago. My mom and dad, baby sister. And I mean baby. She was only five.” As his fingers

curled into a tight fist, she felt him tremble. “Ritualistic killing. Fucking page in the book is dog-eared. Exactly like they died.”

Brodey said she calmed him. Maybe she could help Kael. She wrapped her arms around him and rested her head against his shoulder. “I’m sorry.”

He sobbed, then crumpled to the floor. Zack raced over and together they held him as he cried.

* * * *

Cail and Micah took over looking at the book. “Some of this is in Welsh, some is in Gaelic,” Cail said. “Some old French, but I’m rusty in that. And other languages I don’t know.”

Jan and Rick flanked them, looking over their shoulders. Jan pointed to one passage. “That’s old German. This is like a metaphysical cookbook from Hell.”

Brodey joined Zack, Lina, and Kael. They got the distraught dragon shifter moved to the sofa, where he lay across Zack, his head in Lina’s lap. She stroked his hair, trying to soothe him. Zack held his hands. Brodey sat on Lina’s other side, his arm draped around her shoulders.

“They’ll pay, bro,” Brodey assured Kael. “I swear, we’ll help. You’ll have our Clan behind you all the way. I’m sure we can get most of the others to help, too.”

Bertholde returned, alone, and walked over to the sofa. “I don’t want to rush you, Goddess,” she softly said, “but I won’t be here much longer. You and your kin have a lot to do. May we have your Ceremony soon?”

Lina wanted to say no, so she wouldn’t have to make Kael move, but he sat up and sniffled. “I’m okay, Lina,” he softly said. “Thanks.”

Lina looked over at Rick and Jan, who nodded. “Okay,” she said. “Give me a few minutes. I’d like to do it by Old Faithful.”

“It will erupt in about forty minutes, according to the board in the

lobby,” Bertholde helpfully offered.

“Okay.”

She smiled. “Excellent. I’ll inform Anel.” She left.

Zack snorted at her departure. “Funny, I figured she’d say some sort of nonsensical bullshit before she left. She’s good about doing that.”

* * * *

They returned to the cabin. Zack shooed Rick and Jan out of the room and unzipped a garment bag he’d brought with him. He held up a skirt. “This is from me to you, sugar. I knew you wouldn’t want to dress up, but you’re going to look beautiful. Get nekkid.”

She laughed and started undressing. “You’re lucky Jan and Rick like you.”

“Remember, they’re like Kael. They know the gig. They know we’re two halves of a whole.” He handed her the skirt, a soft emerald green material with shimmering undertones of blue, red, and orange.

“This is beautiful,” she said, amazed.

He proudly grinned. “I know. Got all the colors of your two dragon boys in it when they’re shifted.” He helped her slide the matching corset over her head. She held it in place while he laced it up the back for her. When she looked in the small mirror over the sink, her eyes widened. “I have a shape!”

Zack brushed her hair. “A gorgeous shape, sweetheart. We keep telling you that. Why do you think those two go around with their pants looking like pup tents? You’re beautiful.” He loosely braided her hair and draped a matching shawl over her bare shoulders.

“Oops, shoes!” He dug a pair of sandals out of the bag and helped her slide her feet into them. “See, flats. I thought ahead.”

She turned to look at him. “Are you happy with Kael? Really?”

He smiled and wrapped his arms around her. “I think you misinterpreted Baba Yaga’s torture. That would be too easy for her.

I'm sure she'll torture you somehow. Or maybe her 'torture' is she's fucking with your mind and you're not being tortured. I *am* happy. You should be happy, too. No, we don't get to settle down together this time around."

He gently kissed her, then brushed his thumb along her chin. "However, this time around, I don't lose you in a few short years. We get hundreds or thousands of years together now, not a few lousy decades. Your guys aren't jealous of me. Anymore. And I'm not jealous of them." He smiled. "I think that's a pretty fair trade."

She tightly hugged him. "I love them, but promise me I won't kill them."

He laughed. "That I can't promise. I think every time they look at that charbroiled pine tree in our backyard, they're gonna think twice about pissing you off."

It was nearly time. He walked her outside, where Brodey waited. Zack handed her off to him. "I'll meet you down at the boardwalk."

She watched him go, knowing the others were already there and waiting. When she looked up at Brodey, he was smiling.

"You starting to get the hang of this Goddess gig yet?" He offered his arm and she hooked hers through it.

"Yeah, maybe." She rested her head against his shoulder as they walked. "Nice to know I've got friends I can count on to save my bacon."

"Honey, you won't need any help once you get a handle on those powers."

"Hey Brodey," she softly asked, stopping and turning to him.

"Yeah?"

She grinned. "Original recipe, or crispy?"

He laughed, loud and hearty. He picked her up and swung her around. When he set her down he planted a kiss on her forehead. "Crispy, babe. Definitely crispy."

Chapter Eight

Andel and some of his entourage, she'd be damned if she could remember most of their names, waited on the boardwalk. Cail and Micah were in attendance, and some of Rick and Jan's close shifter friends. Bertholde and her two remoras stood next to Andel. Jan and Rick's eyes followed Lina's progress down the trail until Brodey walked her up to them. Before Brodey let go of Lina, Bertholde stopped him.

"No, you stay," the Seer instructed. She had Kael stand on Zack's left, and made them hold hands. Then she placed Lina's left hand in Zack's right. She arranged Rick and Jan so they both held Lina's right hand.

"Wolf, place your hands on her shoulders."

Brodey did.

Bertholde placed her hands over both of Lina's and wrapped her fingers around them. "Our Goddess in place, as she should be, where she belongs, with those she loves and who love her." Bertholde squeezed. Lina felt an odd, tingly sensation in her fingers. "Before all here, let it be known they are bound. The Goddess and her men, her Watcher and his love, and the protector and friend who returned her safely home. An unbreakable bond, a completed circle."

Bertholde squeezed hard. Lina's eyes widened as it felt like a shockwave washed through her. She knew Brodey felt it, because his fingers tightened on her shoulders.

Then the Seer let go and smiled. "The wolf and his Clan are, from here on, considered part of us and ours. Goddess, take your mates."

Brodey stepped back. Zack released Lina's hand and she turned to

face Rick and Jan. Both men smiled. "I love you guys."

"I love you, too," the men echoed, frowning a little at each other before smiling again.

She laughed and squeezed their hands. She kissed Jan, then Rick, then closed her eyes and enjoyed the feel of both of them tightly wrapping their arms around her and hugging her.

Her men. *This* was where she belonged, no doubt about it.

Old Faithful erupted, sending a burst of boiling water and steam high into the air. With an arm draped around each man's waist, they watched it together until it finished.

"What now?" she softly asked.

Rick nuzzled the top of her head. "Want lunch? Or we can do something else. We've got over six hours before dinner."

"Yeah," Jan joked. "We can go see what *you* make erupt."

She laughed, blushing. "Well, let's go then." She hugged the other men. "We'll see you at dinner."

Brodey smiled. "It's a date."

Zack and Kael were going to do a little sightseeing. "We'll catch up to you later, kiddo," Zack said as he hugged her.

Uncle Andel stepped in to offer his congratulations.

"You are beautiful," he said, smiling. "I feel honored you are our Goddess."

Lina blushed. "Um, yeah, okay."

Bertholde softly laughed. "Don't put her on the spot, Andel." The old woman hugged her tightly. "I pass the torch to you, love," she whispered in Lina's ear. "You are more than worthy. Trust your instincts, trust your heart, and trust your men."

"Pass what torch?"

Bertholde stepped back. "Time for a younger generation to untangle the convoluted skeins of the past."

As she walked away, Zack snarked, "I knew it was too good to be true, that she couldn't just leave without getting the final word."

* * * *

Lina opted to skip lunch and go straight for dessert—her men. They would leave for the airport in the morning, arriving in Florida the next evening. Lina finally had time to enjoy her men and relax alone with them. In their room, Jan undressed and lay back on the bed. She knelt over him, kissing him while Rick carefully unlaced her corset.

“Fucking thing,” he muttered. “I should cut the damn laces.”

“Don’t you dare,” she warned.

“I’m just sayin’. Shouldn’t take an engineering degree to get you naked.” He mumbled something under his breath in a foreign language that she suspected was a few choice epithets directed at Zack for picking the garment. He finally figured it out and loosened it enough to slide it up and over her head. She rolled off Jan and the men rid her of her skirt and underwear. Then she straddled Jan again, with Rick kneeling behind her, playing with her breasts. His warm hands cupped and massaged them, his thumbs grazing her nipples and turning them into hard peaks.

His hot, stiff cock rubbed against her ass as he nibbled on her neck. “Beautiful. Absolutely gorgeous.”

“And absolutely ours,” Jan murmured. Passion darkened his eyes to the deep blue of Yellowstone Lake.

“Get the lube,” she softly said. “I want both of you again.”

Rick needed no further urging. He scrambled off the bed, found the lube, and quickly returned.

Lina kissed Jan as she teased him, rubbing herself against his hard, cool shaft. He splayed his hands around her hips and lifted her, impaling her pussy on his cock, sighing when she’d engulfed him to the hilt.

“Jesus, baby, that’s the best feeling in the world right there,” he said. His hands skimmed up her back until he fisted one in her hair and took a few slow, deep thrusts into her while he kissed her. “I

could spend all day with my cock inside you.”

“Until I make you share her,” Rick snarked. He slowly worked lube into her ass with one finger, then two, feeling her body respond to his attention as he loosened her tight hole.

A low, pleasant tingle started somewhere around the base of her spine, spreading, different than the way an orgasm normally took her. She ground her hips against Jan as his tongue plunged deeply into her mouth, fucking her there the way his shaft possessed her sex.

Lina lifted her head. “Now, dammit, Rick!”

He pressed the thick head of his cock against her rim and she thrust back, hard, impaling herself to the root as her muscles tightly sheathed his shaft.

Rick leaned forward, feathering his lips up her spine and across her shoulders as she took over and found the motion that worked for her. Jan’s hands slipped between them and found her nipples.

She buried her face against his neck. “Pinch them harder,” she gasped, wanting it, needing it.

He did, and she let out a low moan as the sensation at the base of her spine thickened, coalesced, like a supernova building in strength and size. This didn’t feel like any other orgasm she’d had. And with the two brothers, she’d had plenty of them. She felt the men give up trying to help, simply there for her to use as she rode their twin cocks, fucking them hard, driving them as deeply inside her body as she could.

Lina closed her eyes and arched her back against Rick, biting down on Jan’s shoulder to stifle her scream as the first explosion ripped loose and engulfed her body. White heat and icy cold spiraled through her, slicing nerves and sending her somewhere she’d never been.

She opened her eyes. A deep blue light shadowed everything around her. It felt like time had slowed, stopped. Unsure what happened, it seemed like she was now floating with the stars somewhere, not fucking her brains out and having the absolute best

orgasm she'd ever had in her life.

She watched as a dark, cloaked figure wielding a knife crossed her field of vision and disappeared through a door that suddenly materialized before her. A door that looked like a door to one of the Yellowstone cabins—

A second orgasm hit her, slamming her back into her body and leaving her gasping for air. She imagined the ground trembled as her muscles clenched around the large twin cocks buried within her pussy and ass.

"Now!" she gasped. Both men thrust, trying to come with her. As they did she felt them together, hot and cool, joining her. She threw her head back against Rick's shoulder and moaned at the exquisite, nearly painful climax robbing her of coherent thought.

As her body recovered, she melted against her men. They rolled to their sides, Lina still safely sandwiched between them and their softening cocks still buried inside her body, as she sank into a deep, sated sleep.

* * * *

Brodey lay in bed, arms crossed behind his head. He occasionally heard passionate noises from next door, but it was okay.

He felt calm, that's all he cared about.

He heard Lina cry out as slight tremor rumbled through the campground area. In the distance, he heard several of the geysers simultaneously erupt.

He closed his eyes and snickered. *There she blows. Lucky bastards.*

Jealous? Honestly? No. He knew, and accepted, she was taken. Law of the Ancients of their Clan, you don't take someone else's mate. Period.

While she was cute and all, and, yes, he did love her, and, yes, under other circumstances he might feel differently about her, he had

to live in the here and now.

Next to him, the young waitress he'd spent the afternoon boinking smiled and stretched, then leaned over and kissed him. "I've got to go," she said. "I need to set out the dinner buffet."

He smiled and rolled on top of her for one last kiss. "Thanks for a fun afternoon." They'd locked eyes in the lodge after the Ceremony, when he'd gone looking for a cup of coffee. A few minutes of flirting later, and she said she wasn't looking for anything more than fun because she despised long distance relationships.

He'd felt nothing more than a rock hard boner when he looked at her.

She grinned. "Have a safe trip back to Florida." She pecked him on the nose. He watched her dress and leave.

Brodey sighed and closed his eyes, content. Maybe not totally happy, but feeling better, a little more relaxed. He raised his hand and rested his fingers on the wall behind him, letting the calm wash over him.

* * * *

They all met outside the cabin at seven to walk to the lodge for dinner. Halfway there, they heard a scream from another cabin. As one, they all turned and ran toward the source. One of Bertholde's handlers, the woman, stood sobbing outside the cabin door.

Jan, Rick, and Brodey pushed in while Zack pulled Lina back.

The man usually with the Seer looked up from where he stood over the bed. "Someone murdered her! We came to wake her, and she didn't answer." The ornate ornamental knife sticking out of her chest was a clear indication of the manner of death.

Brodey reached over and touched her arm, lifting it. "She's been dead for a while. Her body's already cool, and she's getting stiff."

Rick looked at him quizzically.

Brodey shrugged. "I watch CSI." He looked closer. "Wait a

minute. That knife looks like the one I took from Chicken Little's tent."

Jan and Rick exchanged a glance. "Where did you leave it?"

"It was in the bag with the book and other shit I gave to Zack." The three men raced out.

"Zack, where's the bag Brodey gave you?" Jan called out.

Zack had his arm around Lina's shoulder. She looked shell-shocked over the turn of events. He pointed at her with his free hand and made a *not right now, hellooo, what the fuck?* face at Jan.

Rick looked at Kael. "We need to get to your room. Now."

At a run, they followed Kael and retrieved the knapsack Brodey toted out of the woods. Jan dumped it onto the bed. Rick found the knife and they bolted from the room.

"This isn't the one that killed her," Rick said. "That clears Zack."

The men raced back to the Seer's cabin, where Uncle Andel had showed up. The news had been broken to Lina, who cried on Zack's shoulder.

Rick, Jan, and Brodey pushed into the cabin. Rick held the knife up to the one sticking out of the elderly woman.

The ornate handles were a perfect match.

Andel shoved his way into the tiny room and stared at the two knives. "What does this mean?" he quietly asked.

Brodey looked at him. "It means you got a serious fucking problem."

* * * *

Zack kept his arm around Lina for the walk to the lodge while Brodey protectively flanked her other side and Cail and Micah followed close behind them. Many of the shifters had already left that afternoon. It would be nearly impossible to tell who had committed the murder.

Lina trembled, grieving the Seer's death. Rick, Jan, and Kael were

busy with Andel and his gang of enforcers, trying to narrow down exactly when the murder happened and cleaning up the aftermath. They couldn't call the Park Police into it, not for a shifter matter.

Brodey and Zack settled on either side of Lina, their arms around her shoulders, on the large sofa in front of the windows overlooking Old Faithful. Cail and Micah sat nearby, on edge, keeping watch, their guard up.

"She knew," Lina whispered. "Remember what she said to us earlier? 'I won't be here much longer.'" She cried again. "Then after the Ceremony, when she hugged me, she said she was passing the torch to me." Lina gasped. "Oh my God, she knew she would die!" Memories of what she experienced while making love to Rick and Jan came back with full clarity. "I think I saw her killer!"

The men stared at her. "What?"

She blushed deep red, then lowered her voice so only Brodey and Zack could hear. "Earlier, when...the guys and I..." Okay, maybe she couldn't say it.

"The earth moved, didn't it, baby girl?" Zack softly teased.

Brodey snickered. "I wasn't the only one who noticed, huh?"

She glared at them. "All right, *fine*." She took a deep breath. "When I really *felt* it, it's like I had a vision or something. I saw someone in a cloak enter a cabin door. They carried knife."

Zack frowned. "But you didn't see their face?"

"No. I couldn't tell you if it was a man or a woman."

Brodey nervously glanced around. No one else heard except Cail and Micah. He directed his next comment at Zack. "Dude, we're on the same flights home tomorrow. Do not let anyone else but Rick and Jan and Kael hear her talk about that shit, okay?"

"We've got to tell Andel."

Cail stood, stepped forward, and gravely shook his head. "Brodey's right. Whoever it is, it could be someone close to Andel. If they think they're in danger of exposure, her life could be at risk. As it is, you should seriously consider extra security for her."

“Three dragons at home aren’t enough?”

“Were they enough for your Seer?” Brodey shot back.

Zack clenched his jaw. “You’re telling me there’s a traitor?”

“I’m not saying anything you haven’t already thought of. Tell me I’m wrong.”

Lina looked up at him. “Zack?”

He stroked her chin. “I didn’t want to worry you. When we found out about Kael’s family and the book... Sugar, I won’t lie to you. It could get bad. Really bad. You’ve seen the prophecies.”

“How many people know about Lina?” Brodey asked.

“Well, fuck me. Andel introduced her all over the place this week.”

“But how many people know about her powers?”

Zack stared at him for a while. “Bertholde knew some of it. Most people don’t.”

Brodey nodded. “Safer for her if you keep it that way. I strongly suggest working with her and helping her figure out her powers. As in, it should be your first priority as soon as you get her home. The sooner she can use them, the sooner she can help protect herself.” He stood. “Let’s eat. After dinner we’ll talk about setting up a guard for tonight.” Zack nodded his agreement.

“I don’t need a guard!” Lina protested.

“I have to agree with him,” Cail spoke up. “One of Brodey’s specialties in battle is strategy.”

“We’re not at war!” she protested, then thought about it. “Are we?”

“Yeah, sweetie,” Zack sadly said as he stroked her chin. “We are.”

* * * *

After a mostly sleepless night for everyone, they caravanned out of Yellowstone’s east entrance and back to the airport in Cody. Rick and Jan insisted Brodey ride with them, agreeing with Brodey’s

assessment of the situation and wanting more back-up to protect Lina.

They even stood guard outside the ladies room when she ducked inside before boarding the flight. When she turned from the mirror, she nearly screamed at the sight of Baba Yaga standing there, in her crone form.

“Well played, Goddess. Nicely done.”

“I could have used a little help!”

She shrugged. “No, you did fine. Keep your wolf and his kin close.”

“What the hell is going on? Who killed Bertholde?”

The crone’s eyes narrowed. “The prophecies will be fulfilled. How is yet to be determined. Even I cannot influence some things. There are those who are set on eliminating all others. They have made enemies of people who do not yet know they are in harm’s way. If you are to survive, you must form strong, trusted allies now.”

“And Brodey and his brothers are important?”

Baba Yaga nodded. “In a manner of speaking. In the future especially. You shall be as important to them as they are now to you. Follow the path you have chosen, Zaria. Stay true to yourself, and those you love and who love you, and you shall prevail.” She disappeared in a cloud of grey smoke.

Fuck. I reeeally hate fortune cookies.

During the flight to Denver on the smaller plane, Zack sat next to her and Brodey sat across the aisle, reaching over to hold her hand as necessary. For the flight to Tampa, Jan talked to the gate agent and got his seat switched so Brodey and Zack could sit on either side of Lina on the larger plane. Jan and Rick sat behind, while Cail, Kael, and Micah sat a row ahead.

“I feel like I’ve got bodyguards,” she griped.

Zack smiled. “Duh. Precious cargo, kiddo.”

Safely arriving in Tampa, they parted ways after claiming their luggage. The men made arrangements to get together at the Lyall ranch in Arcadia. Brodey stepped aside with Lina for one last hug.

“Be careful,” he whispered. “Let them protect you.”

“Remember your promise,” she said.

He looked down at her and smiled. “Don’t worry, Goddess Girl. You’ve helped me see the sunrise. The world doesn’t look as dark as it did before.” He kissed the top of her head and hugged her one last time. “I’ll be patient,” he whispered.

Rick and Jan also said their goodbyes, hugging the wolf shifters and waving when their cab departed. Kael wrangled their luggage and got a minivan cab to take them home.

Inside, Zack made way for Rick and Jan to sit next to Lina. Nearly ten at night, she was exhausted and wanted to go to sleep. As she tipped her head onto Rick’s shoulder, she closed her eyes and felt her mind slip.

The scene changed. She stood on a cold, chilly moor, watching two groups of kilt-clad Highlanders gathered around a raging fire and discussing a woman standing to the side.

Ysimel.

The image ended and Lina’s eyes popped open. *Oh, fucking fantastic.* This was like having funky cable that blipped in and out without a channel guide.

She stared out the window and watched I-75 slip past in the darkness. She hoped Brodey could hold onto his newly found peace until he and his brothers met their One.

* * * *

Brodey stared out the cab window. They’d spend the night at Micah’s. He’d drive them home tomorrow and spend a few days on the ranch with them, going over this latest round of bullshit. If there was trouble ahead with these cockatrice assholes, they needed to be ready. Lina and the dragons would drive down in two days. They’d bring the book and other artifacts with them. Maybe Ain’s Clan contacts could help them decipher the writing and give them some

clues to who these fucks were.

He closed his eyes and realized he still felt peaceful. He'd worried that, once they left Yellowstone behind, maybe he'd sink into a depression, but it was as if Lina was still there with him.

The Goddess.

Lucky bastards. He smiled. He couldn't summon jealousy for her men if he tried. She was where she rightfully should be, and if her prediction proved correct, he could summon patience, somehow, until they found their own One.

Cail touched his shoulder. "You okay, Brod?"

He didn't open his eyes, just conjured Lina's face in his mind. "Yeah. I'm okay."

"Really?"

He finally looked at him and nodded. "Really."

Epilogue

They arrived home in Arcadia a little after ten the next morning. Brodey dropped his bags in the huge walk-in closet. He'd take care of them later. He found Ain outside, cleaning the pool filter. Ain glanced at him, then focused on his task.

He knelt next to Ain. "No," Brodey quietly said. "Like this." He was usually the one that did it, knew the stupid thing sometimes got hung up if you didn't put it in exactly right.

Ain sat back, out of his way, and looked at him. "You okay?" he finally asked.

Brodey offered up a half-hearted smile. "Yeah. I'm sorry about before."

Ain shook his head. "No, don't apologize. Been there, done that." He watched while Brodey finished the job. "I know we'll find Her one day, Brod. I swear we will. She'll be special. We'll all feel it. I just know it."

Brodey nodded. "I know." He finished and stood, offered Ain a hand getting up. "Thanks for making me go."

"Did you take down a bison?"

"Not exactly."

Ain studied his brother. "What happened out there? Cail wouldn't say anything on the phone."

Brodey shrugged and stared at the woods. He needed a run before they sat down and talked it all out. And some of the things that happened would forever remain private between him and Lina. "Got back to nature. Went tracking in the woods. Did a little communing with a Goddess."

“Found religion? Oh geez,” he teased.

“Not exactly. Did get the answer to one vital question though.”

They started back to the house. “What’s that?”

Brodey smiled. “Bears *do* shit in the woods.”

“Oh, man. Wally was there?”

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tymer Dalton lives in southwest Florida with her husband (aka “The World’s Best Husband™”), son, and too many dogs. When she’s not dodging hurricanes or writing, she can be found doing line edits or reading or thinking up something else to write. She’s a bestselling writer published in several genres, authoring books such as “Love Slave for Two,” “Trouble Comes in Threes,” “Love at First Bight,” and others. Tymer loves to hear from readers! Please feel free to drop by her website and sign up for her newsletter to keep abreast of the latest news, views, snarkage, and releases. (Don’t forget to look up her writing “alter ego,” Lesli Richardson!)

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