

**A thank you to all my amazing Colts out there: Here is a story that's currently unavailable anywhere else.**

## Chapter One

Luc Dryden smoothed the nonexistent wrinkles from her black pencil skirt in an attempt to curb the nervous energy coursing through her body. The line to exit the airplane was moving at a snail's pace, which left her time to think. It had been five long years since she had set foot in her hometown of Blackburn Falls. But when her baby sister called to tell her she was getting married and named Luc the maid of honor, she was forced to suppress her adolescent issues, put on her big girl panties, and fulfill her duties with a smile on her face. She had cleared her schedule, packed her bags, and told Ivy she was looking forward to her visit. Her voice had dripped with false cheer, but her sister hadn't picked up on the sarcasm. It seemed easy enough to deal with being back for two weeks. But as she stood here now with no wedding plans of her own to focus on, Luc felt her confidence rocked.

She clutched the handle of her laptop case like a lifeline and did her best to focus on the woman she had become. The little girl who left home with her tail tucked between her legs and her heart shattered into a million pieces was a thing of the past. In the world outside of the Falls, she had found acceptance. Luc was one of the best in her field. As a contract historian, she was known to get the job done, work well under pressure, and immerse herself seamlessly in new cultures.

The feeling of never being more than her *disability* in her hometown still stung but was no longer relevant to her happiness. In her youth, the inability to shift into a wolf had overshadowed every accomplishment she had achieved. It sounded like a punch line, a shifter who could not shift. Not quite human but not a true member of her pack, Luc had never really fit in anywhere. The shamed existence of an immutable could only be topped by being feral, and

even then the wolf in question was too mad to understand how ashamed the pack was before it was put down. Her people were not overly cruel, and other than the spiteful bullies her age, no one said anything to her face. Of course, when you had superhuman hearing, whispers traveled far.

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"Luc!" The sound of her name brought her head up, causing a smile as she spotted her little sister's head bouncing up and down as she waved like a maniac.

Clad in a pair of form-fitting designer jeans, a crisp white button-down blouse with cream-colored heels, and sun-kissed mocha skin, Ivy Dryden was impossible to overlook. Her little sister was all grown up and stunning.

"Ivy, you look fantastic!" Luc set her bags down, embracing her sister with a huge smile on her face.

At 5'8", her sister was a few inches shorter with an athletic build born of a high school career of track and drill team.

"So do you!" Ivy squealed. She eagerly grasped Luc's hands and moved them from her body as she gave her a quick once-over.

"I am so glad you're finally here! I missed you, big sis."

"I missed you too, Lil' bit. You know I wouldn't miss your wedding for the world, Iv."

Luc's brown eyes filled with tears as she used their familial link to convey her guilt over her long absence. Despite her handicap, Luc could communicate in the telepathic method of her people. Ivy issued a warm smile as she sent her waves of reassurance and told her forgiveness had never been needed. A weight lifted from Luc's shoulder as she breathed a sigh of relief. Things had been set right, and now they could proceed as they always had.

"What's on the agenda for tonight?" Luc asked. She drank in the scenery as they headed to the parking garage. Not much had changed since she had left, but her pack had always been steeped in tradition.

"Dinner with Ash and his folks, nothing too taxing," she said as they walked to a shiny silver BMW convertible.

"I see the position of Head Editor at the paper is making you cheddar," Luc said. A long whistle of admiration ensued.

"It is, but this is one of Asher's."

"One of the perks of marrying into the Hunter family I guess," Luc said teasingly as Ivy rolled her eyes tossing her bags into the trunk. Randall Hunter was their pack leader, and as his nephew, Asher was set for life.

There had been a time when Luc too thought she would become a member of the Hunter brood. She was overjoyed her sister had found her mate, but Luc was not sure how she would deal with seeing Randall's son, Kalyx. He had been the love of her life and a fellow immutable until his sudden change at twenty-one had thrown her world into disarray and chaos. The loss of her confidante and longtime love had chased her from town, placing her in a dark place it had taken years to escape. She could let the whispers and stares roll off her back. But his presence was a blow she would never be ready to withstand. His title as the best man would be a true test of her character.

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"All right man, I need to head out to Ivy's place now, or I'll be late, and you know how Ivy is about stuff like that." Asher's voice was full of exasperation, making Kalyx smile. With his wedding less than two weeks away, Asher had made Kalyx's home a sanctuary.

"Family dinner again?" Kalyx asked as he spared a look of sympathy for the stress his favorite cousin was enduring.

"Yeah...Luc flew in today," Asher admitted hesitantly.

"I knew she'd be here soon. She's the maid of honor," Kalyx said. He wrapped his long fingers around the neck of his beer until it cracked in protest.

The nervous glance he earned from Asher made his face flush with shame as he took a deep breath and struggled to rein in his temper. It was no secret Kalyx bordered on feral. The nasty by-product of shifting so late in life kept his family on edge.

"Are you sure you can handle this, Kal?"

"What's not to handle?" The sharp tone was undeserved, and Kalyx was careful to keep his too bright green eyes trained on the floor. He did not want Asher to see how upset he truly was. He would have to keep the aggression that flared without warning on a short leash while Luc was here because a feral wolf was a dead one.

"You guys need to clear the air," Asher stated as he shrugged into his jacket.

"Yeah."

Luc Dryden had once been the reason his heart beat, and in one night everything had changed. The moment he first shifted, his parents isolated him, told her God knew what and began to groom him to take the throne. He owed her an explanation; that much he knew.

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*Blackburn Falls, 2007*

"Where's Luc?" he forced out of his badly bruised vocal chords as he turned his head to meet his mother's gaze. The change had blazed a path of fire through his body as his muscles had reformed and bones twisted into a shape and structure they had never been forced into before.

The older the age of the shape shifter at their first change, the more painful the process was. He had no real concept of how much time had passed since the pain had rendered him unconscious. But he was grateful for the oblivion it had provided. Each emergence from the dark came with snippets of lucid moments where his mother bathed his brow and soothed him with her voice and healing herbs burning in the background.

It was now, with the pain at a manageable level, he realized he had yet to see Luc. Had she known about the shift, he had no doubt she would be glued to his side.

"Where's Luc?"

"Don't worry about her now, Kalyx, just rest."

"*Where is Lucy?*" He pushed the words through gritted teeth. A low rumble resonated in his chest as his mother's eyes grew wide and the scent of fear assailed him.

"Y-you need to stay calm."

"Where is she?" His teeth pierced his bottom lip as he forced his body up into a sitting position and his temperature spiked in preparation for a shift. Tremors began as the newly unleashed beast inside him grew restless.

"She is no longer a concern!" boomed the chilly voice of his father as he entered with Kalyx's younger brother Chase on his heels.

"Vivian, leave us," he commanded.

"Yes, Randall." His mother gave a curt nod and scrambled out of the chair and through the doorway.

"You need to control that temper. Anger will trigger the change, and your body is not ready to handle it again this soon."

"I d-don't understand. How did this happen?" he asked. A first shift this late in life was

unheard of.

"The doctors aren't sure of much, but tests are being run around the clock. Right now you're a danger to yourself and everyone around you if you fly off the handle," he chided. Kalyx looked down at the bedspread, ashamed. He had always been a disappointment to his father. Kalyx was a man with a mind of his own. It was something that had caused constant friction. When they discovered he was unable to shift, the discord between them changed to embarrassment. A royal was only as strong as his lineage, and as far as Randall Hunter had been concerned, Kalyx was the weak link in the chain. That he had dared embrace his condition and date the other immutable in their pack had pounded the final nail in his coffin.

"How long have I been here?" he croaked. Kalyx was grateful when his brother brought him a cool glass of water to quench the desert in his mouth.

"About a week. We got worried when you didn't show up for dinner on Sunday, and Chase found you unconscious on the floor in the bathroom. The smell of the pheromones that rolled off you announced you were in the first stages of the change."

"Has anyone called Lucy? She must be worried to death by now."

"Luc has been informed that she's no longer needed," his father said.

"What!"

"Everything has changed now, Kalyx. You have responsibilities and duties to fulfill, a whole new life that Luc Dryden cannot be a part of."

"That's my decision to make," he whispered, voice deep and distorted by the voice box wavering between human and wolf.

"I am your pack leader! And you will do as I say!" His father growled, using his own power to stop the shift threatening to overcome his son's body, the convulsions that struck

rendered him limp as his weary body gave out.

"You have a lot to learn and no time for distractions. Chase will help you shower and dress, and once you've rested, we will begin lessons." Randall stood and strode from the room without a second glance.

Chase gave a sad shake of his head and said, "Don't make this harder on yourself than it needs to be, Lyx."

"But what about Lucy?" he whispered. Tears welled up in his eyes as his heart shattered one piece at a time.

"Trust me; she's better off with a clean break."

His head felt like it was ready to explode and his body protested even the most minute movements, but all of this paled in comparison to the shape of his heart. He had planned to ask Luc to marry him next week on their anniversary. He had the ring picked out, the reservation at Damon's booked, and now none of that mattered.

Pulled from the past by the click of the door signaling Asher's departure, Kalyx swallowed the bitter taste of regret. What he would do for another chance to make things right.

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Being back was a disarming experience, but adding dinner with a high-school sweetheart's family was a mind fuck. It was like an episode of a sitcom as they sat around the table pretending they were merely casual acquaintances. Luc did her best to ignore their pity-filled glances, but the experience drained her energy. Two weeks of this would feel like an eternity.

Later, in her bedroom, a glance in the mirror attached to the teak vanity made her wonder once again why she had been singled out. The pack believed things happened for a reason and a



wolf's path was predestined before birth. So what had she done to get the short straw? Her face was fair, oval-shaped and blemish-free. She could be called attractive. Her creamy peanut brittle-colored skin stretched over a supple body toned and sculpted by yoga and weights, and there was not a damn thing wrong with her brain.

Less than twenty-four hours back in Blackburn Falls and Luc felt like a useless failure. She turned her face from the familiar image and began a mental pep talk.

*Just get through these weeks, and you can leave and not return for a very long time. This town is no longer home and other than family and memories, nothing holds you here.* A timid knock sounded just before the sight of her sister's face accompanied the opened door.

"Just checking to see how you were doing."

"I'm fine, Iv," Luc said. A small smile on her lips as she patted the bed beside her and waved her into the room.

"I know that was uncomfortable—"

"No, I had to face his family sometime. It was such a long time ago; I doubt anyone thinks about it now."

"So you don't?"

"Don't' what?"

"Think about him anymore?" she asked. Ivy's eyes narrowed with the careful scrutiny of a trained reporter.

"I try my best not to, but after the years we spent together it happens from time to time."

"Maybe you're not the only one," she suggested.

"Ivy!" The only way to get through this was to maintain the frigid facade she had carefully constructed over the years. It had taken power from others to hurt her.

"After all this time, he's still alone, Luc. You think that's a coincidence?"

"I don't *care* what it is."

"Really?" Ivy crossed her arms over her chest and leaned in with a thousand-yard stare meant to make her tell the truth.

"Yes, really."

"Well then, I guess you don't care that Violet Winters has been sniffing around him like a bitch in heat, trailing his every step for the past year."

"She's acceptable in his social circles. I'm sure plenty of people think they're a good match," she replied nonchalantly. At her very core, she fought back the bile threatening to travel a path up her throat.

Violet had made their lives hell through school. The tiny bleach-blond cheerleader had used every opportunity available to let the immutable know her place was at the very bottom of the pack.

"We had to invite her to the engagement party we're having tomorrow night," Ivy confessed apologetically.

"What?" The knowledge struck her like a punch to the gut and stole the air from her lungs.

Ivy wrung her hands as she spoke. "I know there's a lot of bad blood between you two, but with her daddy being my boss, it was pretty much impossible to snub her. Maybe she won't even show up."

"Yeah, maybe you're right," Luc replied. The last thing she wanted was her sister to feel bad. But she knew damn well there was no way Violet would miss a chance to rub their role reversal in her face, now that she was the one with Kalyx.

## Chapter Two

"You got your head on straight?" Chase asked doubtfully as Kalyx paced from one end of the room to the other.

"As ready as I'm ever going to get," Kalyx said.

Luc's return had the potential to throw everything they worked for upside down. The persona his father had constructed with meticulous detail stood balanced on his ability to perform well in public. His aggression issues had always been gossiped about behind closed doors, but he usually managed to keep it together for his brief stints at public events.

"You need to keep it together, bro. Enough people question you as it is."

"Don't tell me what I already know. Dad preaches to me on a near daily basis."

Despite his miraculous transformation at twenty-one, he had yet to live up to his father's expectations. There was always something more he needed to be and responsibilities piled up on his door like snow in a blizzard.

"Just keep your mind on what's important," Chase said with a pat on the back.

*I think our definitions of what's important differ*, he thought as they made their way out to his black Dodge Charger and headed to the celebration.

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The engagement party was being held at the town hall, and Luc paused to admire the transformation from the interior's bland appearance. A pink and cream-colored wonderland fit for a princess replaced the sterile white decor. Ivy would be pleased. The bridal party made their way down to the hall ahead of Ivy and Asher to add a few much needed personal details. The linen-clothed table tops now held heart-shaped glass picture frames featuring Ivy's favorite shots from their engagement photos and pink-and-cream-colored, candy-covered chocolates adorned

with their names.

"All finished on this side," Luc called to the girls as they made their way out toward the front door to await the guests of honor.

"This is gorgeous!" Ivy cried. She covered her mouth with a shaky hand as Asher stood behind her and beamed behind her. He was good for her.

"Surprise!"

The look on her face was payment enough as they all laughed and moved in to exchange hugs.

"Did you know about this, Ash?" Ivy asked. She shook her head in wonder and moved around the tables.

"I might have known," he replied, coming up behind her and wrapping an arm around her waist and guiding her over to the table of honor.

*Here they come*, Luc thought as the guests began to arrive. She pasted on a fake smile and told herself the weakling from the past was long buried.

Most wolves only get aggressive when necessary, but her lack of proper hormones changed her right down to her scent. She smelled more like prey, and her temperament and attitude were in line with a human. The result in youth was numerous scrapes, bruises, and tears. Her life among humans gave her a perspective and strength she could never have achieved had she stayed. If need be, she would show them Luc Dryden had discovered her claws.

Ten minutes into the celebration, Kalyx showed up and devastated her senses. His chocolate curls curved around his ears and the nape of his neck. Black dress pants highlighted his slim waist, and a crisp blue button-down shirt brought out the gold flecks in his green eyes and clung to his well-formed chest. The change had been kind to him. He was leaner and muscular in

a way he had not been before. It figured he would be an alpha given his parents. She eased deeper into the crowd to avoid his gaze and to give her some time to calm her heartbeat, which was pounding like a drum.

This was not how she had envisioned this situation playing out. The plan was to remain cool and unaffected. But now that she was bombarded by memories, all she could think of was an escape. Her gaze darted back and forth until she located the side exit and walked to it briskly, thankful for the bathroom sign offering her a safe haven. Locked inside a stall, she rested her head against the cool door to lower her spiked temperature as she slowed her erratic breath.

*You can do this, Luc, just go out there, avoid him as much as possible and remember this is only temporary.*

One last deep breath later she stepped back from the door, released the latch, and opened the stall door.

"Luc Dryden, imagine running into each other here," purred the waif-like dirty blonde she had hoped to avoid at all costs.

She was careful to keep her voice steady and devoid of emotion, "Violet. Always a pleasure."

"I'm sure. It's been a long time. I thought I smelled your *particular* aroma."

"Rebel Le Fleur is lovely, isn't it?" she asked. Her demeanor was dismissive as she ignored Violet's weak attempt at an insult.

"Oh, I see the little imut has grown claws."

"I can tell you're still caught up in that high-school mentality, so I'll leave you here with your memories of grandeur," she drawled. It felt like she had won a marathon. She smoothed an errant curl, heading for the door with an extra spring in her step.

"We're not done here," Violet said with a snarl, slamming her hand against the door to block her exit. "Listen to me you little twit; you're not about to come back here and ruin the sweet setup I have. Kalyx is off-limits now. Your pathetic little sidekick grew up and turned into the man he was meant to be."

"I wonder if he'd appreciate being considered your property." A smirk curved across Luc's full lips as the blood drained from Violet's face.

"If you say a word—"

"Save the threats. I'm over this town and its bullshit hierarchy. My sole mission is to make sure my sister's wedding day is the happiest day of her life." Her eyes focused on the hand that barred her exit until Violet moved it.

"This isn't over."

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Nursing his whiskey and cola, Kalyx scanned the sea of familiar faces for Luc from his seat at the bar. He had caught her scent when he first entered the hall. It was spicy and sweet like honey laced with cayenne pepper. A part of him wanted to track her down, but he had his dignity and pack politics to observe. So he had made the rounds, shook hands, made polite conversation, and curbed his less desirable traits. Too many scents and emotions, coupled with his father's expectations caused his temper to grow short, his voice to deepen, and his territorial instincts to rise. The pack doctor thought if he was mated things would ease.

Which led his father to launch his scheme to campaign Violet as the next Mrs. Hunter. Just the thought of the woman made Kalyx's stomach curdle. Too much bad blood between them prevented even the most platonic friendship. Of course, this fell deaf on his father's ears. Randall didn't like to think of the time before Kalyx's change, the majority of Kalyx's life.

"What are you doing here by the bar, son?" his father asked. A frown turned his lips down.

"Just wetting my whistle after making the rounds," he replied, setting the empty glass on the counter.

"Nothing wrong with a little downtime." His approval was obvious as he gave him a pat on the back before he disappeared back into the crowd.

"One more round," Kalyx said shaking his glass. The bartender gave a nod and topped him off.

His glass froze halfway to his lips when he spotted the one woman he had wanted to see every morning for the past five years. Luc Dryden was less than thirty feet away and very much grown up. Her once stick-thin frame had rounded into curves that made him think of the pinup models from days gone by. Her legs were encased in a pair of tailored khaki pants shaped to her body. A pale pink tank top spilled ruffles down the center and nipped in at the waist, all topped off by a pair of pink- and- white peep-toe heels.

She was so well put together, with her light dusting of makeup and a loose bun; she would be the envy of any Stepford wives. Her prim, proper, and buttoned-up look threw him for a loop. The wicked high pink-and-white peep-toe heels were the only throw back to the Luc from his past. This was not the Luc he had been madly in love with. His Luc had used her appearance as an art form. An outlet to express all the creativity she held inside her body He smiled remembering the myriad number of hair colors and styles she had gone through.

Surely that Luc was still there, just buried under the surface. This was a semi formal event after all. Intrigued, he felt his desire to speak with her overwhelm him as his wolf surged to the forefront, forcing his legs into motion before his mind could stop him. He stalked her through

the crowd, careful to keep out of her line of sight until she neared the door leading to the sparsely populated deck. With a quick grab of her elbow, he pulled her outside ignoring her sputters of protest.

"Leave," he commanded. A glance down his nose sent two couples back into the hall without comment.

"Could you be more dramatic?" Luc asked. Her cheeks flushed as she snatched her arm away from his hand like she had been burned.

"We don't need an audience for this."

"I would be perfectly okay with not having this moment at all." Her pink lips curled up into a sneer of contempt as she glanced away.

"How can you say that?" he asked, wounded by her words.

"Because all I want to do is forget we ever dated."

"Lucy—"

"No. You don't have the right to call me that anymore," she said. Her sherry-brown almond-shaped eyes flashed from distant to angry. He had to bite back the moan tickling his throat. She was hot when she was pissed.

"Look, we're adults, and the past should stay where it's buried. I'm not out to cause any problems. I already got the riot act from Violet."

"What did she say to you?" His body flooded with anger at the thought of the fickle woman interfering in his business with *his* Luc. His muscles tensed, and his skin prickled as his anger rose and the need to change crept over him. "Kalyx, calm down. It was nothing," she assured him. Her hand on his shoulder was meant to soothe him.

She knew the shift so late in life caused irrational behavior, but the worry in her eyes told



him it was different to see it firsthand.

"I'm not with her, Luc. I would never be with someone like that," he protested. He had to make her understand how sorry he was for the way things had gone down.

If he had it to do all over again, he would never let them interfere. Back then he had been so green and out of control of his body. By the time he had gotten his shit together, she was long gone and ignored all of his attempts at contact. A slow panic began to rise as his mind grew cluttered and his animal threatened to take over.

"I know," Luc said, worry audible in her tone. Her voice lowered, and she sought to calm him as she began to talk him down from the ledge his beast had forced him on to.

If this was all he could get from her, he would take it. At least he knew she still cared.

"Why didn't you answer me when I called or wrote?" he asked.

"Because it was easier for everyone if I didn't." She sighed.

"Why?"

"Your mother paid me a visit and explained that my presence was a hindrance. A smart girl like me must have realized that an heir to the throne needed to marry someone strong and able to produce healthy pups."

The words winded him, and he shook his head, unable to speak. He expected this from his father, but not his mother.

"I was a wreck for a long time." It wasn't an excuse, but it was all he had.

"You really don't have to do this," she mumbled, her eyes glued to the floor.

"Yes, I do. I owe you at least that much."

"Look, if you want my forgiveness, it's yours," she insisted as she refused to let him continue. "Now we've been out here long enough. I don't want to take any of the spotlight from

Ivy," she stated, turning to leave.

The clicking of her heels on the wood pierced the stillness of the night around them as she walked away without a backward glance. Though the conversation had lifted a weight off his shoulders, he realized it was not enough. He wanted a second chance.

"This is far from over, Luc Dryden. I know the real you is in there somewhere," he whispered thinking of the flashes of emotions that had sprung in her eyes.

### Chapter Three

"How you holding up?" Ivy asked as she sat beside Luc on the porch swing. Her face was full of sympathy as she handed Luc a mug of Earl Grey tea.

"Isn't that my line? Tonight was a big deal for you."

"I had a wonderful time. Now let's get back to the subject," she said, determined not to be deterred.

"It was fine, Ivy, we're all grown-ups now, and I am over letting bullies intimidate me."

"Asher said he saw you and Kalyx slip away."

"Asher talks too much."

"What did he have to say?" she asked.

"We cleared the air. He explained a few things and apologized."

"Hmph," Ivy huffed, crossing her arms and puckering her lips in a sour expression.

"You know as well as I, that the change past nineteen is usually a death sentence. You're either stuck in the middle between human and wolf, or you're stark raving mad."

"Well, he must be the later to give up a prize like you so easily."

"Thanks, Iv." She sighed. It was nice to know her sister was always on her team, but it did nothing to stave the loneliness.

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"Shit!

He flung the sheet from his heated body and sat up. Sleep had eluded him for the past three hours as his mind replayed every memory involving Luc. Even now her scent clung to the clothes he had donned earlier; a sweet torture he hated but craved at the same time. He moved

his hand reached down to adjust the painful erection, making him feel like a man possessed. He had taken matters into his own hands when he first got home only to realize it was nothing but a fleeting fix when his erection returned shortly after.

He needed the real thing to sate the lust building up inside him like a storm about to wreck havoc. Disgusted by his lack of control he moved from the bed to the bathroom and splashed water on his face in an attempt to calm his frayed nerves. Energy prickled along his sensitive skin as his wolf begged to be set free. His was close to the surface tonight and agitated by the dismissal of the woman he considered to be his. A glance at his reflection in the mirror revealed his green eyes had already turned a pale yellow, and when his body began to shake he relinquished control. He had struck out with Luc earlier; perhaps the wolf would have more luck.

In seconds his bones shifted, fur sprang forth, and he hit the tile on all fours. The russet wolf with the mind of a man gave in to the call of his siren's scent and bounded out of the room.

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She opened her eyes in response to the whimpers that traveled to her ears from the open window. The mating gesture was sweet, but she wished Asher had chosen a more appropriate time and place. Of course, the way she heard it told when the urges hit there was no such thing as rational thought. Saddened by the awareness, she would never experience this for herself she turned on to her side in an attempt to block out the intimate moment. Frustrated when her throat itched to respond she covered her face with a pillow. Was she really this hard up for male attention?

"Yes," a little voice mocked.

Another note from the rich baritone had her breasts heavy and her fingers anxious to tweak hardened nipples.

Amazed she could find Asher so tantalizing, she whispered, "Please answer him, Ivy. This is what happens when you're thrust back into a community full of virile wolves after living among humans," she chided.

The melancholy howl replacing the amorous whimpers pulled her from the bed and to the cushion of her window seat. The russet wolf she spied in the yard below was not Asher.

"Kalyx," she said remembering how his green eyes had flickered to a pale yellow on the deck at the party. He was magnificent, lean and sculpted with a shiny pelt her fingers ached to touch. The dark musk of the pheromones rolling off him brought her body to life. A strange sound rumbled up in her chest in response to his concentrated stare. Shocked by the odd changes occurring in her body she paused only to be goaded on by the playful yip of approval making her juices soak her silk panties.

A sane person would close the window and head back to bed, but the passion he aroused refused to be denied. She would deal with the consequences of tonight tomorrow after the smoldering fire had been extinguished. The smell of dark spice increased, and her center responded with a flow of liquid running down the inside of her thighs as her center pulsed. Her walls contracted with every breath she took. Her sensitive body begged for relief, and in a blink, she went from the hunted to the hunter. A smirk graced her full lips as she slowly unbuttoned the silk shift irritating her overly sensitive skin.

Lingerie had always been a guilty secret, and she knew from past experience he loved to watch her take it off. She shoved the offending material off her shoulders to the floor and ran her fingers up her flat stomach to cup her full breasts and begin a rough massage. Her long fingers elicited moans, pinching and pulling, the erotic site set his eyes aglow with passion.

"Like that, don't you?" she teased, a husky chuckle spilling forth when he nodded.

"Good."

In need of more stimulation, she untied the bows of her panties one by one and lifted her leg onto the sill to bare her slick center. More moisture streamed down her thighs as his growl of admiration made her spread her lips to reveal the pink petal inside. Past the point of a staged performance, she cried out as she buried two fingers deep inside and went to work. Hard, sure pumps had her hips snapping forward. She forced her eyes to remain open as she rubbed her swollen clit in circles, and her pussy rippled as an orgasm roared through her body.

Her mouth opened in a silent scream echoed aloud by his hearty howl of approval. Coming down from her high, she was grateful for the click of the light in the room beside her own, chasing him off into the night. Her head rested against the coolness of the window, and she knew the concept of being over Kalyx Hunter was nothing more than a carefully constructed lie.

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The wolf collapsed onto his back porch panting as the passion created by Luc's impromptu window display slowly ebbed. It was the last thing he expected after her brisk dismissal earlier.

*She wants to mate with us. She reeked of the mating scent,* the wolf insisted. If only it was that simple. It was clear she desired him, but mating was impossible with her condition.

Tired of his baser side's false accusations he took control and shifted back to human seamlessly. He wanted her so bad his own instincts lied.

## Chapter Four

When a knock echoed through the empty house in the middle of the day, Luc had no doubt who was on the other side. Bracing herself for the battle to come, she straightened to her full five feet eleven inches. Last night was a major error on her part. The clawing loneliness had outweighed the logical but did not mean she was about to travel a road she knew to be a dead end. The emotions between them remained, but the reasons why they could never be together were vast, too vast to risk her heart.

"We need to talk about what happened last night," he said. Kalyx pushed his way past her the moment she opened the door.

*Come on in Kalyx*, she thought, irked by his behavior. "There's nothing to talk about." *An arrogant jerk replaced the sweet boy I grew up with.*

"After last night, how can you say that?" he sputtered. A scowl painted on his Cupid's bow lips as he pinned her with flashing eyes.

"Because it's the truth. I was lonely, and you were there."

"Don't insult me," he snapped stepping forward deep into her personal space.

Her heart jumped, and her nipples pebbled as want endangered the aloof air she struggled to maintain. He was like a shark in water: one hint of blood and he would go in for the kill.

"Back off," she warned, her desire twisting her stomach into knots as her center wept.

"Or what, Lucy?" he asked as he moved in closer. "Your body admits what you continue to deny. You're so wet right now I can taste you on the tip of my tongue." His body was so close his breath tickled her ear and evoked a deep shiver.

"Chemistry was never our problem." She cleared her throat as she looked away and

effectively erected the walls keeping them apart.

"We're not children anymore; we can make our own choices now." His voice sounded desperate as she retreated further.

"You may believe that, but *I* know better."

"Luc."

"Just go, Kalyx, you might have forgotten what it's like to be an immutable, but I can't," she spat, disgusted.

"Luc—"

"Now!" The force behind her roar shocked them both into temporary silence as her chest heaved.

"This is far from over." The sentence was an ominous promise as he headed for the door and left her alone in the silent house.

\*\*\*

Parked in the driveway of his parents' home, he took a deep breath and prepared to take his life back.

"I don't know what you did, but Dad's on the war path," Chase said from his seat on the porch.

"What I'm about to say won't make him any happier," Kalyx admitted. "If I was you, I'd go hide out."

"Are you sure about this?"

"This has been a long time coming."

Kalyx's wolf delivered a growl of approval. For two alphas to comfortably occupy the same space one had to submit. For years he had been the submissive. Happy to be a source of



pride instead of shame he allowed his father to arrange things as he saw fit. But now Luc was at stake, and he would not yield. Firm in his decision, he made his way inside the front door and down the hall to his father's office. After a brief knock, he entered and took a seat across the desk from his father wrapping up his phone call.

"Son, you are just the man I wanted to see," his father said. His thick fingers laced as he leaned forward over the desk. "People have begun to talk about your dalliances with the imut."

"Her name is Luc." His shoulders tensed as a growl rumbled in his chest.

"You openly admit you've seen her?" he scoffed, nose wrinkling in disgust. "And recently from the stench of it."

"I'm old enough to make my own decisions."

"Not if that's the company you want to keep. I taught you better than that."

"I think it's time we get something straight. My life is my own to live. I bent over backward for the past five years to make you proud, and no matter what I do, it's never been enough, so now I'm done."

"Done"? There is no being done when you're a Hunter. This is who you are. You have a duty to this family and your pack!" He roared. His father's heavy fists slammed down on the oak desk hard enough to make the wood groan in protest.

"My duty is to serve them not play Simon Says with you."

"It's my choice who succeeds me, *boy!*" he threatened, face flushed as a vein in his neck bulged.

"I never wanted the title," he said as he stood. "We both know Chase was always your first choice anyway." He walked away regret free for the first time since his change.

"Feral wolves get put down, Kalyx!"

"You'd never risk the embarrassment," he said over his shoulder, leaving the office.

Kalyx needed to leave before he changed and attempted to assert his dominance against his own father. His clothes were strewn as he ran out the back and shifted.

\*\*\*

Infuriated by his son's outburst Randall placed a call to Violet.

"Hello, Mr. Hunter."

"Cut the chit chat you twit, this isn't a social call," he spat. "I am paying you handsomely to do a job, and you're failing miserably."

"I-I'm trying sir, but your son is being stubborn."

"I don't want to hear excuses. I want results. So shake that tight little ass of yours in his face and make him forget about this damn imut he's sniffing around!"

"Y-yes sir!" she stuttered.

"Good, I'm glad we understand each other."

Disconnecting the call, he leaned back in his chair. Luc Dryden had become a big problem.

\*\*\*

Luc riffled through clothes in search of an outfit for the bachelorette party at the Tavern.

"I've held this in since Mom, and I got back from our breakfast run to Panera. Why did the house reek of Kalyx Hunter?" Ivy asked.

"Because he was here."

Luc's lips twisted into a frown directed at the selection she had to choose from. Everything she owed was khaki, black, or a pale pink. When had she fallen into a rut?

*When you started trying to be perfect to make up for things you couldn't change. A little*

voice chimed.

"*And?*" Ivy waved her arms like a wild woman, and Luc shook her head.

"And nothing; he was only here for about ten minutes. We're having a difference of opinion on a few things, but I think he got the picture."

"Do you really believe that?"

"I'm only here for the next week and a half, Iv. Soon enough it won't matter," she said unsure if it was Ivy or herself she meant to convince. Luc wanted to change the subject "Do you have anything I can wear?"

"Actually, I have the perfect top!" Ivy squealed. She was up and out of the room before Luc could take back her request. The gleam in her sister's amber eyes made her nervous.

The three-quarter length white shirt with a black triangular pattern hugged her curves like a second skin, showcasing her ample chest and tiny waist when paired with black pencil skirt and peep-toe black heels.

"Now you're ready for a bachelorette party." Ivy beamed as they took in their reflection.

With their high cheekbones, matching smiles, and similarly shaped eyes, it was easy to see they were sisters. For the first time in a long time, Luc was happy.

\*\*\*

The Tavern was a local bar and grill with a dance floor, and a decent DJ playing every Thursday night, making it the perfect choice for celebrating Ivy's last days of freedom. The pink boas paired with tiny pink tiaras dubbed the four girls members of a bachelorette party. The minute they sat at the bar, free drinks began to arrive from well-wishers.

"You're not drinking?" Heather asked. Her eyebrow lifted when Luc shook her head and watched Ivy and Jacinth down another shot.

"No, I'm here to make sure this one gets home safe and sound, so Asher doesn't kill me," she joked. Luc had always liked Ivy's best friend, Heather, and the newest addition to the duo, Jacinth, had proved to be a lot of fun.

"Good idea," she said giggling as Ivy jumped up, swaying her hips to the strains of *My Chick Bad* by Ludacris.

"Come on, Luc! Don't act like you forgot how to dance!" Ivy shouted before she grabbed her arm, pulling her up from the stool and out onto the dance floor.

Within minutes their rocking hips, boisterous comments, and jovial mood had the dance floor full. Content in the middle of the bridal party Luc let loose and enjoyed the break from the drama.

\*\*\*

The moment the blonde walked into the VIP section of the Pulse in a skimpy black dress barely restraining her double D chest, Kalyx knew there was going to be trouble.

"What's she doing here?" Asher asked as Chase and Kalyx shook their heads in response.

"Who knows what goes on in that vapid little head of hers," Kalyx said his anger rising. Before her appearance, the night had been a success. After a long run and a heart-to-heart conversation with Asher, he had been able to leave the Luc situation alone for the night.

"Kalyx. Just the man I wanted to see," Violet purred slinking her way over to perch on his seat.

"Come on, Vi. It's Asher's bachelor party," Chase said.

"That's okay. It's not him I'm here to see," Violet cooed. Her slim fingers ran through Kalyx's hair blatantly ignoring the tense set of his muscles and the growls resonating in his throat.

"Come on now, Kalyx. There's no need to play hard to get. We both know I'm your father's choice, and you could do a lot worse."

"You need to leave," he ground out. Each word a careful enunciation as the urge to shift struck. The pheromones leaking from her pores were a threat to his mate. An insult his wolf would not stand for.

"I'm sure your bark is worse than your bite," she drawled. Her bold challenge to make her stop was visible in her narrowed eyes.

The snap of her wrist echoed through the corner as he shoved her to the floor and stood. His nostrils flared as his eyes bled from green to yellow and his canines lengthened.

"Learn your place, bitch," Kalyx said pinning her to the floor with his power.

"Look at you, barely able to keep from ripping out my throat. I can handle it rough. It's why dear old daddy chose me. But what about Luc?" She asked holding her wrist to her side as she kept her eyes lowered.

"I *will* rip your throat out if you say one more word." Lowering into a crouch and leaning in to inhale the scent of fear pouring off her in waves, his wolf wanted to bath in her blood for the insults she spewed. The human in him was terrified.

"Get her out of here," he managed, barely keeping himself in check as his body trembled.

"I got it," Chase said, moving in to lift her body from the floor and rush off.

Kalyx turned to whisper, "Asher, I'm a fucking monster." Both hands clenched into fists as his heart swelled with sorrow.

How could he come to Luc like this? He was just as likely to hurt her as he was to make her happy.

"Kalyx, you need to calm down."

"I think you mean I need to be put down," he said, the wolf inside him howled for his mate.

He registered the words, "Are you okay?" from Chase before the wolf attempted to claw his way out and bring on darkness.

\*\*\*

"Did you do what I asked you to do?" Randall asked, recognizing the number.

"I did everything you told me to. I had the bartender slip the Mickey in Luc's drink while she looked after itty bitty drunken Ivy. The stupid wench made it so easy. She left her drink right there on the bar." Her dark laughter made Randall smile. "Then I reminded Kalyx of why the imut was a poor choice."

"Good girl," he praised.

He knew the situation had grown out of hand when the son he had groomed for the throne for the past five years came to challenge him. There was no way he would let all that hard work go down the toilet for one useless piece of ass.

"All will be as it should be by tomorrow night, my love, and you will be Mrs. Kalyx Hunter before the year is out."

"Thank you, Randall."

"No, my dear, *thank you*," he said. The call ended with a smile.

The chemical compound he had ordered the pack doctor to make would assure Luc Dryden was never a problem again. The mixture was a play off the one predominantly used to help ease young wolves through, particularly painful transitions. In its original form, it was harmless, but the reworked version was something different altogether.

## Chapter Five

Their night of fun ground to a halt when an emergency phone call from Asher sent the girls from the Tavern to Pulse in five minutes flat. As much as Luc wanted to keep away from Kalyx, the thought of him losing control in a crowded club made her heart race. Despite his lineage, a wolf that could not be controlled was a risk too great to take.

"Where is he?" she asked Asher upon entering the club.

"We have him contained in the private room off of VIP, but I'll be honest with you, it's not looking good."

"How far gone is he?"

"He's in between. The older members of the pack never fully embraced Kalyx post change, so this is just the slip up they've been waiting for," he said. His dark head lowered as she rushed for the door.

Luc was shrouded in darkness the moment she closed the door behind her. The harsh breaths expelled from Kalyx were the only sound to penetrate the eerie atmosphere. She should be terrified of being left alone in such a small space with a feral wolf, but the raw power filling the room with tension made her wet.

"I can smell you," he said breaking the silence. His voice was low and gravelly. He prowled the room. His steps echoed along the floor as his nails clipped the tile lightly.

The band of desire tightened as he approached her swiftly, coming close enough to brush the exposed skin of her arm before he moved away. She found the tease erotic in the intimate space the darkness created.

"Then you know I'm not afraid. Where's the light? My vision isn't as good as yours," she

said, eager to place some distance between them when the delicious weight of his body pressed the length of her own. The dark spice of his scent combined with the heat radiating from him made her knees weaken, and she was grateful for the support of the wall they leaned against.

"I don't want you to turn on the light."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want you to see me," he said. The breath on her ear a tickle and a tease. The tone of his voice was soft and defeated as he leaned over her.

"Why?" she whispered not able to let it go.

"Because I couldn't stand to have you see the monster I've become."

Her heart bled for the boy she had once known still living inside the man before her.

"Oh, Kaly." She sighed. She opened her arms and held him the way she had been dying to since she walked into the room. No amount of denial or avoidance would change the potent bond still existing between them.

"You could never be a monster." She nuzzled his neck as she stroked his elongated nose. Pleased to find the fur was even softer than she had imagined.

"You didn't see me tonight. I wanted to rip out Violet's throat."

"We all have at one point or another," she teased. Her fingers stroked down the pelt on his back in a mindless gesture soothing them both.

"How can you joke about this?"

The fury in his voice was palpable. Jerking from her arms, he crossed the room.

"Because I know you, Kaly," she said using her senses to track him to the opposite side of the room, her arms protesting his loss.

"No, Luc, you *knew* me," he corrected.



"If either of us believed that, I wouldn't be here now," she countered, moving to stand in front of where he stood. Unable to resist the lure his pelt held, she leaned into stroke a path over his chest marveling at the muscles flexed beneath her palm.

"Luc..." he warned.

"You want me to stop?"

"No. That's the problem." He groaned. Her fingers slid up to rub the sensitive points of his ears.

"Stop!" His hands wrapped around her wrists as he pushed her back roughly. "I refuse to be some pity fuck."

"Do I smell like I pity you?" she snapped, a dominant instinct inside her woke and bristled at his false accusation. She had creamed her panties the moment she shut the door behind her, and her breasts were heavy with an ache only he could assuage.

"No."

"What do I smell like?" she asked with a growl. Her hands wrapped around his thick wrists, placing his hands over the taut nipples straining against the shirt.

"No bra." He moaned leaning in to lick her pulse point. The claws extending from his fingers issued a light form of torture as they trailed a gentle path across the top of her cleavage.

"What do I smell like?" she asked, her voice husky and filled with grit. She spoke to his wolf.

"My mate," he answered.

"Yes, Kalyx. Your mate," she echoed as he released a howl of triumphant she found herself replicating.

"Damn, Luc. You never did that before."

"I never knew I could."

She moaned as he pressed the smooth skin of his hard body against her. The danger of a shift had faded now that he was no longer at odds with himself.

"Let's see what else we can discover." His nimble fingers made quick work of her clothes.

Each touch of his hand to her bare skin set her on fire as his tongue moved between her full lips and the darkness of the room heightened her senses. Dark chocolate and berries explode along her taste buds as their tongues entered into a familiar dance of twirling and exploring as they made love with their mouths. Hands roami the planes of each other's bodies discovering new curves and hardened muscles.

"You feel so good, baby," he said, his large hands kneading her hips.

"Mhmm, so do you. A-are you really my mate?" her voice filled with wonder, afraid to believe what her senses told her.

"My wolf and I agree, and unless my nose fails me, yours feels the same."

"I don't have a wolf."

"You do, maybe you don't feel her as strongly as others, but she's in there."

"Doing what?"

"Accepting me as her mate."

His sharp nips at her neck woke something primal as a sensation unlike any she had ever known unfurled in her belly. Sweat beaded on her skin and she strained to receive more of his touch. "That's just her saying hello, baby."

Playful nips became bites, and she rocked her hips against his hardness as the pain sent pleasure racing through her body. She curled her fingers and dug her nails into his back. The

sharpened points drew blood, and she whimpered her pleasure.

“Shit, Luc,” Kalyx muttered, nuzzling her neck as he rubbed his scent onto her skin. Her legs lifted from the ground to wrap around his waist. The feel of his rigid cock teasing her moist heat made them both moan aloud.

Panting she rotated her hips in a circle, seeking relief from the throbbing of her swollen clit. Each brush of the sensitive bundle of nerves against his leaking tip made her purr.

“You like that, Lucy?”

“You know I do.” Whimpering when he leaned back, she gasped a moment later when he sucked her breast into the heated cavern of his mouth. She arched her back to shove the round melon as far as it would go. The hard draws as he suckled her breasts were almost enough to make her climax.

"Oh God!" Shaky fingers twined in his hair as she ground her slippery slit over his engorged cock. "I can't wait! Kaly, I can't!" Her pleading accompanying sharp tugs of his hair brought him from his feast.

"Then I won't make you." He eased the broad mushroom-shaped head inside her taut passageway and paused as they both gasped at the tight fit. She gripped his shoulders hard as he stretched the unused muscle.

“You feel so fucking good, Luc.” Moving back, he angled her body against the wall, pushing her legs higher to spread her wide. A fresh gush of cream helped his journey to the heart of her, and with a final thrust, he was buried to the hilt. Her quivering pussy locked onto him like a clamp, and she fell headlong into a climax screaming his name.

"That's it, baby," he coaxed, pounding his way through her orgasm. Her head knocked against the wall behind her as he drove inside her. His eyes rolled into the back of his head. The

glove-like fit continued to constrict, and he leaned down to bite her neck before shooting her full of his warm seed.

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"I want to see you," Kalyx whined suddenly making her laugh as they came down from the after glow.

"I guess we did things backward, huh?" she asked.

A squeal filled the air a moment later when he scooped her into his arms and padded across the floor.

"Maybe just a little bit," he agreed. A flip of the light switch flooded the room, and he gasped at the strange golden appearance of her eyes.

"Luc, how do you feel?" he asked cautiously as he sniffed to test the air around her and his heart stuttered in his chest.

"Hot and a little dizzy, but I 'm pretty sure that's normal," Her hands moved up to scratch her neck. "I hope we didn't pick up something from here," she said glancing around the tiny office where their clothes were scattered.

"Put your clothes on, Luc. We need to go."

"What's wrong with you? You smell different." She sniffed. Frowning, confusion filled her eyes.

"Luc, I think you're sick," he said shoving her skirt into her hands. "We need to get you to my house."

"What's going on?" she asked, zipping up her skirt as he pulled on his clothes.

"I told you, you're sick, baby," he said, eager to get her out of the club and away from their friends. The last thing she'd want to do was ruin Ivy's night, and if he was correct, they

couldn't help her anyway.

"I think you're right, Kaly," she whispered as her head began to pound in response to the lights and the music bombarding her senses.

"I've got you." Making sure to keep her body tucked beneath his shoulder, he led her to his car and cranked the air to help cool her heated skin.

"Oh *God!*" She curled into a ball clutching her stomach.

"I know it hurts baby, but you have to stay calm because you can't change."

Kalyx broke every speed limit and was halfway to the house when he called the doctor.

"What the fuck!" His hand slammed against the steering wheel when the call went to voice mail.

"Hold on, baby," he pleaded. His heart bled for her when the tremors started. Her teeth chattered, and deep moans of pain filled the vehicle.

Dialing the doctor's home phone when the cell number did not work, he felt his stomach drop as a realization hit him. His father had done this. He was the only person who could order the doctor to stand down. A murderous rage unlike any he had ever known filled him as he howled. The first number on speed dial was his father, and he slowly counted to ten as he waited for him to answer.

"I figured you would be calling me about now. How's the imut?"

"You want me to beg? 'Cause I will."

"My boy, that was not my intention. I am simply getting rid of a threat to the throne."

"Call this off!"

"No, you need to learn your place," he snarled. "I thought I taught you that before, but then this bitch came around and made you think you actually ran something."

"What are you talking about?" he asked as the car pulled into his driveway and put the car in park.

The sound of the dial tone in his ear his only response, his anxiety spiked. His father had caused this somehow, and he had no intentions of calling it off.

"This is my fault, Luc," he whispered. Tears rolled down his face as she began to arch in the seat. Exiting the car, he hurried over to her side, unfastened the seatbelt and laid her down in the grass. When her body flopped on the lawn like a fish, he made an executive decision.

He wouldn't let her suffer when he could force her change. He would accept the consequences later. For now, this was his right as her alpha.

"You have to ride the pain, baby; stop trying to fight it and let go," he instructed as he stripped her down. She was too far gone now to stop it all together. If he didn't interfere, this painful process would go on for God knew how long, and the aftermath would remain the same, she would change. He'd seen elders help young wolves with their change numerous times, but his confidence was wavering now that he was preparing to step into that role. It was a tricky thing to let your power come to the surface to coax another's wolf free while remaining in control.

"Forgive me, my love," he whispered as he threw his head back and howled, shifting.

His power built inside him the electrical current creeping up his arms as he sent it out in a stream. The pulsing energy wound around her like a lasso, pulling the wolf to the outside. Pus and blood exploded as she wailed in agony. The rotten stench assailed him turning his stomach and the crunch and pop of her bones attempting to reshape and fail made him flinch. It was clear this transformation was forced because it was brutal.

The first transition was known as an induction by blood because of the mess, but this was

not normal. When Luc doubled over in half form and began to convulse, he regained his human form, racing to retrieve his phone from his car. Shifters who got caught in-between their first time rarely came out on the other side.

The doctor might be under his father's thumb, but there was a woman who was above it all, Fern Hunter. She was the eldest of their kind and his grandmother.

"What's my idiot son done now?" Fern asked. Her deadpan tone would have been hilarious if the circumstances had not been so dire. She was still just as outspoken now as she had been when she ruled. After her husband died and the rule passed down to her son, she never hesitated to let him know when she was displeased. Gram remained silent as Kalyx quickly caught her up to speed and placed Luc across the back seat.

"I know what this is," she whispered her voice full of awe.

"Gram?"

"She's more than your mate. She's your twin flame."

"What's a 'twin flame'?" he asked as he reversed out the driveway and headed toward her house.

"It's an old legend among the pack, a mate so perfect she's your other half. Together you're a puzzle with pieces crafted so well your connection is seamless."

"And apart?"

"You're lost, empty inside. You never quite fit in, and your temperament is short."

"Is that why I act like I'm feral?"

"Yes, Kalyx. Twin flames should not be separated for long periods of time. They balance one another out."

"Gram what can we do?"

"Union of Souls."

His heart hammered in his chest as he growled his approval at the thought. The Union of Souls was an ancient ceremony binding the souls of two mates together. Unlocking the bond existing between mates gives the pair access to thoughts and emotions until they truly didn't know where one personaa ended and the other began. He'd often thought if he could crawl inside of Luc and live he would be happy for the rest of his life. This would be the closest he could ever come. A wheeze came from the back of the car, and he sped up.

"Will this keep her from being feral like I was after the change?"

"Yes, it will fix the things that ail you both. I'll have everything ready when you arrive," Gram said, and she disconnected the call.

When he pulled up to her house, the door opened, and she came out with a bag full of items. Her face may have thinned with age, and her silver hair had gone white, but it did not take away her regal bearing. Stepping beneath the light of the full moon she looked almost otherworldly. What power she had left rode close to the surface, and he felt he was getting a brief glimpse of what she had been like in her prime.

"Bring her into the back yard; the moonlight is most prevalent there."

He nodded as he stepped from the car and retrieved Luc. She was covered in sweat. Her dark hair was matted to her face and neck as her body emitted a blistering heat. Her moans had lessened, but she continued to shake as her head thrashed. The movements were lethargic as if her body had little fight left.

"Lay her in the circle of candles, and sit beside her with your hands linked."

He did as she directed, stepping inside the circle, he sat on the grass with Luc's body propped up against his chest, her legs positioned between his own. Entwining their fingers, he set



them in her lap earning a curt nod of approval as his grandmother turned from them raising her head above her head.

"Nyx, Goddess of the Moon. You who blessed us with the power to become the wolf. We ask you now to bestow your blessing upon Kalyx Hunter and his mate Luc Dryden. Made twin souls, they are in dire need of being linked."

Thunder sounded in the distance, and the hair on the back of his neck stood on edge as a strange shift in the ozone began. He had never seen anyone call down the moon. The process was meant to be a way to commune with Nyx, to whom they credited their abilities.

"She approves," Gram whispered as he nodded. She walked over and knelt beside him. She placed a hand placed over their interlaced fingers.

"Destined to walk as one, two souls are joined." The words pierced him as goose bumps covered his flesh.

"Approved by Nyx they will make the journey of life together and die as one." Her voice seemed to echo in the darkness as the candles surrounding them flickered and his head swam.

"Mind, body, and soul, Kalyx Hunter and Luc Dryden are forever joined!"

Kalyx gasped as vivid images, thoughts, and memories not his own poured into his head. He was the viewer of a movie on fast-forward as his body shook, and they were encased in a brilliant blue light pulling the wolf forward in a seamless transition. It was like nothing he had ever experienced before. There was no pain or hesitation: one moment he was a man, and the next, a wolf with his healthy mate lay before him. This seamless shift was the stuff of legend. Mentioned in ancient texts when the man and the wolf held a primal connection that had been lost over the centuries, the powers of old appeared to be rising once more. He glanced down at his mate, and his heart beat against his rib cage in a crazy rhythm. Luc was a beautiful wolf,

midnight black with gold eyes full of mirth. She yipped her joy at her entrance into their world.

He fell in love with her all over again.

## Epilogue

"Finally seen the error of your ways after some time to lick your wounds?" his father asked as he appeared in the door frame. A smug smile on his face.

"No, but I think it's time that you do," Kalyx replied reaching behind him pulling Luc into view making Randall's jaw drop.

"W-what *is this*?"

"Your plan backfired. I haven't spent the past twenty-four hours licking my wounds. I got married; even now my seed quickens in my wife's belly," Kalyx said.

"How dare you—"

"Sit down and shut up!" Kalyx roared loud enough to make his father flinch as he stepped in and walked over to the desk with Luc in tow.

"We can do this two ways, Father: easy or hard. Personally, I hope you choose the hard way after what you tried to do to Luc."

"This is mutiny! I will have your heads for this."

"With all due respect, sir, the first rule of the pack is to look out for its members' welfare. If the pack leader is no longer doing that, we're well within our rights to act," Luc said.

"What would you know about pack loyalty?" he spat.

"I know if the current pack leader is purposely harming his people he can be dethroned and his successor can step up. I married smart. Not only is my wife a historian, she knows everything there is to know about pack history and rules," Kalyx said with a grin that was all pointy white teeth.

Defeated, Randall slumped down into his chair, face pale and weak, aging in a matter of

seconds. Kalyx knew his father was too old to defend his position against him. To challenge him now would be a death sentence. Accepting his position as alpha had given him a strength Randall could not match at his age.

"What do you want?"

"For you to step down and choose a successor and for that, you need to thank my wife because my plan was a lot less nice." The thought of what his father had attempted still fresh in his mind.

"When am I supposed to do this?"

"After the wedding. We don't want anything to ruin Asher and Ivy's big day. I promise you if you try anything we will air every piece of dirty laundry you poses and we both know that list is a long one," he said allowing his father to taste his energy. Confident he had gotten his point across when his father lowered his head, eyes cast down, his face flushed with shame.

"I'm glad we understand each other," Kalyx said with a curt nod before he tucked Luc beneath his shoulder and walked outside.

"I had no idea being Mrs. Hunter would be so exciting," she teased. Her finger twisted the two-karat diamond he had picked out five years earlier.

"I did, my love. I did," he whispered as he placed a gentle kiss on the top of her head. From the moment she had left town, he had felt like his life was on hold, and now he understood he had been a wolf waiting on his mate.