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Howlin'

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Howlin'

Allyson James

Chapter One

Alain Dupree walked stark naked onto his back porch to watch the moon rise. Thick trees screened him from his neighbors, giving him privacy in this house built right on the bank of Oak Creek. This land had been his grandfather's, then his father's and now Alain's.

The moon rose above the trees, round and full. Its silver light traced shadows on Alain's hard-muscled chest and picked out the sharp lines of the black tattoos that encircled his biceps. He could feel the vibrations of this place—what the New Agers called vortexes. A high concentration of magic lingered here, no matter what it was called, and it tingled and sang through Alain's blood.

He sniffed the wind, tilting his head back. He knew there was another werewolf out there, a female, but he didn't know where. He'd sensed her when he arrived but hadn't been able to pin her down. Yet.

But he'd do it. He knew she was out there somewhere—he could scent her on the rising breeze. Time to find her and break the news.

* * * * *

Patrice Spencer was also naked, in the bathroom of her doublewide just inside the line of Yavapai County.

I'm not going to change into a werewolf, she told her reflection. It's ridiculous.

Today, a man calling himself a shaman showed up at the police station, asked to see her, then said he'd been sent to warn her. Her parents, long dead, had been werewolves and Patrice would undergo her first change the full moon after she turned twenty-five.

She'd turned twenty-five two weeks ago.

Shaman. Right. He'd said his name was Jackson Gray, couldn't have been more than thirty himself and wore jeans and an earth-colored Sedona t-shirt. The t-shirt stretched tight across honed pecs and broad shoulders. He had long black hair caught in a tail, and the liquid brown eyes of a Native American.

Hubbahubba.

He'd made himself right at home in her office, lounging on a hard chair like it was padded with eiderdown.

“Hello, Patrice Spencer,” he said in a silken voice. “Guess what?”

She'd never seen the man before. She knew most of the Native Americans in and around Sedona and Cottonwood, but not him. She'd have remembered *him*.

He leaned forward and rested sun-bronzed arms on her desk, his eyes so dark she wanted to drown in

them.

“What?” she answered. *And does it involve you slathering me with massage oil?*

He’d smiled until she wanted to melt into a puddle and then those brown eyes twinkled as he’d told Patrice she was a werewolf and needed to get used to it.

“But don’t worry,” he said, sitting back, at his ease. “I’ll be around to help you. The first change is the hardest, not because your body has trouble changing to the wolf but because you have to integrate it into your life.” He tapped the side of his head. “It’s hard up here, but I’ll be there for you. You have friends, Patrice.”

This had to be a joke. Why did one of the most good-looking men she’d seen in ages have to be insane?

She’d see another man just as handsome the other day, but only briefly, and she hadn’t encountered him again. Just her luck—she went for years without a real date, then encountered a hunk and a gorgeous, crazy Native American in the same week.

“We do have programs to help people like you,” she said to Jackson. “The clerk can give you some phone numbers. I’m sorry, but I’m in the middle of about a million reports.”

Jackson stood up. He rested his fists on the desk and leaned to put his face close to hers. With any other walk-in, she’d have been on her feet telling him to back off. Instead she sat and let his warm breath touch her face, his smile heat her.

“I will see you soon, Patrice.”

He leaned even closer, flicked out his tongue to touch her upper lip, then turned and sauntered out of the room. She stifled a groan. *Nice ass.*

She sat in a daze for a moment, then shot out of her office after him. Jackson was nowhere in sight.

“Who was he?” she demanded as the clerk and dispatcher stared at her. “Anyone know him?”

Susan Gonzalez, the dispatcher, looked puzzled. “Who was who?”

“The man who just walked out of here.”

Susan blinked, as did the clerk. “No one’s been in here all afternoon. You feeling all right?”

Patrice gaped at them as Susan and the clerk exchanged a glance. *Crazy gringo.*

She closed her mouth. “Fine.” She fled back into her office and closed the door, trying to ignore their looks.

She finished her shift, her mind everywhere but on her job, then drove home, keeping a sharp eye out for anyone who looked like Jackson. She admitted she’d been pretty tired lately. Maybe she’d fallen asleep and dreamed him.

But as the sun went down, she found herself more and more nervous. She went into the bathroom, stripped off her clothes and examined herself in the mirror. She didn’t look any different.

No way am I going to turn into a wolf.

So why was she standing there naked in the bathroom, waiting to see what would happen when the moon came up?

And why did she crave sex so much all of the sudden? She slid her fingers to her clit, sinking fingertips into the wet warmth she found there. Ahh. She moved her touch in a slow circle, watching in the mirror, eyes half closing. The hot tingle felt so good. She tilted her head back to enjoy it, the ends of her short hair tickling the base of her neck.

Her nipples tightened and lifted, and she cupped her hand under her breast, thumb rolling across the areole. Her thoughts moved first to Jackson, then to her brief encounter—the man she'd seen coming out of a convenience store on Tuesday. He'd been tall and tight-bodied, and his ass had been just as fine as Jackson's. She hadn't been able to look at him fully—there'd been only a brush of bodies as he left and she entered—but she remembered the ass.

The clerk inside had told her she'd just nearly bumped into Alain Dupree, come out here from back east because his father had passed away and he'd inherited the Dupree place in Oak Creek Canyon. Alain. Unusual name, but she liked it.

She thought about Alain Dupree's cute ass now, imagining herself sidling up behind him and rubbing herself on it. She also thought about Jackson Gray's eyes, how they twinkled when he smiled.

She moved her finger more quickly, back and forth, back and forth, as she imagined the friction of his jeans on her. Too bad she hadn't looked up in time to see the other man's face so she could fantasize about him turning around, smiling, sliding his fingers into her.

Her thoughts went wilder still. She envisioned Jackson and the other man climbing into her SUV with her and driving out onto one of the backwasherboard roads where no one came. She'd turn off her police radio and lock the doors while they helped each other strip her out of her uniform and lick her all the way down...

Patrice gasped and jerked her fingers away from her body. What was she doing? She'd never in her life touched herself in a more than cursory way, never masturbated. Her friends advocated it as a way to release tension and implied all healthy women did it, but Patrice had never been interested. Too busy and too stressed to think about it, probably.

And now she craved sex like a woman on a restricted diet craved cake. She wanted it bad and was ready to stand here moaning in front of her own mirror to sate herself.

Except it wasn't working. She needed sex, real sex, a long cock sliding inside her and making her scream. The urge to mate burned through her body, so much that she rocked back and forth, arching as though a man held her and thrust into her.

A tight-bodied man with a gorgeous backside plus one with black hair and beautiful eyes.

The mating madness gripped her and her vision started to blur. She saw her bathroom, but in muted shades, as though she looked through opaque glass. In the mirror her eyes had gone round and icy, very different from her own soft green.

Her body ached and stretched, hurting but not hurting, an orgasm overtaking her. She growled with it, reaching her arms above her head and then dropping to the floor...

On all fours...

Covered with fur...

* * * * *

Miles away, up the Oak Creek canyon, Jackson Gray folded his arms over his chest and leaned back to breathe the scent of the night. He was naked already, standing on the bank of the creek below the Dupree house, the moonlight on his body.

Alain Dupree lingered on his back porch, bracing his cock with his hand, letting out a half-groan of pleasure as his fingers glided along it. He closed his eyes as he stroked himself and Jackson's own cock rose in sympathy.

Jackson gave himself a little stroke, loving the pent-up feeling of need. Tonight he'd start bringing these two together, the woman in pain and the man who needed her help. All in a night's work for a demigod like Jackson.

Meanwhile, he enjoyed watching Alain stroke himself. The man had a honed body, muscles thick like most werewolves', his strength clear. Back and forth he moved his hand, a small grunt escaping his mouth as he climaxed, catching his seed in a towel he'd readied for that purpose.

"Very nice," Jackson said.

Alain's eyes popped open, silver and nearly glowing. "Who the hell are you?"

"Your new best friend," Jackson said. "Ready for the change?"

Alain tossed the towel aside. "You're not a werewolf. You smell wrong."

Jackson grinned. "Not wolf. Coyote."

"Coyotes are vermin."

Coyotes swarmed up and down these canyons, into the mountains above them and down into the deserts. They had learned to adapt to humans and so were numerous, while wolves had all but died out.

"Be nice to me, wolf. I can save your life."

He sensed Alain's body come alert, the wolf in him rising. "What are you talking about?"

"Your dad was a good man. He didn't deserve to die. I'll help you find out who killed him and keep him from doing the same to you."

Alain's growl turned into a full snarl as his body swirled down to become a huge black wolf. He'd been a werewolf a while, Jackson saw—had gotten comfortable with the beast in him. He was savage yet controlled.

“You know the werewolf hunter who did this?” Alain asked. He didn’t speak in words, in English, but Jackson spoke wolf quite well.

“Not yet. I have some ideas. I also know the she-wolf is out there and she needs you.”

Alain growled again, his fur bristling. He leapt off the porch and landed square in front of Jackson, his head as high as Jackson’s chest. “You know a lot about me.”

“I’ve been watching you.” Jackson let his glance turn admiring. “I like what I see.”

Alain made a noise of disgust, turned away and splashed into the creek.

Jackson changed. Adrenaline rushed through his body, his already formidable strength increasing as he quickly morphed into his coyote form. His sense of hearing and smell sharpened and his vision showed him concave images with edges of sharp silver, black and white. He sniffed the wind, enjoying the tangy scents of the night before he threw back his head and let out a coyote howl.

He heard the black wolf snarl deep in the shadows of the trees across the creek. Jackson chuckled to himself. Vermin, was he? The gods would love that.

Still laughing, he splashed into the creek to follow Alain at a discreet distance. He was going to enjoy this.

* * * * *

I am not a wolf. It's a trick. A hallucination.

A pretty damn good hallucination. Patrice was running on all fours, her body lithe and lean and strong. She could see smells and hear sounds beyond the scope of human ears.

The November wind was cold in her fur, but it exhilarated her. The darkness was not dark at all to her; she could see things she’d never noticed before. The need for sex hadn’t lessened, either—if anything, it had grown, which spurred her to run and run.

She’d slunk out of her doublewide and down the street to where it ended in a dirt road. She tried to keep to thick stands of trees but Sedona and the Village of Oak Creek had become so developed that the trees tended to vanish into bare patches of land and parking lots. What used to be an easy walk into a canyon was now blocked by gated timeshare resorts.

She finally made her way to the Oak Creek and started working her way upstream under the overhanging trees. The creek led through the center of town now, but traffic stayed high on the bridge, and in the darkness she doubted anyone would see her scuttling through the brush. If they did they’d think she was a large dog or coyote.

Patrice felt...glorious. A splash of water was as loud as a gunshot, the smell of fish sharp and fresh, the scent of garbage from dumpsters close to the creek overwhelming. As she ran on up the canyon, the human smells gradually dissipated, the scents of cedar and river and red clay taking their place.

She’d hiked these paths many times, but where her human body would have tired and turned back, her wolf body navigated quickly and easily. When space between houses became greater, she crossed the shallow river, loving the cool water in her hot fur.

On the other side of the creek she shook herself out, finally understanding the joy dogs took in that simple act. A mountain rose before her, the canyon leading up to open wilderness. She sensed rabbits, squirrels, mountain goats, snakes hiding from the cold in their holes, birds huddled for warmth in trees and the faint and far away scent of a lone wildcat. An entire world was laid out for her, one so close to the fancy spas of Sedona, yet so different.

She had run on a few miles, loving the freedom of it, when she realized she wasn't alone. Every sense prickled—sight and hearing and scent, and another sense that she just thought of as “awareness”.

Under the trees a few yards away, another shadow kept pace with her. She couldn't tell what it was, but it turned when she turned, took the paths that she took.

A wolf felt fear differently from a human, Patrice realized. No silent message in her head: *I'm afraid*. Just a spike in her adrenalin, an urge to run as fast as she could at the same time her instincts readied her to turn and fight.

She effortlessly climbed a rocky path, dodging beneath hanging limbs of twisted juniper and piñon pines. The shadow kept pace with her without trouble. Patrice had lived in and hiked around Sedona for twenty years but she'd never been up here, never in this wild place unmarked by human passage. Whoever chased her obviously had, and he was herding her where he wanted to go. Time to turn and confront him.

She stopped, pushing her paws into the earth and swinging around so abruptly that whatever followed her pulled up short. She watched the shadows under the trees for a few heartbeats, then a large black wolf walked slowly out of the darkness and sat on his haunches a few feet away.

She could have “seen” him with scent even if the moon had not been so bright—he smelled clean and musky and very male. He was massive, high of shoulder, deep of chest, his thick black fur shining in the moonlight. Eyes of silver fixed on her and a small growl issued from his mouth. Otherwise he remained still, watching her.

Patrice had no idea what to do. She'd run a long way, warming her already warm body, and embarrassingly, she began to pant.

“Mine,” he said with finality.

He hadn't actually spoken, nor had he projected into her head like a voiceover in the movies. His wolf self had spoken, his body language conveying what it needed to. She tried to answer, but she only knew how to communicate in the human way, and she started to whine and yip.

“It is difficult at first,” he said. “Give in to the wolf. It knows what to do.”

Patrice growled and snarled while the black wolf sat and watched her. She had no idea who he was or why she'd not heard of a huge black wolf sighted in this area. Things like that got reported to the police, along with animal control. But no one had mentioned it.

She liked the black wolf's eyes, so purely silver, and she wondered if he was just as good-looking when he was a man. Exciting thought.

Scary too. She took the measure of his scent, heard the breath move in and out of his nostrils, sensed his power.

“Yourwhat?” she asked.

He blinked. “What?”

“You said *mine*. Your what?”

The wolf growled, smile gone, but she sensed his glee. “My mate,” he announced and started for her.

Chapter Two

She was beautiful as a wolf—silver-furred and green-eyed—whoever she was. When they were human again, Alain would not be able to keep his hands off her. He looked forward to it.

“Your mate?” she said incredulously in wolf. “You mean I have to have wolf sex?”

“You will be my mate in all ways.”

“Oh really?” she growled. “I’ve only been a wolf for a few hours. Give a woman time to adjust, will you?”

Alain’s bloodthrummed, every sense alive to her. “I can give you everything you need.”

“Tell me who you are.”

“Surrender to me. We’ll do formalities later.”

He leapt. She leapt faster. She sidestepped him so that he skidded in the dirt right into thorny underbrush. She whirled, stared at him in astonishment for a moment, then yelped and sprinted away.

Alain tried to disentangle himself to follow her but the thorns caught deep in his fur. He swore and bit, and became aware of a throaty chuckle not far from him.

Not the beautiful gray wolf, but a coyote. Long and lean with plenty of muscle, this coyote had deep brown eyes rather than the usual yellowish eyes of his kind.

“Aw, is poor wolf-kinsstuck?” he asked.

“Do you have a death wish?” Alain snarled. “When I get out of here, you’re toast.”

“I know who she is.”

Alain stopped. He looked at the coyote’s sharp-pointed face, swearing that the animal was grinning. “Tell me.”

“How bad do you want me to help you?”

Alain trailed off into a series of growls. The coyote’s outline shimmered and changed until he was six feet and more of lean, tight, naked muscle. His long black hair swung free as he leaned down and

disentangled Alain's fur.

Alain backed well away from the bushes and morphed into his human self again. "All right, tell me, who is she?"

"I can show you. But not right now."

Alain gave him a very wolf-like growl. "Listen, coyote, you come around my house claiming you know secrets, but you haven't proven to me you know anything. You say you know what happened to my father—"

"You know that too. He was killed."

"By who? Tell me."

He lost his smile. "I'm not sure yet. I need proof before I accuse anyone."

Alain took a step toward him, ready to close his hands around the man's throat, but the coyote-man caught his hand and twined his fingers through Alain's.

"Come on now, wolf, I won't steer you wrong. You want that girl and I want you to have her. Your dad was a good friend to me."

"A wolf friends with a coyote?"

"Everyone's friends with me," he said. "You can call me Jackson."

Alain stood still while Jackson released his hand, circled behind him and slid strong arms around Alain's waist. "I'm not just any coyote." He leaned down and nibbled Alain's shoulder, his teeth sharp. "I'm *the* Coyote. Look up tribal legends. Most white people don't know them."

"I've heard of Coyote. The trickster with much magic. You're saying that's you?"

"In the flesh." He ran his tongue from Alain's shoulder to his neck and Alain felt his already frustrated libido responding. Strange—if any other man had touched him like that, shifter or no, Alain would have thrown him to the ground. Instead he liked the warmth of Jackson's arms around his waist and his mouth on his skin.

Alain closed his eyes, letting his cock enjoy elongating and stretching. "Who's the woman? She implied this was her first turning."

Coyote answered, his breath warm. "All right, I can't stand the suspense. She's a police officer. Cute woman who drives around in an SUV, has a gun and handcuffs."

Alain's eyes popped open. Patrice Spencer was a werewolf? He thought of her dark brown hair, her fine green eyes, the way her body filled out her uniform, giving a man fantasies about being arrested and frisked. He hadn't sensed any hint of the wolf about her, but admittedly he'd only seen her from afar. Their only close encounter had been at the convenience store when they'd passed in the doorway.

She'd brushed past him with a polite smile on her way inside, probably not knowing his jeans had tightened at the way her eyes turned up in the corners. She'd smelled good, just out of the shower

probably, grabbing coffee on her way to her morning shift.

Patrice Spencer. Things were looking up.

“I’ll introduce you,” Jackson offered, his lips on Alain’s neck. He felt a brief flick of pain on his earlobe as Jackson closed his teeth on it.

Alain found himself breathing hard, first in anticipation of meeting Patrice and second from how the other man touched him. “When? Where?”

“Leave it to me.”

Jackson withdrew his touch, stepping back. Alain whirled around, but the space behind him was empty. He thought he heard lingering laughter, the hint of a coyote’s yip and then nothing.

* * * * *

Patrice turned the SUV down the county road the next morning and made for the house at the end. Thomas Dupree had owned this house before he’d died, and now his son, Alain, did.

She thought of Alain from their convenience store encounter, the one that made her fantasize about him last night. Making her rounds this morning, she’d seen the fence at the edge of his property half down and the tracks of the truck that presumably had caused the damage visible in the dirt of the road.

It was early, just after eight, and Patrice felt like hell. After she’d run from the black wolf, fully expecting him to chase her, she’d gotten lost in a meandering wash and followed it a long way before finding a good place to climb out. She’d gotten muddy, her fur matted and her paws sore.

Give in to the wolf, the black werewolf had told her. Sure.

She’d made it to her back porch an hour before sunrise and felt her body shift back into the familiar form of Patrice. She’d showered, wishing she could have a long soak in the tub instead, fell across her bed and crashed into sleep.

She’d only slept about twenty minutes before the alarm reminded her she had to be at work at six-thirty. Not even three cups of coffee straight down helped. She was groggy and nauseous, her eyes felt like she’d fallen into a sandbox and she refused to even look at her hair.

She parked the police SUV in front of the house and strolled toward it.

The house had been built on a strip of land between towering cliffs and the creek, reachable by the county road that turned off the main one. It had escaped encroachment by development by being hard to find and because the Duprees owned a lot of land around it and stubbornly refused to sell.

The house was long and rambling, with wide windows to take in the view that was the main attraction of Sedona. Patrice felt a pang of envy. Her doublewide allowed her to glimpse the bright red butte of Bell Rock, but only if she craned her neck the right way. Here a person could sit on the front veranda or even look out the living room window and be surrounded by beauty.

When she reached the front door, a rush of awareness flowed through her body, a tingling similar to what she experienced when she was about to grab a perp. Instinctively her hand went to the butt of her

gun in its side holster, but she didn't draw it.

She couldn't make her hand knock on the door and she had no idea why. She hadn't come here to arrest Alain Dupree—just to tell him about a broken fence so he could make an insurance claim. She'd investigate the site and report it, and they'd all be on the lookout for a truck with a smashed left front fender. So many tourists drove through Sedona it would be hard to track, but it was winter, tourism down to a trickle during the week, and they might have more luck. So why, if this was a courtesy call, was her heart in her throat and her palms sweating?

As she stood there, knuckles upraised and in position, the door was jerked open by Alain Dupree, wearing nothing but a bathrobe.

Oh fuck.

He was tall and beautiful, his body an art form, broad of shoulder, strong of chest. Black, wiry hair dusted his specs, which she could see almost all of in the V formed by the bathrobe. He'd loosely belted the robe at the waist and she spied no waistband of any kind below the hard abs and the indentation of his navel.

While that would make any red-blooded woman sing, his eyes arrested her most of all. Alain Dupree had thick black hair that tumbled in unruly waves to his shoulders, a square face and eyes of silver-gray.

Those same eyes had regarded her calmly under the moonlight in the woods west of Sedona. He swept his gaze over her from head to foot, recognizing her, knowing her.

"No," she said, taking one step back. "Oh, no way in hell."

Alain's strong grip closed over her wrist and he jerked her inside the house.

* * * * *

Lord, she was beautiful. Alain's entire body sang with it. Her dark brown hair curled against her face, cut short, flattened now from the hat that had fallen to the floor.

She smelled all kinds of good, like the shampoo he remembered from when he'd brushed by her at the convenience store, plus adrenaline and fear and, over that, desire. She wanted him, whether it was the human in her reacting to a half-naked man or the wolf hitting the mating cycle of the full moon.

"You're a new werewolf," he said, pitching his voice low. "Why didn't anyone initiate you?"

"I didn't know for sure until last night."

"You should have been initiated." He caught her other wrist and pressed her gently against the door, unable to stop himself. "It must have been hard for you, going it alone."

"My body seemed to know what to do."

"Not entirely. Do you want me to teach you, Patrice?"

Her body language said *yes, please*. Her mouth said, "Teach me what?"

“How to be the wolf. How to give in to the need to hunt, to run, to mate.”

“Mate with you, presumably.”

“Last night I claimed you. I need you, Patrice.” He let his lips just graze hers, feeling the pad of her lower lip move under his. “You need to mate too. You feel it.”

She said nothing, but her fingers stole to the first button of her uniform shirt. Touching it seemed to startle her and she looked down at herself, the button undone.

“I’m on duty. I can’t do this now.”

“When are you finished?”

“Four this afternoon.”

“Good.” He kissed her again, letting his mouth trail along the line of her jaw. Damn, she tasted nice. “We’ll have a few hours before the sun goes down. Come back here and I’ll show you everything about being the wolf.”

She slid her hands up his chest and inside the bathrobe. “I shouldn’t.” She let out her breath against his neck, warming it. “But God knows I want to.”

He licked the curve of her throat. “Come back to me, Patrice.”

She rubbed her body against his, letting out a faint sound of delight. “I need it so bad. Why do I need it so bad?”

“It’s the change. That’s why you need to be initiated and taught. I’ll make the pain go away.”

Patrice nodded into his chest. “Please.”

“Then be back here at four-thirty today. I’ll be waiting.”

He laced his fingers behind the nape of her neck and tilted her face upward. The kiss opened her mouth, his thumb on the corner of her lips coaxing them to let him in. She kissed back with tongue and lips and entire body.

When he finally released her, she leaned against the door, face flushed, like she couldn’t move. His broad hand rested against the wall by her head and she turned and kissed it.

Need roared through him. He couldn’t let her go, not now, not until he’d tasted every inch of her. Four-thirty was eight and some hours away. He’d die of agony before then.

She licked his wrist, her tongue swirling a pattern of heat. She put her mouth to it and suckled, instinctively knowing the pressure point that would lift his pounding cock higher.

She’d stay and he’d take her deep on the bed in the back of the house, the one whose window overlooked the creek. He’d lie in bed all day with her, watching the shadows play on her skin and listening to the rush of the Oak Creek in the background.

Outside, the radio in her truck crackled. Patrice jumped, jerking herself away from Alain.

“Damn it.” She scrubbed her face. “This is killing me. How am I going to do my job?”

“Meditation.”

“What?” She looked up at him, red lips parted, and oh, he wanted to slide his tongue back inside.

“Meditate. Think of wind chimes, count backward in your head, focus on a pattern, anything.” He opened the door, feeling regret and loss. “And then return to me. You need me, Patrice.”

“I do.” She rubbed her hand once between her legs and sighed. “See you after my shift.”

Alain watched her walk away from him, off his front porch to climb into the waiting SUV. Her uniform clung to her ass, making him want to run after her and bend her over the hood of the damn truck.

But this was also part of being the wolf. During the day, you had to be human. You had to do your job and all the little things that went with it. Surrendering to the wolf was necessary, but it was dangerous. Balance was what you needed, or you ended up dead.

Patrice started the SUV and rolled it down the driveway in a spurt of gravel. Alain watched until she’d turned the corner, the strong Arizona sun glinting off the hood, then he made himself go back inside and close the door.

He let the robe fall open and drop from his arms. His cock stood up thick and full, too damn needy to go down by itself. He grasped it, pressing his thumb against the base. He looked forward to satisfying himself a different way later, but for now this would have to do.

Alain heard a faint rustle of wind chimes and then Coyote Jackson was walking barefoot through his back door. The man was shirtless, in jeans only. He wondered briefly where Jackson lived during the day—a cabin, a house, some hole in the ground? Jackson looked shower-clean, his hair in a neat braid, so that ruled out the hole in the ground.

The man closed the back door and unzipped his jeans, showing he wore nothing beneath. “Want me to do that?” he offered.

I’m not gay, Alain wanted to say. But this seemed different—not two men who wanted to pick out curtains together but two men who understood each other’s needs.

“Not necessary.” Alain’s voice came out a cracked whisper.

Jackson dropped the pants all the way as he crossed the room to him. The man was lean muscle, not an ounce of fat on him. Jackson slid his arm around Alain’s shoulders as Alain continued to stroke his own cock.

It didn’t take long for Alain to come and once he did, he turned his head and took Jackson’s mouth in a deep, penetrating kiss.

Chapter Three

Patrice drove her SUV along the back roads of Sedona, then down the 89A toward Cottonwood. It was her usual circuit, patrolling back roads to check up on bikers on their way to a rally in Jerome, the old mining town that hung on the side of the mountain above Clarkdale. The bikers were camping along the way and a few gave her innocent waves as she drove by.

She checked the creek bottoms to make sure no one harassed the snowbirds, the over-sixties who drove their RVs down from the northern US and Canada in search of Arizona's winter sun. The snowbirds liked to find inexpensive lots in which to park, and some enjoyed roughing it along the beauty of the creek. But despite the high-price restaurants and spas in nearby Sedona, this was still wild country, a desert mixed with protected wetlands. There was danger among the beauty—it wasn't just a pretty backdrop.

Patrice drove restlessly, her mind only half on the job. Stupid—there was danger out here for her too. But the more she tried to banish the intense scent and warmth of Alain Dupree, the less successful she was. She wanted the man, every inch of him. She wanted to rub herself against him, to lick him, to taste and kiss him, to strip his robe from him and run her nails and tongue all the way down his body.

Thank God there weren't a lot of problems today—a couple of lost hikers calling for assistance twenty yards from the road and a rancher worried about a wild animal one of his hired help thought he'd spotted last night.

"A wolf, he says," the man told her. He had the yellow-brown, leathery skin of an Arizona native, a man who'd spent his entire life under the desert sun. "I told him it must have been a coyote. Ain't no wolves up here."

Patrice flushed as she pretended to agree with the man. No, no wolves around the Sedona-Oak Creek area. People had tried to reintroduce them to southern Arizona without much success.

No wolves but herself and Alain Dupree. The man took her flush to be from driving around in the truck in the sun, but Patrice's body heated up as she pulled away. It was four. She needed to check in at the station and sign out, and then she'd go see Alain.

Her temperature kept inching upward, her face breaking out into a heavy sweat. She mopped her skin as she filled out her reports back at the station and checked herself out, getting even hotter as she climbed into her own car and drove away.

This was more than a simple reaction to Alain, more than the warming trend on a winter day. Her body was raging, her skin itching and tingling, and her quim driving her crazy. As she drove back along the highway toward Sedona, she jammed her hand hard between her legs, letting out a little moan as she massaged herself.

The traffic was backed up in the tourist area of Sedona, the buses loading up day-trippers to transport them back down to Phoenix or up to Williams for the Grand Canyon trip. People wandered across the highway singly or in clumps, unaware of impatient locals trying to get past them to their homes.

Patrice breathed a sigh as she shot out the other side of uptown, heading up the 89A along the creek. Once she crossed, miles ahead, she took the dirt county road back to Alain's ranch. The fence was still down—she'd forgotten to tell him.

She was nearly tearing off her shirt as she dashed up onto the porch. He opened the door without a

word and his lips were all over hers, his hands pulling her shirt off her body, unclipping her bra.

“What’s wrong with me?” she gasped.

Alain hauled her up into his arms and carried her through the large living room to an airy bedroom in the back that overlooked the Oak Creek. The water rushing through the wide creek bed did little to soothe her. He was wearing a bathrobe again, though he’d obviously showered, and she fumbled with the tie that held it closed.

“It’s the first change,” he said, voice breaking like dry gravel. “You shouldn’t have to face it alone.”

“I changed for the first time last night. Why am I still feeling it?”

“That was the first physical change. You felt the urges, didn’t you? To hunt, to run. To mate.”

“Yes.”

“You didn’t sate the hungers and now your body is overloaded with them. I can help you with that.”

If she’d been in her right mind, his arrogance would have annoyed her, but she needed him so much. She needed his hand snaking between her legs, pressing the ache that throbbed there. She loved his mouth closing over her breast.

She untied the robe’s sash and slid her hand to his abdomen. His skin was as hot as hers, heat pulsing below the surface. But he’d tamed his hungers and controlled them, while she was going crazy.

Her hand moved lower until it touched the base of his cock. His wiry hair twisted around her fingers, the skin smooth and tight. She ran her hand along its long length to the tip and he made a raw noise.

“Fuck me,” she whispered. “Alain, fuck me, please.”

She’d never begged like that in her life. Come to think of it, none of the men she’d ever slept with—and they had been few and far between—had been worth begging for.

Arrogant or not, Alain Dupree was worth a little begging. His body could haunt her dreams. She tugged him toward her with her hand around his cock, his body landing hard and hot against hers. He shrugged off the robe and rolled onto her, naked.

Alain tore open the button of her shorts and yanked them down her legs. He broke the bikini strings of her panties and threw the ripped underwear on the floor.

“Open to me,” he coaxed. His hand stroked wetness, her clit already slick as it could be. She spread her legs, her fingers still around his staff. He had to pry her grip from him to position himself between her thighs and press the tip inside.

Patrice nearly screamed with it. He was hard and huge but she wanted him so much that she didn’t care. She grasped his buttocks and pulled him down on her, and he groaned as he slid all the way inside.

Alain kissed her fiercely, then he shut his eyes tight, his fists bunched on the blanket beside her, and rode her like he hadn’t had sex in a decade. This was no sweet getting-to-know-you sex, but primal urges consuming both of them. She thrust against him as hard as he thrust into her, his sweat dropping onto her

skin.

She lifted her hips, pressing hard, *hard* to him. The bed thumped and rocked under the onslaught and she didn't care. Let the furniture break. It would be worth it.

Alain pumped almost mindlessly, his eyes shut, but he whispered her name into her skin, his mouth finding her throat.

“Patrice, you are so beautiful. And mine, all mine.”

Her body wound her toward climax, a heavenly feel as he drove into her. She was stretched and aching, happy and needy all at the same time. Dark waves of climax took her and then receded and then built again.

Alain's thrusts became harder, his erection inside her fuller as he began his own climax. Patrice caught a movement near the window as Alain groaned, and she glanced over to see Jackson Gray sitting in the open window. He wore nothing but a pair of jeans and he was close enough that she could see the bulge that pressed against his zipper.

She gasped, but it was lost in Alain's cry of climax. Jackson's dark eyes fixed on her, his half-smile warm. He put one broad finger into his mouth and licked it, his eyes gleaming.

Jackson watching her with such intensity coupled with Alain's fierce lovemaking made her climax hard. Patrice screamed as black waves of it rolled over her, her hips shuddering against Alain's. Her whole body climaxed, her legs tightening, her head spinning, her fists balling against Alain's back.

She cried Alain's name. Jackson chuckled softly, which made Alain look up.

Patrice expected Alain to leap from the bed or snarl at Jackson, but he didn't. He moaned the last of his climax, then held Patrice as she rode out the last of hers.

Jackson hopped off the windowsill and sauntered across the room. He ran his fingers down Alain's back and then caressed Patrice's face. Again, Alain said nothing, only looked up at the man in quiet acceptance.

Jackson's teeth gleamed. “Anything I can do to help?”

“I think we've covered it,” Alain said, his voice hoarse.

“Maybe, but now I'm turned on.” Jackson's eyes were dark, pupils wide. He unzipped his jeans and proved he wasn't wearing underwear of any kind. “What I'd love is both of you licking me.”

Patrice knew she shouldn't want to. She'd been raised to believe that sex was fine, as long as it was safe sex between a man and a woman, and an engagement ring should already be shining on her finger. Times had changed, but though Patrice had fantasized about a threesome, she'd never dared.

Of course, she'd never had crazed sex like she'd just had with Alain. It felt right, lying in Alain's arms with Jackson standing next to them, his cock tight and long and large. Inside her, she felt Alain harden again. Her fantasy threesomes had always been two rather vague men pleasuring her—she'd never thought of the two men pleasuring each other. The vision of Jackson and Alain together and then including her made her giddy and almost come again.

She turned her head and licked the length of Jackson's cock. He groaned and lost hold of his waistband, letting his jeans slither to the floor. Alain watched her, his silver eyes intent on her tongue. Slowly, as though uncertain, he leaned forward and licked Jackson with her.

Her tongue and Alain's tangled around each other and Jackson let out a moan of ecstasy. Patrice caught Alain's tongue deliberately and they kissed around the tip of Jackson's cock.

Alain laughed and Patrice echoed him. Then they both went to work on Jackson, licking their way up and down him, lingering at his balls, taking turns sucking his tip into their mouths. Jackson tasted spicy and dark and the way he thrust his hips at them told her he enjoyed it as much as they did.

"Nice," he murmured. He laced his hands in both Alain's and Patrice's hair, making noises of approval.

They licked and stroked him, Alain still large and hard inside Patrice, until Jackson gasped. "I'm coming," he said, then his seed wet their tongues and lips. Patrice kissed Alain's mouth, licking every drop off him.

Jackson backed away, but his pants were still around his ankles and he sat down hard on the chair behind him. He laughed, his face relaxed with the afterglow, and Patrice smiled at him.

Alain groaned, dragging Patrice's attention to him. He was inside her, his cock opening her wide, and he began to fuck her again. He braced himself on his fists, driving faster and faster until Patrice was screaming and he came a second time.

Jackson sent them a smile of delight.

"This is fun," he said as she and Alain fell back, panting, to the bed. "What do you want to do next?"

* * * * *

Patrice wanted to run. The moon had risen by the time they left the house for the porch and Patrice felt her body shimmer and start the change.

"No," Alain said sharply.

Startled, Patrice shifted back to human. "What? Why not? I want to."

"You must learn to control it. You must give in to the wolf but you must also command it. Or else one day you will surrender and become the beast completely."

Patrice's heart began to pound. It did not seem odd to her that she stood on a porch overlooking Oak Creek with two naked men, she naked herself. She'd just had great sex with one of the men and enjoyed helping him pleasure another man. None of that seemed odd, which meant her worldview had severely changed since yesterday.

"You mean I wouldn't be able to turn back from being the wolf?"

Alain gave her a grim look. "Oh, you'd turn back. But you'd still be the wolf. The human Patrice would be gone and the beast would take over."

She stared at him. “Seriously? Hell.”

Jackson nodded. “In other words, you wouldn’t be able to drive your truck and wear your uniform, or even think like a human anymore. Of course, you’d be able to smell criminals long before anyone else saw them. The police department could devise some sort of leash, I suppose. . .”

“Very funny,” Patrice snapped. “Shit, what if that had happened last night?”

“That’s why you need me.”

Her skin warmed as Alain ran his hands up her arms and cupped her chin. “I told you that you needed initiating. I didn’t mean just having sex. You need to learn about being the wolf and about being Patrice.” He touched her lips and then pressed a brief kiss to them. “Now. Think of the wolf—become it. But don’t change until you are ready. Decide to change at the count of twenty and don’t change until then.”

Patrice drew in her breath and nodded. “I think I can do that.”

Jackson smoothed back a lock of her hair, his touch gentle. “We’ll be right here. Don’t be afraid.”

His words gave her strength. Patrice closed her eyes, reached out with her senses to the night and started to count silently to twenty. She felt the wolf rise up in her, the beast wanting, needing, to come to the fore. She clenched her hands and held it back.

“That’s it.” Jackson’s voice came to her, now smooth and calm. She felt a wave of caring from him.

“Wait until twenty,” Alain’s more grating voice said. “Wait for it.”

She relaxed, suddenly unafraid. Jackson was there on her left, his coyote cockiness hiding an aura of incredible strength. Alain on her right, his body tall and warm, his need for her palpable.

“Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty.”

Now.

Change.

She felt herself shimmer, her senses sharpen, and she became *wolf*.

“What a cutie,” Jackson chuckled, and then he was next to her, nuzzling her with his pointed coyote nose.

Alain growled something in irritation, then the black wolf joined them and they were off into the night.

Chapter Four

The three loped up the hill, Alain exhilarated from the hunt and what had started to happen in his house. The scents of juniper and wildflowers filled his nose and so did Patrice’s scent as she ran beside him, moonlight dancing on her silver fur. She was beautiful no matter what form she was in.

Jackson ran just behind them, his tread nearly silent. A demigod, he'd said. Alain believed it, thinking of the man's sleek, well-muscled body. The light in his eye said he found both humans and werewolves amusing, and he had an uncanny ability of knowing everything about Alain and Patrice.

They ran west of town, the roads giving way to wilderness, protected for now from human encroachment. They skirted the ranch where a man called Dunstan raised cattle, hearing the uneasy calls of steers out on the range. The cattle sensed the wolves, but Patrice and Alain left them alone.

The three of them roamed for miles, following dry washes and then ones filled with water from winter rains. They ran up the slopes of a mountain, stopping to rest on a rocky outcropping that gave them a view of the entire valley and the beautiful red bluffs of Sedona.

"Why did you come here?" Patrice asked Alain after they'd sat silently a while. She was slowly learning to communicate in the way of the wolf, though a few whines escaped her mouth.

"I inherited the house." Alain sat down, letting the wind ruffle his fur. "When my father died."

"When your father was killed," Jackson corrected him.

Alain acknowledged him with a grave nod. "When he was killed."

Patrice gazed at him with beautiful golden eyes. "Killed? I never heard that. That's terrible." Her distressed yips died away and her eyes narrowed. "Wait, why didn't I hear about it? The police should have been all over that."

"Because everyone thought he died of natural causes," Alain said. "In his bed, of a heart attack. But he didn't."

"Werewolf hunter," Jackson said shortly.

"Oh, Alain, I'm so sorry." Patrice paused, her fur standing up on her back. "A werewolf hunter? Here?"

"Yes," Alain said gravely. "I was going to ask you, as a police officer, to help me look into his death."

"A werewolf hunter," Patrice repeated. "Why would he kill your father when he was human? Why not hunt him when he was a wolf?"

"I think he poisoned my father. I'm not sure how. It was a coward's way. He didn't even have the guts to hunt my father down and shoot him."

Patrice moved closer to Alain, rubbing her body against his. "How terrible. You should have reported a suspected poisoning, you know."

She tried to sound severe, but she didn't quite have the wolf growl down yet.

"And say what? 'My dad's a werewolf and a werewolf hunter poisoned him?'"

"I see your point. How do you know it was the hunter who did it? That it wasn't a rancher trying to get rid of coyotes or something?"

"Because of the poison used," Alain said. "My father did actually die of a heart attack but it was

because he'd been given silver when he was a wolf. The symptoms all point to it.”

“Silver is lethal to werewolves,” Jackson put in.

Patrice looked around nervously. “I've heard that. I always thought those were just stories.”

Jackson snickered. “Welcome to the real world.”

“I can look into it at work,” Patrice said. “Find out who was in the area around the time of your father's death, any strangers who were stranger than usual, that kind of thing—”

Alain broke in. “It could easily be someone who lived here already, someone who wanted my father dead. I've been sniffing around.”

He meant that literally. He'd smelled silver faintly in the bed on which his father had died, even after the woman who'd cleaned the house had washed the sheets. Alain had put those sheets aside and bought all new ones, unable to bear even the lingering traces.

It angered him that someone in this beautiful place had been so evil that he or she had dosed his father with silver and then watched him die. Alain would find this person and tell him—or her—exactly what he thought. Exact retribution. That was the way of the wolf.

He'd distressed Patrice. She leaned into him, rubbing her muzzle along his. He liked her long-legged strength, which she possessed whether wolf or human. He wanted to teach her so much, and he had so much to teach her.

He sensed Jackson watching them, his dark eyes filled with knowledge. Jackson was teaching Alain things he never knew existed. Since Alain had moved in he'd had the feeling of being watched, but he'd assumed it was the hunter. Now he realized it had been Jackson, the coyote's eyes on his every move.

He still wasn't sure what to make of his reaction to Jackson. It had seemed natural to join Patrice in licking the man's tight cock, enjoying the unfamiliar feel of Jackson's satiny tip under his tongue, the taste of his seed. Alain wondered if the fact that Jackson was part god kept him from worrying why he liked stroking and kissing another male.

Alain broke his thoughts. “Want to run?” he asked Patrice.

Patrice darted away from him so fast it was comical. “Oh yes.” She zoomed off into the underbrush with the eagerness of a pup, never mind watching for danger.

“Patrice,” he growled, and plunged after her.

Jackson began to follow, then he dropped back to the edge of the trees and silently sank to his haunches. Something smelled wrong, even sinister. He sat quietly, letting the breeze drift past his nose, analyzing each scent. He sensed anger, bright and hot, overlaying the excited scents of Patrice and Alain.

The coyote shimmered and became Jackson the man. He looked around with grave, dark eyes, not liking what he felt. The mind he sensed burned with anger on colossal levels.

Jackson put his hands on his hips and looked around with human eyes, but human eyes were limited. Did he sense another? No, that wasn't right. The auras of Patrice and Alain as they chased one another were shot through with rainbow lights while this aura was muddy gray.

Jackson himself wasn't— he was divine, or at least half-divine, as the gods liked to remind him. Half-divine with a strange interest in humans, they teased him. To which Jackson replied that humans and their foibles were tons more interesting than gods with nothing to do but sit around and admire themselves.

They laughed at him but they respected him. Humans feared Coyote sometimes, but he really had their best interests at heart. And demons—they would learn to fear him.

Jackson gently sent his senses to the woods around him, to the snakes curled tightly in holes against the winter cold, to rabbits huddled together for warmth, to a lone hawk roosting high on the side of the cliff. Jackson touched his mind, earning an irritated hawk equivalent of *What?*

"Let me borrow you a moment, my friend," Jackson sent to him.

The hawk snarled a few things about being awakened in the middle of a good dream, then he spread his wings and glided out into the night.

* * * * *

Patrice and Alain ended up at his house before dawn. Alain made Patrice wait to change back, teaching her to control the movement between wolf and human. With practice, he said in his rumbling voice, she'd be able to shift at will, without the crazed burning she felt at the full moon.

Patrice completed the change and stood once more with him on his back porch, the wooden boards cool beneath her feet. She put her arms around his naked body. "I won't feel *all* the need?"

He smiled, silver eyes filled with mirth. "Well, you can hang on to some of it." His hands were warm on her back. "The part that involves me, anyway." He covered her lips with his, sliding his tongue inside to taste every corner of her mouth.

They made love again in his bed, this time slowly and gently without the frenzy of earlier that evening. Patrice fell asleep with his body warm and heavy on hers and woke to him lying full length beside her, his arm across her abdomen.

He opened his eyes as she slid out of bed. "Time for work," she said with reluctance.

His silver gaze held hers in triumph. "You do what you have to. My mate."

She opened her mouth to retort but the warmth in his eyes, the wickedness of his smile sent shivers down her spine. He'd well and truly caught her, but whether she could stay caught remained to be seen.

He showered with her, which slowed her down as she got lost in admiring how the water slicked back his dark hair and beaded on his lashes. Him washing her back in slow, sensual strokes while his erection bumped her backside didn't help either.

She drove down the dirt road faster than she should have and nearly turned the SUV over when she peeled out onto the paved highway. Damn it, she'd forgotten to tell him about the fence again. Well, he'd

have noticed it on his own by now. Funny she'd not seen a vehicle around that might have done it.

She'd better slow down and drive sedately or people would call the station and ask what the emergency was and her boss, a fair but stern man, would call her on the carpet. She liked her job, despite the grueling hours, and she didn't want to lose it just because she sometimes turned into a wolf and had wild sex with another wolf and a coyote. Hell, turning into a wolf could be an advantage—she could become her own drug-sniffing dog.

What am I talking about? she chided herself as she slowed to drive through town. *I'm exhausted and wired at the same time. I've had the best sex of my life, ran like the wind in the middle of the night and learned more in one day than in the rest of my life put together.*

She needed to pull it together so she could function at work. She straightened her shoulders and took deep breaths and concentrated on her driving. But her thoughts slid again and again to the glorious feeling of the night air in her fur as she sprinted through the woods with Alain growling at her heels. They'd lost Jackson, who had probably gone off to do coyote things, but that was all right. She knew, somehow, that he'd be back.

The moon had burnished Alain's black coat when they'd run into open country. When he'd snarled at her to be careful, she'd playfully jumped on him, and they'd wrestled on the ground. Then they'd mated, animal with animal, she just as strong as he was. She remembered Alain's teeth in her neck when the pair of them had given in to lust, but the rest of it was kind of a blur.

Wolf sex. Who knew?

Patrice reached her house, changed quickly into her uniform and drove as fast as she dared to the station. She parked the truck, smoothing her still-damp hair as she leapt out and walked quickly inside.

She was fifteen minutes late. She earned herself some disapproving scowls, but since Patrice had been late a total of once in five years, no one said much.

While she took care of her usual duties, she asked for the file on the death of Thomas Dupree. The file was thin—he'd been found dead in his bed by his next-door neighbor, Howard Weiss. A patrol car had happened to be close enough to answer the call, arriving at the same time as the ambulance. Dupree had been pronounced dead on the scene, and the coroner's report concluded he'd had a heart attack. Case closed—never opened, really.

But what if Alain was right and his father had been poisoned with silver? She knew that if he'd come in here last week claiming his father had been poisoned, she, along with everyone else, would have thought him crazy. But she trusted his instincts now, and Jackson's too.

Even a normal human could be poisoned with silver—high doses of any metal were fatal, and her wolf self shivered. She remembered the sterling silver her mother's best friend had proudly displayed in her dining room back east. Patrice had always thought she didn't like the silver because it was clunky and ugly, but she realized now that the werewolf in her had cringed from it even during her childhood.

She tucked the file in her desk drawer and went out to drive her rounds. Anyone sick enough to give a werewolf silver was dangerous and she hoped Alain took care of himself.

* * * * *

Alain dressed after Patrice left, feeling rested and almost satisfied. Patrice still had doubts about them being together, but Alain had none. She was sweet to agree to help him track down his father's killer, though he would do some investigating on his own.

He'd already talked to the neighbors and traced his father's last day. Thomas Dupree had done some grocery shopping at one of the supermarkets in west Sedona and had visited his nearest neighbor, Howard Weiss. Howard was the same age as Alain's father and had been friends with him for thirty years. The two had drunk a few beers and talked, then Thomas had gone home.

Alain had scented Howard's distress and grief over losing his closest friend, but not one ounce of guilt. Nor had Howard known what Alain's father had done once he'd gone home—Howard was not even aware that Thomas Dupree had been a werewolf.

Thomas and his friend had liked to hang in Cottonwood, at a bar where tourists didn't go. Alain would have to nose around there, too, to find out who else had been in contact with his father, to find out who had known he'd been a werewolf.

"You won't find him by searching that way," Coyote Jackson said behind him.

Alain didn't even jump. He was getting used to Jackson's abrupt comings and goings. The man again wore jeans riding low on his hips, his torso bare, his straight black hair hanging to his waist.

"Why not?" Alain asked.

"Your father's human friends know nothing about his death. They liked him, but they didn't know he was Were. Your dad kept that a big secret."

Alain didn't even feel dismay that his cock was rising, getting hard at the sight of Jackson's body and the memory of the man in his mouth. It should bug him that another man made him horny, but it didn't. Patrice made him just as horny, and he suddenly wished she were here so they could all thretriangle together on the bed.

"He followed you last night," Jackson said calmly. "I felt his madness and his rage. He wants you dead too."

"Why? Who was he?"

Jackson looked glum. "I don't know. I borrowed a hawk to spy for me—I can only turn into a coyote. I spotted him, but then the hawk saw a stray ground squirrel and his instincts took over. Do you know what it feels like to plummet to the ground at seventy miles an hour, hot for blood? I left his mind just in time but the hunter disappeared. Maybe he heard me scream."

"Do you have any idea who he was?"

"I couldn't find anything when I searched the ground where I'd seen him. He'd run off. At least you and Patrice were safe for the rest of the night. I'll visit Patrice today and have her check out the place."

"Screw that. I want to check it out. Take me there."

Jackson put a strong hand on Alain's chest. "No."

“No? Why not? This guy could have killed my father. Do you have any idea what that feels like?”

“Some idea, yes. My mother was mortal, and she was murdered. Long story.”

Alain stopped. “Oh, hey, sorry. But then you do know what I’m going through.”

“I do. I want Patrice because she’s an experienced crime investigator. She knows how to not disturb the scene and how to gather evidence. We should do this right so the guy can be arrested and pay for what he did. It was murder.”

“I know. That’s why I want vengeance.”

Jackson put his hands on his shoulders. The two men stood about the same height, brown eyes staring into silver.

“You’re too emotional about it—with good reason. Let Patrice and me handle this. We’re angry for you, but we can make it right. Vengeance so often goes wrong—take it from me. He will pay, Alain, don’t worry.”

Jackson spoke reason, but Alain was too torn up inside to be reasonable. “Talk to Patrice, but don’t you dare take her out there without me. I need this.”

Jackson’s touch became soothing. He closed the remaining distance between them, his body coming against Alain’s. “You need justice and closure. You need to be safe. You need to trust me.”

“Sure.”

Jackson’s stern expression melted into his playful grin. “You can trust Coyote. I’ve got your best interests at heart.”

He pressed his palm flat against Alain’s chest, under which Alain’s heart beat fast and hard. Strong fingers released the buttons of Alain’s shirt and slid inside to caress bare skin.

Alain swallowed as his body heated. “You’re trying to distract me.”

Coyote’s grin became an incandescent smile. “Maybe. Is it working?”

Chapter Five

Hell yes, it was working. Alain cupped his hands around Jackson’s ass and pulled him tight to him. Their mouths found each other, strong lips and strong tongues tangling in a kiss.

It was sensuality Alain had only dreamed about. A woman’s body—Patrice’s body—was soft and beautiful and delicious. Jackson’s was hard and honed and strong. Alain wouldn’t have to hold back with him.

“Don’t hold back,” Jackson echoed in a low voice. “Do what you want.”

“Are you reading my mind?” Alain said, his lips an inch from Jackson’s.

“Nah. I just know what you’re thinking.”

“I’m wondering why the hell I want you so much. I’ve never been interested in men.”

Jackson swiped Alain’s lips with his tongue. “I’m irresistible, that’s why.”

“Oh, right, that must be it.”

Jackson laughed, low and throaty. “Get your clothes off and we’ll play.”

The shirt, jeans and underwear that Alain had just pulled on ended up in a pile on the floor. Jackson got rid of his jeans, the only thing on his body, and they resumed the tongue play, the two of them standing up with arms around each other.

The difference between kissing Jackson and a woman was that Jackson had a spicy bite he’d never tasted before, plus Alain had never had his cock rubbing against another man’s. It felt damn wonderful, like fucking without fucking. Jackson was as hard as Alain, his cock tight.

“I’ve never done this before,” Alain murmured around kisses.

“That’s obvious. You’ve got a nice ass.”

“You don’t want to fuck me, do you?” Alain couldn’t decide if the idea excited or worried him.

“Of course I want to fuck. I’ll teach you to do me—then I’ll work you up gradually to take me.”

Alain took a step back, his cock so hard it ached. “I have some condoms in the bathroom.”

Jackson shook his head. “I’m a demigod. Divine. No diseases, not me to you or you to me. Though if you’ve got lube, that’s good.”

Alain made himself walk into the bathroom and come back out with a tube of gel he’d bought yesterday in Cottonwood, intending on using it with Patrice. But then Patrice had come over, ripping off her clothes and hotter than fire, and they hadn’t needed it.

If Alain came while thinking about him and Patrice, he wouldn’t need it with Jackson either, he reminded himself. When he walked back into the bedroom Coyote was already on the bed, lying on his back, his thumb on the base of his cock.

“Don’t be afraid,” he said.

“I’m not,” Alain said, holding the tube and watching the other man stroke himself.

“Yes you are. But it’s only me.”

I want this. Alain got on the bed, resting on his knees, the tube of gel in his hand. Jackson smiled at him, a slow, sensual smile that made Alain’s heart beat faster.

“Kneel here,” Jackson said, patting the blanket. “Between my legs.”

Alain positioned himself as directed while Jackson spread his legs and wrapped them around Alain's hips. The move let Alain see all of Jackson's staff from base to tip, the dark hair curling around his sac.

"Nice," Alain said.

"Use the lube."

Alain opened the tube and smeared some on his hand, then swiped it up the length of his own cock. The gel was cold but quickly warmed as he stroked. He had the sudden vision of Patrice doing this for him, slicking him up as Jackson waited on his back, the three of them naked. He swallowed and clenched his fist.

"Now me."

Jackson showed Alain how to lube him and use his fingers to stretch and relax him, things Alain had heard about but never tried. Then Jackson lifted his hips until Alain's tip was right at Jackson's opening.

"Come on in," Jackson invited him, wrapping his legs around Alain's waist. "It's just like fucking a woman. Except completely different."

"You got that right."

Alain's body became slick with sweat, his heart beating in excitement and anticipation. He gently pushed his cock inside and both men groaned with the sensation. Alain had never done this, not even with a woman, never having known one who was into it. He moved gently, knowing he was big, fearing he'd hurt the other man.

Jackson gripped his wrists, his face relaxed in pleasure. "Go on, I can take it. I'm a god."

"A demigod," Alain corrected, voice hoarse. "One who likes sex."

"Why not? It's one of the joys given to humans—compensation for not being immortal. Some demigods pretend to hold themselves above it, but I love all kinds of sex, male and female. I don't have to restrict myself to one or the other. I enjoy it all."

"Lucky you."

His eyes darkened. "Oh, I am lucky. You can't hurt me, Alain. I want you filling me."

That was good, because Alain wanted to fill him. He laid his hands across Jackson's hips and thrust all the way in.

Alain stilled as astonishing sensations poured over him. Heat and tightness and incredible joy. Maybe it was Jackson's semi-divineness that made Alain shout with ecstasy. He threw his head back, feeling the ends of his hair tickling his back, feeling Jackson squeeze him hard. Jackson's balls rubbed the base of his cock and damn that felt good.

"Stroke me," his lover said.

Alain grasped Jackson's staff, his hand still slick with lube. Jackson's groan was as heartfelt as Alain's.

“That’s it,” Jackson breathed. “You’re good.”

“I only know what I’d like.”

“You keep on doing what you’d like and I’ll enjoy it.”

Both hands around Jackson’s cock now, he moved his hips a little to pump inside. Jackson lay back, his black hair spilling across the bed, his sculpted chest, washboard abs and dark areoles sexy as hell.

“I’m fucking a man,” Alain said, trying to wrap his brain around the wonderful things he felt.

“Demigod.”

“I love it.” He stroked and twisted Jackson’s big cock in his hands, fondling the tip, rubbing the sides. “I think I love you.”

“Damn, I hope so.”

“I’m going to come.”

Jackson tightened his grip on Alain’s arms. “Not yet. I want to feel you a little longer.”

Maybe it was the coyote’s divine powers, but Alain felt his pulse slow, the urge to climax recede a little. It still felt damn good, but manageable now instead of a frenzy.

He lost track of how long they lingered there, tangled together, Jackson encouraging him as Alain filled him and fucked him. It was a good, long time, both men reveling in the pleasure of it. When Alain came at last, it was the most intense orgasm of his life.

The shuddering and shaking went on a while and finally Alain pulled out and fell heavily to the bed next to Jackson. He stroked Jackson’s cock a little longer and seconds later, Jackson climaxed.

They lay together, both silent, as the breeze outside jingled the wind chimes Alain’s mother had loved so many years ago. A mockingbird called from somewhere down the creek, mixed with the peeping of finches in the birch trees. Jackson kissed him, lips soft and warm.

“You love Patrice,” Jackson murmured.

“It’s a wolf thing, the need to mate. Probably on her part too. Wolves mate for life.”

“So it had better be love. Don’t worry, it will be.”

“I wish I knew what the hell you were talking about,” Alain said. “I haven’t been able to think straight since you or Patrice showed up. I can’t believe I just fucked you.”

Jackson’s dark eyes filled with mirth. “Did you like it?”

“Hell yes.” Alain threaded his fingers through the man’s silky black hair. “I even want to do it again. But I want Patrice. I’m confusing myself.”

“No you’re not. You want her because she’s hot and you’re falling in love with her, and you want me

because I make your sexual fantasies come true. She's your love; I'm the sex toy."

Alain let his touch rove down Jackson's body. "I think it's more than that."

"Maybe." Jackson sat up and reached for his jeans. "Next stop, Patrice. I'll give her your love."

"You're leaving already? You haven't even promised to call me yet."

Jackson laughed. "I should have gone right to Patrice, but you distracted me." He swiped his tongue over Alain's mouth. "A fun distraction."

"Will you tell her?"

Jackson's eyes widened. "About this? She'll know. Hmm, but maybe I could demonstrate. She's your mate but..."

Alain thought about that. "I'm betting she wouldn't be able to resist you the same way I couldn't. But if there's any fucking, I want to be there."

"I think I can arrange that." Jackson leaned down, brushed Alain's lips with his again, then rose from the bed and glided out of the room.

Alain lay still for a moment, liking the warmth of the bed and the sated feeling in his body. He yawned and got out of bed, starting to tell Jackson he could give him a lift into town. When he entered the living room, it was empty.

"Jackson?"

He hadn't heard the door open or close. He walked to the window and peered out, hands on hips. He didn't see a soul in the yard or on the drive, no tall, dark-haired man following the creek path.

Alain pulled back into the middle of the living room. "I wish I knew how he did that."

He shook his head then went to dress and put his own plans into action.

* * * * *

Patrice closed the thin file she'd looked at twenty times, no wiser as to what really happened to Alain's father. The file held a few cursory reports and the computer files held only scanned copies of those.

She knew Jackson had entered the room before she even turned from the computer. Every sense went on alert as he leaned over the desk, his biceps working, and smiled down at her. She smelled the scent of sex, Jackson and Alain all mixed up, and she grew wet and warm.

"What were you and Alain—?" She broke off, her hands stealing to cup her breasts. "I still can't control this. Maybe you should go."

His smile for some reason calmed some of the wildness inside her. "Later, sweetheart, I'll give you every detail. Right now you need to take me out in that SUV of yours so I can show you something."

Did she ask for an explanation or even one good reason why she should go with him? No, she just

grabbed her keys, signed herself out and led him to the truck.

* * * * *

Alain locked up the house, wondering why Jackson hadn't wanted him to go with him to see Patrice. It was his father dead, poisoned by someone who knew all about werewolves. Jackson had seen something out in the canyons last night—why the reluctance to tell Alain what he'd found?

The man's seduction had effectively stopped Alain in his proposed investigation. Why? So Alain wouldn't be upset, or for some more sinister reason? He felt nothing sinister from the coyote-man but that didn't mean Jackson couldn't mask his true nature. He was a demigod after all.

Alain didn't have the police connections Patrice did, but he had one advantage. His father had been liked and respected in town, and the locals accepted Alain as one of them. He would have an in on the gossip and piece together what they knew.

After he showered and dressed, he decided to continue his plans, despite Jackson's discouragement. He went back to see Howard Weiss, his father's friend.

Howard was a well-muscled man in his sixties with gray-white hair. On a shelf in the living room was a photo Alain had seen here last time, of Alain's father and Howard in hiking gear.

"I never saw it coming," he said glumly as he handed Alain a bottle of beer. "There wasn't anything wrong with Tom's heart. We'd just come back from a three-day hike through some slot canyons up in Utah. We climbed all over the place and there wasn't a thing wrong with him."

"Was there anything different about his last months or this last year?" Alain asked. "Someone new hanging around him?"

Howard looked puzzled, then he laughed. "There was Gina. He didn't tell you about her? Maybe he was embarrassed, at his age falling in love with a woman twenty years younger than he was. I liked her, though."

Alain was surprised, but not unduly shocked. Alain's mother had died when Alain had been three and he'd seen his father date before. None of the women ever lasted, but his father had never been secretive about it.

"Gina?" he prompted.

"Gina Wood. Gorgeous lady, long black hair, liked to hike. I have a picture of her around somewhere." Howard put his beer aside and got up to rummage in a drawer. He handed Alain a photo of Thomas Dupree with his arm around a dark-haired woman in her forties. She was pretty in an I-live-to-exercise way.

"Too bad about what happened," Howard said, sitting back down. He shook his head. "I told him she was too pretty for him."

"What did happen? I don't know anything about this."

"Like I said, Tom was embarrassed. She dumped him. She went back to Chicago and never called, never wrote, nothing. He talked about going up there and finding her, but he never made definite plans.

He was trying to suck it up, but I know it hurt.”

“She’s from Chicago? Do you have a phone number for her?”

“No, but your dad probably did somewhere. Unless he trashed everything that reminded him of her.”

Alain asked a few more questions and gradually got the whole story. Gina Wood had come down to Sedona from Chicago for an extended holiday. She was a copywriter who liked to take sporty vacations—backpacking, rock-climbing, sailing. She met Thomas Dupree, they hit it off and she moved in with him.

Howard thought they had a good thing going and was happy for his friend, then all of a sudden, Gina up and left. One day, while Thomas was out, Gina packed a bag and took off, leaving a lot of her things behind. Thomas was brokenhearted. A couple of weeks later, Thomas died. Life sucked sometimes.

Alain left Howard’s house both angry and hopeful. He went back home and scoured his father’s house for any mention of Gina Wood.

* * * * *

The SUV rattled over washerboard roads, bouncing so much that Patrice and Jackson couldn’t talk. He’d shout a direction and she’d do her best to follow it, but that was it.

Jackson directed her to drive off the road onto a small, dry track that ended at a wash. She stopped the SUV, set the brake and shut off the engine.

She sat back to catch her breath. “This is as far as this thing can go.”

“Not much farther. We can walk.”

Patrice slid out of the driver’s seat, depositing the keys in her pocket. Jackson started off at a jog, his lithe form moving down the dry wash at a brisk pace. Patrice was in good enough shape to keep up with him but she was panting and wheezing by the time he stopped.

Jackson wasn’t even out of breath. “This is what I saw.”

Patrice put her hands on her hips and surveyed the area. Juniper trees overhung the wash from a steep hill, but among them was a man-built blind—a hunter’s blind. People did hunt deer in the wild, but this area was strictly regulated, a wildlife preserve with no hunting allowed.

“Someone was watching last night, waiting for us to appear,” Jackson said.

Patrice climbed down behind the blind. Nothing had been left, not an empty beer can or a cigarette stub or a torn piece of clothing that could help her identify the hunter. At least Patrice the woman couldn’t, but Patrice the wolf might be able to.

When she came back up, she found Jackson naked on the bank, his clothes in a neat pile. She stared, open-mouthed, at the perfection of his body. The man was gorgeous, almost as good as Alain. She remembered tasting his cock, her tongue and Alain’s swirling around each other and around Jackson, and she blushed.

He grinned at her. "Come on, strip down and join me."

"I can change during the day?"

"You can change any time. You control the wolf, Patrice."

Patrice wasn't sure about that. She only knew that every time the moon showed up these days, she got itchy and bitchy and incredibly horny.

The only relief was to change to the wolf, run as hard as she could and have sex with Alain. No slow, sweet lovemaking, but hard, heavy, panting sex with not one but two men. Two weeks ago it never would have occurred to her to do the things she'd done the past few nights, but now it seemed natural and right.

At least they were way back in the wilderness with no camping and no hiking trails, no one to see her. She kicked off her shoes and stripped off her uniform, folding everything and laying it on top of Jackson's clothes.

"I can't leave my gun and my ID," she argued, ignoring Jackson's appreciative gaze on her body. "First rule. I lose my gun, I lose my job."

Jackson shrugged, muscles rippling. "I'll strap it to your wolf body for you."

Patrice studied him, liking his tight body and long black hair. Black hair curled across his chest and arched in a line that pointed downward to his long, thick cock. A beautiful man, finely crafted.

"What tribe are you from?" she asked him. "I've been trying to decide if you're Navajo or Yavapai or even Apache, maybe from around Payson."

"I'm from all tribes, sweetheart," Jackson answered. "I protect them all. Even you whites, though you don't always see me or believe."

"Oh, I believe in you," Patrice said wholeheartedly. She took a breath, readying herself for the crazy feeling of the change. "I haven't had much practice at this. I don't know if I can control it yet."

"Find the wolf inside you. Like Alain said, you become it, but you control it. It is part of you, but only a part."

Easy for them to say. Alain was already comfortable with his wolf self and Jackson was a demigod. They didn't feel the tingling, wild urges that threatened to rip her apart if she gave in to them—and to rip her apart if she didn't. Of course, men didn't understand PMS either.

She closed her eyes, liking the hot-cold combination of sun and wind on her skin, and looked for the wolf.

Chapter Six

Alain found Gina Wood's suitcase half full of clothes in a corner of his father's garage. It had been placed neatly in a storage cabinet, as though his father hadn't wanted to see Gina's things but couldn't

bring himself to throw them away.

Alain found a postcard of Sedona stuffed into a pocket of the bag, already addressed but never stamped and mailed. He leaned against the car and stared at the photo of Coffee Pot rock, red and stark against a blue sky.

Why would the woman write a postcard to someone in Chicago if she planned to leave right away? And why leave the postcard behind, plus souvenir shirts of different sizes, obviously meant as gifts?

To leave for Chicago, Gina would need a car, either to make the long three-day drive or to go down the hill to Phoenix to catch a plane. She hadn't stolen or borrowed Thomas' car, because it was here under Alain's butt.

She'd have to rent, which meant getting a lift into Sedona, or maybe all the way to Phoenix, and people would remember that. They'd remember if they saw her out on the county road hitching too. But according to Howard, no one had seen her leave.

Alain looked again at the photo Howard had given him of the two men side by side in the slot canyon. Who had taken the photo—Gina? Slot canyons were remote and hard to reach—not a lot of tourists would be happening by to snap a picture. Conclusion, Gina had probably gone with them.

Howard and Thomas had been best friends, but what could drive friends apart? A pretty woman who liked to hike and climb as much as they did? Perhaps instead of sharing her, like Jackson and Alain with Patrice, the two men had become rivals.

Come to think of it, Alain's mind whispered, Alain and Jackson weren't sharing Patrice. Patrice and Jackson were sharing Alain.

He shook off the distraction, grabbed the suitcase and carried everything inside. It didn't take long on the Internet to find a phone number that matched the name and address on the postcard, and then Alain had a very interesting conversation with Gina Wood's best friend in Chicago, a woman named Sandra.

No, Gina hadn't returned home. She'd kept in touch, promising to bring gifts from out there in the Wild West for Sandra's kids. Sandra told him Gina had met a man and thought it might be the real thing. Better than the first man Gina had met out there, a real jerk.

Alain perked up. First man? Did Gina tell her his name?

No, Sandra said. She hadn't mentioned it.

Alain hung up the phone, his body burning with frustration. The wolf inside him wanted to tear up the town until he found out what happened to this Gina, and what she had to do with his father's death. The cooler side of him told him to call Patrice and tell her what he'd discovered.

But Patrice had gone out, the dispatcher informed him, and she wasn't answering her radio. Alain hung up, his fingers changing to claws in front of his eyes.

He ripped off his clothes as the black wolf took over, then he sprang from the back porch and sprinted down the path, heading west across the creek.

* * * * *

“I’ve smelled it before,” Patrice said, sitting on her wolf’s haunches in the middle of the hunter’s blind. “But I can’t remember where.”

She and Jackson had followed the scent for a mile or so before losing it at a wash running thick with runoff. They’d returned to the blind after that to see what else they might turn up.

“As a wolf?” Jackson, the coyote, asked her.

“No. At least, I don’t think so. The last couple days have been a blur.”

“They’ve been eventful for you.”

That was an understatement. “Do I love Alain?” she asked, half to herself. “Or is it just the change? I’ve never met anyone like him.” She thought of his silver eyes, the way he gentled himself for her, his deep, wonderful voice. If she wasn’t already in love with him, she could fall in love.

“You are meant to be with him,” Jackson said. “You’ll love him.”

“You’re sure, are you?”

“Of course I’m sure. I’m Coyote. If I have to have sex with the pair of you until you’re bonded, I will.”

“What a sacrifice for you.”

“It’s a tough job, but someone’s got to do it. I’ll fix the fence though, that’s no trouble.”

“The fence?” Patrice stared at him, pieces falling into place. “You knocked down Alain’s fence? Why?”

“So you’d see it and drive out to tell him about it. I couldn’t wait forever for you to run into each other again.”

“You’ve been trying to get us together?”

Jackson shifted back into his human form and Patrice, after a moment’s concentration, did too. It was getting easier, though she still had to brace herself.

Jackson went on, “Like I said, you belong together. But you’re both independent and busy. I’ve had to work fast.”

“You were with Alain this afternoon,” Patrice said. “When you came into my office, I smelled it on you, both of you together.” Herquim tightened. “You never told me what you were doing.”

“I will now.”

Jackson told stories very well. He described every touch and every taste shared between himself and Alain better than the best erotic novel. By the time he finished, ending with Alain and him kissing on the bed, Patrice was quivering with need, her hands cupping her breasts, herquim hot.

Jackson came to her. He gently moved her hands and rubbed her swollen areoles for her, fingers rolling the points until they tingled. She moved against him, liking his strength and the sexy smell of him and his

dark, dark eyes.

She gasped when he got to his knees and put his mouth on her quim, his tongue flicking over her clit. The friction was wonderful. She wanted Alain but she wanted this too, her fingers in Jackson's black hair, his mouth doing incredible things between her legs.

She thrust her aching clit against him as he suckled and nibbled and licked, her body tense for every second of enjoyment. Just when she thought he'd let her release, he backed off, a wicked twinkle in his eyes. Then he put his mouth to her again until she screamed to the empty sky.

Finally he stood up and grinned at her, wiping his mouth with his fingers.

"Why did you do that?" she asked, breathless.

"You looked like you needed to relax. Feel better?"

She did. The hormones that raged through her from the call of the wolf had been sated somewhat. She realized he'd wound her up and brought her back down in order to help her.

"Thank you," she breathed.

"My pleasure," he rumbled. "Later, we'll get with Alain and put it all together."

Patrice had a sudden vision of herself spread on Alain's bed, Jackson suckling her as he had just now and Alain behind him, filling Jackson as Jackson had described. She let out a final, frustrated moan and pressed her hand between her legs.

Jackson kissed her, his lips gentle, but he looked pleased with himself.

* * * * *

Alain hunted for a while, following the canyons, sheer red cliffs covered with gnarled piñons rising to either side of him. A few mountain goats scrambled to get out of his way, but he wasn't hunting them today.

After a time he stopped running, trotted to a halt, then sank panting to his haunches. Jackson was probably right—he needed logic to solve this puzzle, not anger. He needed Patrice. In more ways than one.

Fucking her had been good, opening emotions that he'd never opened before. He'd thought at first it was because she was his mate—naturally he'd feel protective and also physically needy for her.

He was starting to think it was a little more than that.

Plus he'd had sex with a man. Well, Jackson wasn't just a man. He was a god, which maybe made things different.

Whatever it was had been good, and not something he wanted to keep secret from Patrice. He wanted her to know about it, he wanted her to join in. Damn, testosterone hadn't raged through his body like this since he'd been eighteen.

He made his way back home, crossed the creek in deep shadows and shifted back once inside. He had to take a cold shower and drink about a gallon of water before he called Patrice.

* * * * *

Jackson and Patrice dressed, then Patrice drove back into town, neither of them speaking much. Jackson whistled and looked out of the window at the scenery while Patrice concentrated on keeping the SUV on the narrow roads.

When they reached the station forty-five minutes later, Susan Gonzalez looked up at her. "Someone was trying to reach you—said it was important. I radioed, but you were out of range."

"I was investigating an illegal hunter's blind," Patrice explained quickly. "You need to send someone out to the big wash west of Vultee Arch Road to clear it up. Who was it?"

"That Alain Dupree who moved out to his father's place. He didn't leave a message."

Patrice dove into her office to call Alain back.

"Is Jackson with you?" he asked before he even said hello.

"Yes. Why?"

Alain's voice went low and gruff. "I need you."

"I'm done at four," she answered breathlessly.

"I found out a few things." He paused. "Plus I'm about to explode."

"Me too." Patrice sank into her office chair, resisting the urge to rub herself where Jackson had licked her. "I can't wait to see you."

"Say, four-thirty?"

"I'll rush right over." She meant it.

"Bring Jackson."

"Oh, you betcha." She hesitated a moment then said, "He told me. Everything."

She could hear his quick breathing, her werewolf senses sharper now. She could even hear the rapid thud-thud of his pulse against the phone. "I'm glad," he said.

She wanted to tell him how much the story had turned her on, but she couldn't risk Susan overhearing. "So am I."

"Four-thirty, then."

"I'll be there."

They both hung up. Patrice sat back and heaved a long sigh.

She tried to bury herself in the mountain of papers on her desk, but caught herself every ten minutes with her palm pressing hard to the warmth between her legs.

The lust-crazed thoughts wouldn't stop, even when she wrote her mundane report on the marijuana crop she'd found along a wash. The innocent-looking, elderly woman who'd grown it seemed surprised when Patrice went out to arrest her.

Patrice shook her head, finished the last report at four on the dot and high-tailed it out to her SUV.

Jackson was waiting for her.

"I was sniffing around while you worked," he said as they headed up the highway toward Alain's turnoff.

"Smell anything?"

He grinned. "Two horny werewolves. Your scent is all over the place."

"Does it ever stop? This awful need?"

"No." He leaned against the door and folded his arms. "But you can learn to control it. In fact, you have to, or it will eat you alive. Alain controls it, but barely. The two of you are driving each other crazy."

"Have you learned to control it?"

"No. But I'm not a Were. The benefit of being a god."

"Are their drawbacks?" she asked.

He sobered. "Yes."

She waited for him to tell her what, but he remained silent for the rest of the journey to Alain's.

* * * * *

Alain tried to sit calmly in the living room while they talked about what they'd discovered today. He'd built a fire in the fieldstone fireplace, the weather at last chilly enough for it, and the wood smoke smelled pleasant.

It couldn't mask Patrice's scent, her lovely female pheromones, which in turn couldn't mask the scent of Jackson all over her. She was looking at him with hungry eyes and he knew that despite his shower, Jackson's scent was probably on him too.

"I think we'd better have sex," Jackson said quietly. "Before you two lose all control."

"Good idea," Patrice said fervently.

She stood up and came to Alain. The dominance of the male wolf to the female flared up in him and he had to make himself stay still and see what she would do.

When she sat down on his lap, his wolf side wanted to put her on the floor and rip off her clothes, but

the Alain side of him stopped it. He liked that she touched him so gently, her fingers sliding under his shirt.

He kissed her. He loved the taste of her mouth, the heat of it. He'd been in such a frenzy before that he hadn't had time to simply savor her.

"That's right, my friends," Jackson said softly. "Enjoy each other."

Alain nipped her lips and she laughed. Jackson slid onto the sofa beside them, his warm bulk leaning on Alain. He kissed Patrice's mouth and Alain's too.

Alain unbuttoned and unzipped his pants. Patrice got a gleam in her eye, and she slid from the sofa to her knees.

He expected her to pull his pants open and close her soft mouth around his cock. He braced himself for it, wanting it, then opened his eyes with a snap when he instead felt cold metal around one wrist.

Patrice grinned up at him. "I brought my handcuffs."

Real ones, not pretend things from an adult store. He looked at the steel cuff around his broad wrist and then at the other cuff around Jackson's. She'd handcuffed the two men together.

"Shit," he whispered.

Jackson was laughing as he unfastened and pulled down his own jeans. "Told you she was fun."

Patrice pushed Alain's pants open and helped him slide the waistband of his underwear over his hips. Then she lowered her head and licked Alain's cock.

"Oh no," Alain moaned. He lifted his right hand to tangle in Patrice's hair, but it was hampered by the cuff. He let his wrist drop and Jackson's hand landed on his thigh.

Patrice sat back on her heels and openly stared at the two long cocks displayed for her. "Yum," she said.

Alain shifted his hips a little, seeking her mouth. This was killing him.

Patrice smiled, eyes feral. She bent over Jackson this time and took his cock into her mouth, lips moving as she suckled. The sight of the other man's cock pressing against her cheek from the inside made him want to come right there.

She turned back to Alain. He could smell Jackson's pheromones, the man hotter and hotter as Patrice happily licked and suckled Alain's cock.

He couldn't stand it anymore. He got off the sofa fast but he was still locked to Jackson, who came up with him. Alain's jeans fell around his ankles, and Patrice looked delighted.

"Don't move," she said. "Stand just there."

Alain and Jackson were facing each other over her. Patrice licked Alain's cock, then turned her head and licked Jackson's.

“I just love this girl,” Jackson chuckled.

She knelt back on her heels. “Stand closer together.”

Jackson laughed again. “I think I know what she wants.”

He put his hand on Alain’s shoulder, and Alain put his hands on Jackson’s. They clasped their locked-together hands then moved until the tips of their cocks touched. Alain was breathing hard, the wolf in him trying to rise. He caressed Jackson’s tight shoulder, resisting the urge to lean over and kiss him.

He felt Patrice’s tongue snake from his balls all the way down his cock, then leave to curl around Jackson.

I just love this girl too.

The buildup inside him was incredible. He wasn’t in her—hell, he wasn’t even touching her—but the intensity of what she did took his breath away. Too soon he started to come. A drop of seed trickled to Jackson’s cock, then the wild wolf rose inside him and he changed.

Patrice shrieked in surprise and jumped backward as Alain’s wolf self ripped through his clothes. His black wolf was huge, dwarfing the living room, but his paw was slim enough that he could pull out of the cuff.

To his wolf vision, Patrice’s body was only the outer shell of her. He sense her wolf imprinted over her, and he wanted it—his mate. He lowered his head to her, lips pulled back in a snarl.

“You’d better change,” Jackson said, catching the dangling cuff.

Patrice nodded and began to pull off her clothes. Too slow. Alain seized her shirt in his teeth and ripped it.

“Nice doggy,” Patrice said, wide-eyed. She patted Alain’s head. “Give me a second.”

She toed off her shoes then shimmied out of her jeans and underwear while Alain tried to contain himself. He smelled the change as well as saw it, feeling the electricity of it along his fur.

Patrice shifted relatively quickly—she was learning. Her body shuddered as it fought the shift for a moment, then her face elongated and sleek fur rippled over her. She was an elegant silver wolf, her green eyes like the palest jade.

Mine.

He snarled but held himself back from doing more than nuzzling her. Patrice took the initiative, brushing her body along his, filling him with her scent. She rolled over onto her back and nipped playfully at his throat.

His wolf and his lust took over, and things got a little blurry. Dimly he heard Jackson say, “I’ll leave you kids to it. Wolves don’t share their mates.”

He had that right. Alain growled at the coyote until the man walked out the front door, chuckling. “Have

fun, now,” he threw over his shoulder, then he was gone.

Chapter Seven

Their wolf mating was wild and crazed, the whole thing a bit fuzzy to Patrice.

A bit fuzzy, she laughed to herself as she woke up on the bed.

She was human again, and nude, cuddled against Alain’s very human back. Without turning, Alain grasped her hand and pulled it around his waist.

“I bet we shed a lot,” she said, feeling deep contentment. “All over your living room rug.”

“I have a vacuum cleaner.”

She chuckled. “Your neighbors must wonder about all your dog hair, when you don’t have a dog.”

“The neighbors don’t come over,” he murmured. “At least not now. I don’t know what my father told them.”

A hint of sadness broke through her contentment. She would not be here with him if Alain’s father hadn’t died. She squeezed his hand, sympathetic to his grief.

“He was lonely,” she said. “Like you. And me.”

“Wolves are lonely. It’s the way things are, until they find that special mate.”

Patrice rose on her elbow. “I thought wolves ran in packs. They always do on nature shows anyway.”

“Those are true wolves and they’re dying out. They never got used to humans like coyotes did.”

“Poor things. I remember the experiment to reintroduce wolves to southern Arizona a while back. Within a few years, most of them were dead, many shot. The ranchers just don’t like them—say they attack the cattle.”

“Werewolves don’t. But we don’t always breed true and that’s how you make more werewolves, you know—mating. It’s not the werewolf bite. It’s too bad that myth isn’t real, because there are so few of us anymore.”

“Maybe that’s why we crave all this sex,” Patrice suggested. “The need to continue the species.”

He made a noise of amusement. “Maybe.”

“This Gina Wood isn’t a werewolf?”

“No. Her scent was human, not Were. I’m betting my dad just liked her. They shared the same interests.”

“And now she’s missing.” Patrice stroked the tattoo on Alain’s arm while she thought. “She left not long

before your father was killed. She might have made it look like she'd gone, then came back and killed him."

"Then why not take her suitcases?"

"To make it look like she was running away from him?" That explanation didn't seem satisfactory to her detective instincts. "Or else she's dead, her body waiting to be found."

Alain turned over. "Poor lady."

"I'll file a report on her, list her as a missing person and ask for a search. The county sheriff will get involved in that—they have posses that will ride out into the desert."

Alain grinned, silver eyes glinting. "Posses. Like the wild west."

"It's still the wild west out here in many ways. People carry guns legally—a cop has to watch her back, even in a small town."

"Now I'm here to watch your back."

Warm feeling flooded her. "And I can watch yours."

He kissed her, the kiss of a man in the afterglow of lovemaking. And maybe wanting to follow up with more.

Patrice had another idea how to find Gina Wood, if she could be found, but she decided they could talk about it later.

* * * * *

Jackson returned when the sun was sinking, twilight sliding a blanket of stars over Sedona. Patrice loved the night sky, the dry air revealing thousands of stars overhead. In the cities, light pollution swallowed all but the brightest stars—out here they clustered thick and white across the sky.

Alain and Patrice were back on the sofa, kissing, when Jackson came in. They hadn't dressed, but at the moment Patrice felt the restless pull of the wolf rather than the need to mate. She could sense Alain's wolf pulling him too.

"You made a joke before about me being a sniffer-dog for the police," she said to Jackson.

Jackson smiled. "That's true."

"I thought I'd try it for real. Get a good scent of Gina's clothes and then track her."

"I tried to pick up her scent already today," Alain said. "I went out hunting while you were working."

Patrice blushed, remembering what she and Jackson had done while "working".

"I know, but I know specific places to start looking. We get a lot of smuggling across the deserts, with remote houses used as drug pick-up points. They would be great places to hide someone, and I know where most of them are. Plus we can return to the hunter's blind Jackson found, see what scents are

there.”

“It’s worth a shot.” Jackson shrugged.

As Jackson undressed, Patrice left the couch and walked onto the front porch, feeling the wolf yearn for moonlight. Behind her she heard Jackson and Alain making noises of approval at her bare backside.

“We’d better get hunting,” Jackson said. “Or we’ll be here all night.”

Alain only growled again.

Patrice knew she’d already become part of the wolf because a week ago she’d never have dreamed of walking outside naked. Even knowing Alain’s place was remote and she’d have time to duck back inside if anyone came down the drive, she wouldn’t have done it. People just didn’t go outside naked.

Now it felt natural to walk out under the starlit sky and stretch her arms overhead like she was embracing it.

Alain, now the huge black wolf, trotted past her. She concentrated, changed and followed him.

Alain led her to the garage where he’d found Gina’s things. Jackson remained in human form long enough to open the door for them, then sort through Gina’s clothes and let them get a good sniff. Once they were outside again, he sank down into his coyote body.

“Let’s run,” he said.

They crossed the creek and headed through the juniper and pines, the pungent scents comforting. Patrice easily climbed the faint trails, keeping up with Jackson and Alain. Her newfound strength amazed her.

They at last emerged onto a desert mesa, a flat-topped hill with steep sides. The long, narrow mesa ran for miles, a perfect place for two wolves and a coyote to go flat out. In the dark, isolated from the town, they could let loose.

Patrice led them down into another canyon to a tiny, remote house where she’d made drug busts before. She knew even before they went in that Gina had not been there. The place smelled of dust and desertion—no humans had entered the place in months.

She took them to several more houses with the same result before they doubled back and found the hunter’s blind. Again, Patrice smelled only one human—male, she thought—and Alain confirmed it.

“I’ve smelled this before.” Alain sat on his haunches, moonlight rippling in his black fur. His eyes, as silver as the stars, narrowed as he thought. “I think I remember where.” He rose, shook himself, then led them off.

They trotted and loped back toward civilization, the night crisp and refreshing. Patrice ran hard on Alain’s heels, excited that they might have found a lead. Jackson brought up the rear, humming and singing snatches of songs—all in coyote. Far away across the hills, coyotes yipped in answer.

Alain skirted a county road, staying in the shadow of juniper and scrub. Patrice heard the heartbeats of rabbits huddled together and the swift wings of doves that fluttered out of their way.

Alain leapt a barbed wire fence, easily clearing it, then turned to wait for them. Patrice eyed the barbs at the top of the fence, dubious about her own jumping skills. She hesitated until Jackson nipped her rear, then she sprang over with a squeal.

Chortling, Jackson launched himself up and over, his four legs spread as though he flew. He let out a howl of glee as he touched down and Alain growled him to silence.

“This is the Circle T ranch,” Patrice said, looking around. “Owned by a man called Dunstan.”

“Does anyone else live here besides him?”

“I don’t think so,” Patrice said. “But I don’t know how many people work here. I mostly go places where there’s trouble and I’ve never been called out here.”

Alain looked thoughtful and didn’t answer.

They trotted across the range toward the outbuildings tucked in a hollow of the grasslands. The cattle were on the other side of the rolling hills, but Patrice’s new wolf senses smelled and heard their worry. She wondered if they’d feel better if she told them she was vegetarian.

Arizona didn’t have huge barns like in the Midwest because the weather was never severely cold. Cattle were free-range or kept in shaded pens. But Arizona ranchers did have smaller barns where they stored hay plus sheds in which to keep equipment. Alain sniffed hard around these, his nose nearly glued to their foundations.

“He’s been here.”

Patrice smelled it too, faintly, and Jackson agreed. She also smelled Gina Wood. Her hackles rose excitedly. “They’re here.”

Alain sat down, giving her a severe look. “You’re new at this. The scent is faint—all we can say for certain is that they *were* here at one time.”

“Oh.” Patrice paced along the wall, sniffing, trying to still her disappointment. Her wolf wanted to find the killer and grab him by the throat.

The thought made her stop. The Patrice she knew was a protector, not a killer. But knowing someone had deliberately taken Alain’s father from him made her anger rise. Wolves were lonely by nature and to lose another so close... She knew it had been horrible for Alain.

She nuzzled Alain, whining a little, and stroked herself against him. He nipped gently at her.

Jackson sat back, watching as though knowing what Patrice had to work through.

“We need to get inside,” Alain rumbled.

He trotted around to the front of the hay barn, then rose on his legs and changed to Alain the man. He tried the door and found it locked. Still in human form, he walked around the hay barn, then moved to the shed. Both were locked up tight.

Patrice enjoyed the sensual way he moved, naked and unashamed. She noticed Jackson watching him too.

Alain put his hands on his hips and looked at the house a little way from the barn. No lights shone in the windows, the occupants either asleep or out. Dropping to all fours as a wolf again, he led them across the dry scrub, moving as silently as a ghost.

“The scent is fainter here,” he said.

The three of them halted in the shadow of a large juniper, out of sight of the windows. A rancher spotting two wolves and a coyote in his yard would call animal control—or use his own animal control in the form of a shotgun. Regular bullets wouldn’t kill a wolf, so legends said, but Patrice had no interest in seeing how badly it hurt before her body healed.

Patrice circled Alain, then Jackson, unable to keep still. “Are we going in?”

“Slowly,” Jackson said, his tone calm. “This man might be dangerous, or he might be innocent. Both scents are old—both people might be far away.”

“Patrice and I can easily break in,” Alain said.

Jackson rolled his coyote eyes. “Wolves. No sense of subtlety. You’d break the locks and leave a mess, and the whole town would be in an uproar. Patrice might even be called in to investigate herself.”

Patrice shook herself. “We can’t sit here wondering if he knows anything about Gina or Alain’s father.”

Jackson grinned. “That’s why you’re lucky you have a wily coyote with you. I’ll check the house.”

Before the other two could stop him, he’d crept softly to the porch. He rose as silent as smoke to his human form, then the shadows swallowed him and he was gone.

Patrice blinked, wondering if she’d seen right. She still wasn’t used to the way he seemed to appear and disappear at will.

She leaned against Alain, taking comfort in his fur and his breathing. The moon slid out from behind a cloud, and she lifted her face, loving the silver light that filled her with power.

“Nothing to report,” Jackson said from beside her.

Patrice jumped and barely stifled her yelp. “I wish you wouldn’t *do* that.”

Alain growled, giving the coyote a put out stare. “What did you find?”

“One man, fast asleep. Dreaming dreams of the innocent. No woman hiding or being hidden.”

“The outbuildings then?” Patrice asked.

Jackson shook his head. “I don’t think so. There’s also a big “sold” sign on the front drive. Could be Mr. Dunstan is long gone.”

Patrice sat down, frustrated. “I thought it was such a good lead.”

“It still might be,” Alain said. “It’s a place to start, anyway. Gina Wood and whoever was in that hunter’s blind were here. We can try to pick up the scent and follow it again.”

“The sleeping man might know something,” Patrice suggested. “I have an easier way to get in and ask him than tearing up his house, though. I, friendly local policewoman, can come up here tomorrow to inquire about a disturbance in the night.”

“What disturbance?” Alain asked. “If he’s not innocent, he’ll be suspicious if he never heard anything about a disturbance.”

His words were drowned by a sudden howl. Jackson broke from the cover of the trees and began yipping and howling and yowling.

“What the hell?” Alain began.

The nervous cattle on the far side of the pasture started to panic. A light went on in the house.

Jackson kept on making noise, even as Alain and Patrice ran past him, Alain swearing under his breath.

Jackson swept past them at a dead run, laughing like a maniac. “There’s your disturbance. This is fun.”

Behind them, a shot rang out. It went wide, but Patrice yelped and doubled her speed. She cleared the barbed wire fence with a couple of feet to spare and scrambled down into the wash on the other side.

Jackson and Alain caught up to her, then Alain turned on Jackson and snarled like the dominant wolf he was. Jackson looked back at him with a grin, his tongue lolling. Nothing submissive about Jackson.

“Coyotes,” Alain muttered as he turned and trotted away.

* * * * *

Alain didn’t like Patrice going out to the Dunstan place alone the next day, even with her gun. But Patrice convinced him that she’d get on better if she went in her official capacity, which meant civilians didn’t get to ride along.

That didn’t stop both Alain and Jackson from lurking around the perimeter of the ranch when she was there. The two of them kept Patrice in sight as she talked to the man on the porch.

But while their conversation was long, there was no tension in it. They were too far away to be heard, even with werewolf hearing, but Patrice’s and the man’s body language told him the chat was easygoing.

Patrice finished, gave the man a friendly wave and climbed back into her SUV.

A little way down the dirt road, Patrice pulled over and opened her door. Alain trotted to her and thrust his head inside, resting it on her thigh to enjoy her scent. Patrice scratched his ears while Jackson morphed to his human form and leaned against the SUV.

“Dunstan sold the ranch last month and moved out just a few days ago,” she said. “He sold everything—livestock, barn full of hay, equipment. The house itself was empty when this man, Peterson, moved in. He doesn’t have any idea where Dunstan moved.”

“Dunstan is the key,” Jackson said. “He either has Gina Wood, or he had her, or she’s with him voluntarily. We can keep trying to track her, but not if they left in a car for another state. It’s not like the old days when everyone was on foot. So much easier to chase people down back then.” He sighed.

“In these new days, we can use a paper trail instead of a scent trail,” Patrice said. “I can try to track him through whatever info we have on his car or his driver’s license, see if he has any kind of record.” She looked at Jackson curiously. “How long *have* you lived out here, anyway?”

Jackson smiled. “Oh, since forever.”

“You can do a simpler kind of tracking while I go through records,” she said, returning his smile.

“Anything you want.” Jackson leaned into her and Alain scented his desire loud and clear. It made his mate-protection instinct kick in and he morphed back to human before his wolf could attack Jackson.

Patrice looked back and forth at their naked bodies, pheromones pouring from her. “Well, this is every woman’s fantasy. Or should be.”

“You are the one with the handcuffs,” Jackson said. “Which I remember you used very nicely yesterday.”

Patrice blushed. Alain felt a twinge of envy that he wasn’t good at the light banter Patrice and Jackson seemed to do effortlessly. He was more wolf-like, his emotions basic and gut-level.

Jackson leaned closer to Patrice, his arm stealing around Alain’s waist. “Maybe you’ll have to take us into custody. Maybe search us for concealed weapons.”

Alain’s cock rose swiftly and steadily. This road wasn’t all that deserted—someone could drive past on the main road any time. For some reason this made him even harder.

Patrice’s radiocrackled, and the voice at the other end started talking about an accident on Highway 179. Patrice shook her head ruefully. “Not practical. I’m on duty.”

Jackson shrugged. “Later then. What fantastic plan did you have in mind for us tracing Dunstan?”

Patrice grinned at him as she reached for the radio. “Easy. Ask the neighbors.”

Chapter Eight

Patrice assisted at the accident between Sedona and the Village, which fortunately left no one hurt. Many cars were involved—that highway had some of the most beautiful scenery in the country, but was also a narrow, winding, two-lane road. Ogling drivers often paid the price.

She returned alone to her office, wondering how Jackson and Alain were getting on talking to Dunstan’s neighbors. They hadn’t called and neither of them carried cell phones. Too much of a pain to keep track of when they were on four legs, they’d told her.

She did look up Geoffrey Dunstan. He drove a big, white pickup and had recently sold his ranch down to the last nail. He’d taken his furniture, which implied he had somewhere to take it to.

She could find no record in the county database of Dunstan buying another property, but Geoff Dunstan did have a brother, Ben, who owned a house in Jerome. The county records site obligingly coughed up the address and she printed it out, folded it and slid it into her pocket.

She had other work to do that precluded jumping up and driving out there right then, unfortunately. There was the follow-up report her captain wanted on the altercation between a tourist from New Jersey and the man on whose land he'd been trespassing. The tourist threatened to sue when the local turned a gun on him, but he'd been digging up cacti on the local's land to transport home to Jersey. The tourist had been astounded that there was such a thing in Arizona as "cactus-napping," and that it was highly illegal. That one had been tricky.

Jerome was outside Patrice's jurisdiction anyway—she'd have to contact the police there or the Yavapai County sheriff's office to get any kind of official warrant. Sedona lay just inside the Coconino County line, which meant she'd have to call or drive all the way to Prescott to get Yavapai's cooperation.

Easier to sniff around as a wolf. She did leave a message at Alain's house about what she'd found—he didn't answer or call her back.

At about three, her phone rang, and Jackson was on the other end.

"Hiya, babe."

She heard noise behind him—music and men's voices. "Where are you?"

"A bar in Cottonwood. The Last Chance. Interesting name."

Her senses perked. "Why are you there? What have you found out?"

"That Dunstan liked to hang out here. So did Alain's dad. The plot thickens."

"Where's Alain? Is he with you?"

"He is keeping an eye on Dunstan's brother's house. He lives in Jerome, in a house halfway up the mountain."

"I know. I looked up the address. How did you find it?"

"Talking to the neighbors." She heard laughter in his voice and pictured him, standing there tall and sleek, his liquid dark eyes dancing. "And your phone message helped. I was going to call you back but Alain hightailed it out of there."

"I can come out in about half an hour, if all goes well. Have you talked to his brother?"

"He wasn't home. I'm here in case either he or Dunstan comes in. The house is too close to neighbors for Alain to go all wolfie, so we might have to wait until dark to investigate."

"I'll be there as soon as I can."

"Terrific." He lowered his voice. "Looking forward to it."

He could make her wet in two seconds flat. Her hand shook as she hung up the phone, her pheromones raging. She'd never in her life have dreamed of falling for two men at the same time—that was something you read about in books you hid from your mother.

She couldn't actually get away until after five, though she chafed at the delay. She changed to her civilian clothes and drove her own car west and south toward Cottonwood and Clarkdale, into the sinking sun. She brought her gun and badge and handcuffs.

Jerome glittered on the side of the nearly sheer mountain west of Clarkdale. Once a mining town, then a ghost town, Jerome was now the home of artists and New Agers—and apparently Geoff Dunstan's brother.

Cottonwood lay at the crossroads of the 89A and the 260 that led east to the freeway. It was a workingman's town, different from the overdeveloped opulence of its neighbor, Sedona. Modern retail stores had sprung up everywhere, but behind them still lay the heart of a small town.

Patrice found the bar easily enough, on a narrow street not far from the highway. Jackson lounged near the doorway talking to a few men inside like they'd been buddies forever. Jackson had a way of putting people at their ease.

The men perked up with interest when Patrice walked in. Jackson smiled as he wrapped a firm arm around her waist and led her abruptly out.

"Alain came down here not half an hour ago," he said as they went to her car. "He got close enough to scent Gina Wood. I said I'd stay and wait for you."

Patrice unlocked the doors. "You two should really get to cell phones."

"I spent all those years without them. Can't teach an old coyote new tricks."

"Balls. Why couldn't Alain scent her right away? We caught the old scent easily enough at the ranch."

"Carbon monoxide." Jackson wrinkled his nose as Patrice started the car and pulled out onto the road. "City smells interfere, chemicals confuse things. Besides, Alain hasn't been able to shift or get closer to the house. Even in Jerome, I think people would notice a man stripping off his clothes and changing into a wolf."

"I see your point."

She drove through Cottonwood and into Clarkdale, then took turned off on the switchback road that climbed the mountain. The valley floor fell away, the houses of the towns below lighting for evening.

Clapboard houses painted yellow, blue and white hung from cliffs above, once the homes of prosperous miners. At the top of the hill, the streets no longer hugged sheer drops, but the switchbacks continued as they wound through the town—there was very little level ground here.

Jackson directed her down a narrow street that ran behind dark brick buildings. The other side of these buildings, once boarding houses and brothels, housed shops and small cafes. Many shut early in the evening—most tourists descended to Sedona or went over the mountaintop to Prescott for the night.

The sun had slid behind the hills during their drive. The desert night darkened quickly, twilight lasting only

a short time. The stars were out by the time Jackson pointed out the narrow alley that led to three houses close together, plus a fourth house at the very end.

The last house was nestled between trees, the far side of it overhanging a sheer drop. Deep shadows from cottonwood trees and the cliff above engulfed it in darkness. Patrice couldn't see Alain.

"Where is he?"

"I don't like this," Jackson said. "He told me he'd wait until we were all together before he went in."

"It's dark now and if Dunstan did kill his father, maybe his wolf wouldn't let him wait."

"In that case, we'd hear some noise. Dunstan screaming, for example."

Jackson silently got out of the car. Patrice joined him, peering at the end house. Only one of the other houses seemed to be occupied, or at least only one showed lights. The two closest to Dunstan's house were quiet and dark.

"What did they tell you at the bar?" she whispered.

"That Dunstan and Thomas Dupree drank together a couple of times. But that they weren't friendly."

"What about Gina?"

"She used to come in with Thomas Dupree, but they haven't seen her lately. They think she dumped Alain's dad."

Patrice watched the house uneasily for a few minutes. She couldn't sense Alain in the shadows, and Jackson was right about car exhaust blocking scent. A pickup roared on the switchback above them, its metallic odor drifting down to them.

"We have to get in there."

"Agreed."

The wolf in Patrice was snarling and dancing, though she stood quiet still. Instincts told her to shift, to fight, to kill. The moon was rising and she felt its wild pull.

Control. She remembered Alain's deep voice directing her to hold the change until she was ready. If she went bounding in without knowing what was going on, she might harm Alain or Gina Wood. Or Dunstan might get away or die before she could question him.

Patrice the cop needed to make a perpetrator pay for what he'd done, by the book. Patrice the wolf wanted to tear apart anyone who hurt her mate. She had to find the balance between the two or she knew she'd become the beast entirely.

Jackson put his lips to her ear, in perfect control of himself. "Let's strip down, honey. We'll sniff around and see what's what."

In the blackest shadows of the trees, they took off their clothes and piled them on a dry patch of ground. A cat slid around the base of a tree and rubbed itself first around Patrice's ankles, then around

Jackson's. It purred when it touched Jackson.

"Why isn't it terrified?" Patrice asked. "Considering what we are?"

Jackson's teeth gleamed in the dark. "It knows I won't hurt it. Nice kitty."

The cat sauntered off, a pale smudge in the darkness.

Patrice began to shift. Her wolf wanted to burst forth, growling and snarling, but she clenched her hands and held it in. *Count to twenty. Shift when I'm ready.*

She steadied her breathing, drawing calm from the still air, the cool smell of mud, the crisp light of the stars. *At twenty* she let out her breath and changed into the wolf.

"Very nice," Jackson said beside her, now a coyote.

"Let's find Alain."

"Quietly," Jackson murmured.

Patrice picked up her handcuffs and gun in her mouth and followed Coyote to the house. As a wolf Patrice could smell better, despite the distracting car and truck exhaust. She smelled several scents she had at the Circle T ranch, but stronger now. Gina Wood. Geoffrey Dunstan. And over that, the unmistakable scent of Alain, her mate.

She growled and started to lunge forward, but a mouth closed heavily on her tail, stopping her short.

"*Quietly,*" Jackson repeated.

Patrice drew a breath, trying to smooth her hackles. Her fur felt charged, like any touch would spark.

They crept to the back of the house. An old-fashioned enclosed porch ran the length of it, the doors closed and locked.

The windows of the porch were dark but had no curtains or shades. The porch ran almost to the cliff wall on one side and faced the drop on the other, so that someone might sit and enjoy the view. No one could see into this place until they got very close, as Patrice and Jackson were doing.

Jackson shifted smoothly into a man and peered into the window, cupping his hands around his eyes. Patrice didn't dare try to shift, so she reared up and put her paws on the sill.

What she saw made her rage flame.

Alain lay on the floor of a living room wrapped in a gleaming net, his hands tied behind his back. Patrice could smell the silver in the net, and also in the chain that wound through the ropes that bound his hands. He was naked, the touch of silver probably having forced him back to human form.

Two men faced him, both holding shotguns. One was Geoffrey Dunstan—she recognized him from seeing him a few times in Sedona. The other must be his brother, Ben.

"You make me sick," Dunstan spat. "Werewolves. Worse than animals. At least *they* act on dumb

instinct.”

“What did you do with Gina Wood?” Alain asked. Patrice was alarmed how faint his voice was.

“Stupid whore. Wanted to fuck an animal instead of a man who’d be good to her.”

“Maybe she figured out you were crazy,” Alain said. “She was happy with my dad—why couldn’t you let her be happy?”

“Because she was a beast whore. But it’s easy to kill a werewolf. A little silver makes them sicker than dogs and their human hearts can’t take it.”

No kidding. Patrice wanted to puke at all the silver in the room and it wasn’t even touching her. Alain’s father had gone through this, barely making it home before he laid down and died.

“My father came to you looking for Gina, didn’t he?” Alain asked.

“Yep. Didn’t find her.”

“So you got silver into his system and he died. What did you use?”

“A needle. Silver oxide—quiet and easy. Took a while, but it got him. He couldn’t do anything about it.”

Alain clenched his hands. “Bastard. You murdered my father.”

“I killed vermin. Wolves attack livestock and stupid bleeding hearts want to reintroduce them into the wild. Werewolves are ten times worse. I’m just culling them, protecting my cattle.”

“He was my *father* .”

“Dumb animal,” Dunstan disagreed, and he kicked Alain in the mouth.

Patrice snarled with rage. She leapt, tearing straight through the window’s glass, dropping her gun and cuffs to free her mouth. For a split second the two armed men gaped, then Dunstan’s brother fired.

The split second let Patrice dive and roll out of the way. She tried to yank the silver net from Alain, but the touch of it burned her. She kept on rolling, the pain in her paw nauseating.

When she came out of her roll, she landed on her feet and forced the shift back to human.

“Police,” she yelled. “You’re under arrest for kidnapping and murder.”

* * * * *

Alain stared up at her, his beautiful mate who stood above him, naked and furious. Her legs were near his face, lovely limbs that he wanted to lick.

If he weren’t tied up, trapped in a net and sick on silver.

Dunstan and his brother both stared at her. The roar of the shotgun made Alain’s ears ring, the acrid smell of powder hanging heavy. Shotguns weren’t made for living rooms.

Geoffrey Dunstan started to laugh. "Did you hear that, Ben? We're under arrest." He had to shout, because he'd deafened himself along with everyone else.

"She can arrest me any time," Ben said, tossing aside his spent shotgun. "Cuff me, sweetie."

Geoffrey lost his smile. "Don't. She's one of the fucking werewolves. A little bit of silver and I can bring my count up to three."

"Three," Alain rasped. "Is that all? I thought you were a mighty werewolf hunter."

"Three in Sedona," Geoff gloated. "Total of ten throughout the U.S.A."

"Bastard," he repeated. He imagined the others had died similarly, poisoned with silver, burning with it until they were happy to die.

Above him, his glorious Patrice began reading them their rights.

Ben laughed again. "Really? You're arresting us with no gun, no badge, no cuffs? Just your sweet little naked ass?"

She gave him a look of contempt and Alain's heart swelled with pride. No more shy Patrice, but a werewolf who knew her power.

"I'm not stupid. I called in backup when I came out here. Said you probably had a missing woman up here against her will. Where is she?"

"Around," Geoffrey shrugged. "Where's your backup?"

"On their way. I imagine some of your neighbors might also report the sound of a gunshot."

"A lot of hunters up here."

"In a neighborhood?"

"Fucking New Agers," Ben growled under his breath. "And their fucking crystals."

Geoffrey Dunstan aimed his shotgun at Patrice. "The police aren't coming and you know it. Even if they are, I still have time to kill me another couple werewolves."

Patrice snarled at him. She shifted swiftly into wolf form and before he could aim at her new height, she sprang. The gun flew out of his hands and thunked to the floor, just out of Alain's reach. The net hampered him, though he could kick Geoff Dunstan hard enough to make him stumble.

Ben Dunstan went for the fallen shotgun, but just then a coyote flew over Alain and landed between Ben and the gun.

Ben stared. "Shit, another one."

Jackson went for his throat. Alain rolled onto his side, trying to flip the net off him. Patrice couldn't help, because she was fighting and couldn't have touched the damn thing anyway.

Patrice was savaging Dunstan. It took Alain a minute to realize she wasn't trying to kill him. She wanted to keep him alive to arrest him, to punish him legally for what he'd done.

Crazy, honor-bound Patrice.

Geoff's hand flopped by chance onto the gun. Alain kicked hard, spinning the weapon away from him. Ben Dunstan rolled, trying to dislodge Jackson, and managed to get his hands around the gun.

It fired.

Chapter Nine

Patrice screamed.

Ben Dunstan crawled out from under Jackson, who had reverted to his human form. Ben's shirt was covered in blood, but he stood up, unhurt.

Both barrels had gone off, Patrice realized through the deafening noise. Straight into Jackson, who lay limp in a pool of his own blood.

But he can't die, Patrice thought desperately. He's a god.

But hadn't he told her his mother was human? And the guns were loaded with silver shot.

Ben looked a little surprised. Patrice took that surprised moment to leap on him. One furious swipe of her paw across his head and he fell, unconscious.

"Patrice," Alain rasped.

Geoff Dunstan, who had been rolling on the floor, head bloody from where Patrice had bitten him, suddenly slid a silver chain around Patrice's middle.

Her howl shook the walls. It hurt, burned like nothing else ever had. She saw Alain look at her in despair, struggling against his own bonds.

He's my mate, her wolf thought desperately. I need to help him.

"We need to help each other."

The voice was Alain's—his wolf's voice.

Aching and weak, Patrice put out her paw. She saw herself changing back to human, the silver chain draining her power. With the last of her strength, she tore at the net, jerking it from Alain's body.

Alain looked pale and sick, his wrists still bound. He closed his eyes—his beautiful silver eyes—and Patrice felt him look for the wolf. She collapsed to the carpet as the chain held her fast.

The power that surged was far weaker than Alain's usual shift, but his form grew and changed and grew

some more until a huge black wolf was getting to his feet, paws shaking off the bonds.

Geoffrey Dunstan tried to grab the net, but too late. His eyes widened as he looked up and up and up at Alain as a wolf. Alain's eyes blazed and his lips curled back in a long snarl.

"Fucking werewolf," Dunstan whispered, then Alain knocked him aside with one blow. His werewolf claws raked the man's face, blood spattering to the carpet.

"Don't mess with my mate," he growled.

Dunstan tried to run. Alain leapt on him and bore him back to the ground. The chain slid from Patrice's waist, easing the pain. Still she lay panting and weak while Alain brought his paw up to finish Dunstan off.

"Wait," she gasped. Patrice crawled to the handcuffs she had dropped and climbed painfully to her feet, scooping up the cuffs. Alain, deep inside his wolf, growled as she tried to push him away from Dunstan.

"No," she said. "I'm arresting him. That's what people do."

Alain met her gaze with a furious silver one. They looked at each other for a long time, Patrice trying to project how much she understood what he needed.

Alain gave a long, rumbling growl but finally backed away.

Dunstan, released, tried to get up again. Patrice summoned the last of her strength, put her foot on his back and slammed him back down, clicking the cuffs around his wrists.

This was the police officer in her, not the werewolf. Alain wanted him dead—she wanted him in prison. Maybe this was her way of not letting the beast take over.

Dunstan swore and tried to wriggle away but his injuries and the cuffs held him fast. Strong, steel, police-issue handcuffs could put even a large man in Patrice's power.

Alain lowered his muzzle to Dunstan's face, teeth bared. Dunstan babbled, "Don't make me a werewolf. Please, don't make me a werewolf."

"Stupid asshole," Alain rumbled. Patrice understood him but Dunstan did not.

"That's not how you become a werewolf," Patrice said. "That's the movies."

Dunstan's eyes widened. "Then how do you... Oh, God, you have sex with them?" He eyed Patrice in new terror.

"I wouldn't dream of it," she said.

She turned away, Alain pressing hard against her side.

Jackson lay on the floor behind them, covered in blood. Patrice knelt next to him, shaking all over, and took Jackson's head in her lap. Alain lowered his head and nuzzled him.

The man's brown eyes fluttered open. "Did we get him?" he rasped.

“Yes,” Patrice whispered. “We got him.”

Alain morphed back into human form and brushed a strand of Jackson’s hair from his face. “Stay still, my friend.” He looked at Patrice. “Did you really call in backup?”

“No. But I will. At least I carry a cell phone.”

Her last word ended in a sob. Alain touched her face, kissed her cheek.

Patrice drew a breath, pulling herself together. Then she rose and left through the back porch, finding her clothes and Jackson’s where they’d left them. She dressed quickly and made a phone call, then carried Jackson’s clothes back inside.

Alain had Jackson’s head in his lap, Jackson’s chest black with blood.

Dunstan watched them from his place on the floor. “That shot was packed with silver,” he sneered. “At least I took out one of you.”

Jackson grunted. Patrice knelt beside him, trying to keep him still, but Jackson lifted one blood-streaked finger. “Silver only works against werewolves,” he grated. “I’m a coyote. There’s a difference.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Dunstan said. “You’re still dead.”

“I don’t think I am yet.”

Alain brushed a finger over Jackson’s lips. “Stop talking. Save your strength.”

“Not only am I not a werewolf,” Jackson went on. “I’m also not a man.”

He gently pushed Alain’s hand away and climbed painfully to his feet. Dunstan watched him, open-mouthed

Jackson looked down at Dunstan. “You’re a killer,” he said, voice weak. “Even when you kill the supernatural, it still makes you a murderer. But I’ll be merciful. I’ll let the human police deal with you.” His voice lowered to a near whisper. “If it were me exacting justice, you’d learn what pain truly was. An eternity of it.” He took his t-shirt from Patrice’s hands, still watching Dunstan. “If you ever harm another living being, *I will* exact justice. I promise you that.”

Dunstan at last looked worried. He believed in power, because he’d seen it in the werewolves. Jackson’s quiet words sounded more terrifying than any werewolf snarl. His power was immense, and it radiated from him.

Jackson suddenly dropped to one knee, spent. He looked at the crimson-stained cloth in his hands and shook his head. “Aw, damn,” he said. “I really liked this shirt.”

* * * * *

They found Gina Wood, still alive, dehydrated and half starved in an empty bedroom on the second floor. An ambulance carried her to a hospital and there she told Patrice her story.

She’d meet Geoffrey Dunstan when she’d first come out here, but after a week or so, she’d realized

what a jerk he was and broke it off. Dunstan had taken her a few times to the Last Chance bar and she'd met Thomas Dupree there. They'd started going out and she'd liked him—a lot.

One night when Thomas was out—*probably being his wolf*, Patrice thought—a man had called her from the bar claiming to be one of Thomas' friends, saying that Thomas wanted to meet her there. Thomas had done that before and she saw no reason not to believe him.

But when she arrived, Geoff had met her in the parking lot, shoved her into a car and driven her to his ranch. He'd used her as bait to lure Thomas to him and then killed him by injecting him with something. Gina had thought Geoff would kill her too, but he raved that he only killed werewolves, not humans. She should thank him for saving her from the beast. She was terrified, thinking him crazy.

Geoff had kept her locked in a shed, then moved her to his brother's house just before he sold up all the land. He was tired of Sedona, he said. Too many developers digging up the place.

Thomas's neighbor, Howard, arrived at the hospital to pick Gina up when she was discharged a few days later. She went back to Chicago after that, Howard going with her to help her settle in. She'd hugged Alain and told him how much she'd treasured his father.

Jackson recovered, his magic repairing his body, but his act hadn't been painless. He'd evaded death, but he'd suffered. It hadn't been an easy thing for him to take the shot to save Alain and Patrice.

"I'm divine," he'd explained to them. "Or half divine. The only one who can kill me is a god. So I always try not to piss them off."

"Good rule," Alain said.

"I have my own legends—I don't share a history with werewolves. That means silver doesn't slow me down."

"Don't rub it in," Alain grunted.

Alain had taken days to recover from being weakened by the silver net and chain. Patrice stayed with him, taking a brief leave of absence from work. She was weak and exhausted even though she hadn't touched the silver as long, and knew she needed a rest almost as much as Alain did.

A week later the three of them sat on Alain's back porch sharing a meal and beer. Patrice liked this, living with Alain—eating and sleeping with him, relaxing with him.

They didn't have much sex while they both convalesced, but as Patrice's strength returned, her wolf's blood began to burn with renewed mating frenzy.

Jackson sent her a lazy smile. He had his hand on Alain's arm, running his fingers along the inside of his wrist. "You think she's ready?"

Alain's eyes glinted. "She might be."

"Ready for what?" Patrice asked. Something dark fluttered inside her. What were you two whispering about today?"

The way they gazed at her made her nervous. The coffee brown and silver eyes that fixed on her were

both beautiful in their own way. She had the sudden urge to run from these men and have them chase her, feeling excited anticipation of what they'd do when they caught her.

Alain said slowly and distinctly, "Clothes—off."

Patrice's hand went to the buttons of her blouse. "It's almost dark. What about the wolf taking over?"

"You still need to learn to control it. This will be perfect. No wolf-turning until after."

"After what?"

Alain's eyes glinted. "You'll know."

She unbuttoned her blouse, their gazes on her palpable. She opened her blouse under their scrutiny, then took off her bra, her nipples tightening as her imagination went wild. *What would it be like if they both...*

Patrice moved to where the two men sat side by side on the porch swing. The sun was just down, the sky streaked with crimson and azure and orange above the silhouetted trees. She stopped in front of them.

"Suck me," she said softly.

Both men smiled. Jackson leaned forward and took her right nipple in his mouth, Alain slanting a wicked glance up at her before he closed his mouth on her left.

Oh, *yes*. Patrice arched as their tongues swirled hard and sweet on her breasts. She laced her fingers through their hair, Jackson's like satin-silk, Alain's rougher and wirier. Both suckled and nibbled until she was squirming with pleasure.

Alain hooked his finger around the waistband of her shorts. "Off," he said into her skin.

With shaking fingers, Patrice unzipped her shorts. Alain and Jackson skimmed them down her legs, then her underwear.

"She's not allowed to wear clothes the rest of the night," Jackson said.

The November evening was cooling rapidly but Patrice's blood pounded so hot it didn't matter. Besides, how could she be cold with these two men to warm her?

"Feet apart," Alain whispered.

She obediently moved her legs apart. Adam slid his finger along her quim, and then she felt the strong touch of Jackson with his. Both men pushed fingers inside her.

"Yes," she murmured. Their mouths hot on her breasts coupled with the friction of their fingers made her rock and moan. How lucky she was to have two beautiful men pleasuring her, men who liked to be together. Not rivals, just friends.

Jackson slid off the swing and went down on one knee. "Spread your legs," he said. "We want to feast."

Patrice's heart pounded in fast excitement. She parted her legs and bit back a cry as Jackson lowered his head and licked her. Alain's fingers were still inside, and she squeezed them hard.

"She's enjoying it," Alain murmured.

"She's tasty." Jackson's breath seared her skin. "Join me."

He moved over so Alain could put his mouth on her and slide his tongue inside. She groaned and rocked on her feet. The two of them took turns tasting her, driving her crazy with tongues and fingers.

They wouldn't let her come. Just when she reached her breaking point, Alain abruptly drew away. Her cry of frustration was lost in his laugh.

"You have *to* really want it."

"I do really want it. I swear I do."

Jackson laughed as he soothed her, touch bringing her back from her near-climax. "She sounds sincere. What do you want, lovely Patrice?"

"To fuck," she gasped. "For both of you to fuck me."

"That can be arranged," Jackson said.

Alain was silent. She could sense the wolf in him, restless and needing. Jackson would always be the joker, confident and relaxed, shifting easily and quickly whenever he wanted. Alain had a wildness in everything he did, the beast in him never quite contained.

Jackson got to his feet and lifted Patrice in his arms. He carried her into the bedroom, Alain following slowly, as though trying to contain himself.

Jackson laid her on the bed. Alain, his eyes shining silver, stripped off his clothes. Patrice lay back on her elbows, enjoying his hard body coming into view and the long cock that lifted to her.

Jackson slid out of his jeans and climbed on the bed. He knelt in the pillows behind Patrice and cradled her head in his lap.

Alain looked at them for a long time, the wolf flicking in and out of his eyes. Finally he climbed over Patrice, on all fours. His eyes were so intense that Patrice's own wolf began to move inside her. She wanted the change.

"Not yet," Jackson said softly. "Not until you've become ours completely."

Alain lowered himself to her. He leaned down and licked her breasts, his tongue slowly tracing her aureoles. Jackson rose to straddle Patrice, and she had a nice view of his tight balls and cock sticking straight out.

"Alain," he said in a low voice.

Alain raised his head. He studied Jackson's cock hanging in front of him a moment, then closed his lips over it, taking it full in his mouth. Patrice gaped, her body heating to a frenzy as she watched Alain suckle

him. She wanted to reach up and join them, but Alain had her pinned and all she could do was watch, frustrated.

Alain swirled his tongue around Jackson's tip and the other man groaned.

"Let me," Patrice begged. "Please."

Jackson knelt back away from Alain, his cock long and thick and glistening. He remained out of Patrice's reach and slanted Alain a gleeful look. "Want to?"

"Yes."

Patrice didn't know what he meant, but she thought it would be fun finding out. Alain got off the bed, making Patrice want to whimper in the cold, but he returned soon with a tube of lube and some towels.

"We want you," Alain said. "Together. Can you take that?"

Patrice the ordinary woman probably could not have. What he suggested was amazing and, weeks ago, had no part in her world. But everything that had happened the last couple of days had given her the strength and the courage. Patrice had been willing to sacrifice herself for Alain, and Jackson had been willing to sacrifice himself for them both.

She got to her knees.

"What do I have to do?"

Alain lay down full length, his cock lying hard and dark against his abdomen. He reached for her, signaling with his fingers. "Come here, love."

Patrice slid her leg over his hips. Alain smiled at her, his eyes sparkling and wicked. "I've always wanted to do this."

"Me too," Jackson said from behind Patrice.

Patrice realized this had been in her fantasies from the first time she'd seen them—the gorgeous Alain and the dark-eyed Jackson sharing her.

Alain guided her down onto him, his cock filling her and stretching her. She shivered, then grew warm, her head tilting back to rub her short hair across her neck. Jackson's large hands rested on her waist, and he kissed her throat.

Alain rocked into her a few times, making her moan with pleasure. He slid his hands up to her shoulders and gently eased her down so she lay on top of him. He lifted his hips a little and Patrice felt Jackson's warmth close behind her, then the chill, slick feeling of lube. She moaned again as his well-lubed fingers touched her anal star, gently working it.

"Relax for me," Jackson whispered. "Enjoy what I'm doing to you."

Patrice let her muscles go slack, then she felt her body warm as Jackson slid a finger into her. It was an incredible sensation, making her first hot then cold then hot again. Her flesh rose in goosebumps.

Jackson played for a while, letting her get used to it, adding another finger. Patrice got lost in the feelings, Alain hard inside her, Jackson slowly loosening her. Even the wolf was soothed, loving what they did to her.

She was so far gone in sensation that she almost missed it when Jackson withdrew his fingers and pressed his large, smooth tip to the opening. She made a noise of anticipation and he smoothed his hand down her back.

“Shh. Stay relaxed.”

She wanted to fly apart. Alain cupped her face in his hands as Jackson eased his way inside, his cock pressing the walls he'd warmed and opened.

Maybe the lube made it all right, maybe Jackson was an expert or maybe the wolf in her let her do what she wanted, but her body let her take it. Suddenly she was filled with both men, Alain under her, Jackson behind her, his hands on her hips. She could feel both their cocks inside her, moving for her pleasure.

Beautiful thought, them together, touching through her body. She squirmed a little, enjoying the sensation as they held her between them.

“I love you,” she whispered. “I love you both.”

Alain started to move, then Jackson. Patrice screamed. It hurt and then it didn't, Jackson's soothing hands seeming to magically remove any pain. She learned that if she relaxed all the way, wide open and welcoming, there was no hurt at all.

Nothing but incredible feeling. She heard her voice ring through the room, heard Alain's growl of satisfaction and Jackson's hoarse breathing, but she seemed disconnected from sound. She was disconnected from everything except the hot, hard bodies of two men around her.

Deeper, deepest.

She didn't know what she screamed, but Jackson laughed as he fucked her ass.

A wave of darkness swirled over her, her senses far gone in delight. Dimly she heard Alain say, “I'm coming,” then felt his scalding seed. Jackson moved a little longer, then he filled her, his hips coming to rest firmly against hers.

Patrice collapsed on top of Alain, Jackson still inside her. She must have fallen instantly asleep, because when she came to herself again, she found herself lying limply across Alain, his arms firmly around her. Jackson stretched out full length beside them, smoothing Patrice's hair.

“That was beautiful,” Patrice crooned.

Jackson laughed his throaty laugh. Alain didn't smile at all. He touched her face, his eyes soft. “I love you too,” he whispered.

* * * * *

Patrice easily controlled her change this time. Alain watched while her human body shimmered and she became the beautiful gray wolf. While he admired her, she leapt from the porch, obviously wanting him to

chase her.

Alain morphed into the black wolf and charged after her. He caught up to her in a patch of moonlight—he knew she let him catch her—and they mated as wolves, doubly ensuring their bond.

He loved her. She'd willingly helped him search for his father's killer, and she'd charged in without hesitation to save his life. The sight of her crashing through the window to save him had been the sexiest thing he'd ever seen. The scariest too. He'd thought he'd been about to watch her die for him.

And then Jackson had taken the bullets and saved them both. It had hurt him bad, he'd said—*hell, the man shot me*—though he seemed to be fully recovered now.

Our guardian angel, Alain thought, watching the coyote pant up to them as they rested by the stream.

Alain changed to his human form and stretched, and then Patrice was right beside him, a human once more. They held hands as they splashed into the creek to refresh themselves, and found Jackson in man form waiting when they emerged. Jackson opened his arms to them and they shared an embrace under the light of the full moon.

* * * * *

Patrice woke just as dawn broke over the mountain ridge to the east of Alain's house. Alain lay stretched out beside her, one arm over his head, breathing deeply. He'd fallen like that after their last lovemaking and hadn't moved. Neither had she.

Of Jackson, there was no sign. She raised her head and looked around, but Jackson was nowhere in sight and his clothes were gone.

Patrice slid out of bed, wincing at her sore muscles. She needed to learn to take it easy, although last night had been one of the most fun of her life.

She pulled on her shorts and blouse and padded out front in her bare feet. "Jackson?" she called softly.

Jackson stood on the front porch in nothing but his jeans, his bare arms stretched toward the sun, his face tilted to catch the morning light. A breeze moved through the stillness, stirring a few shining strands of his hair. He was a beautiful man with a beautiful body, and Patrice's wolf self wanted to sing with the joy of it.

Without turning or opening his eyes, Jackson smiled and lowered his arms. "Patrice."

"You're leaving, aren't you?" She wasn't sure how she knew that—she just knew.

"You and Alain are together. My work here is done."

She slid her arms around his waist and rested her head on his back, his hair like warm silk.

"But you're part of us, the three of us. Don't go."

Jackson gently pried loose her hold, but he turned and brushed his fingers over her cheek. "I won't go far. Promise."

“You’re a demigod,” Patrice said, resigned. “I suppose you have demigod things to do.”

He kissed her forehead, then his lips traveled to hers and lingered a while. “Coyote’s work is never done. But I’ll be back, sweetheart. There’s so much more for us to do, so much more for you to learn.”

His sinful look was promising. Patrice’s heart beat faster as she remembered the three of them in tangled limbs on the bed, the incredible feeling of Jackson and Alain inside her at the same time.

“I hope so,” she said sincerely.

He laughed, the sound rumbling. “Bye for now, love.”

He kissed her again, then turned his back and went down the porch stairs.

Patrice squinted against the morning sun as he sauntered across the gravel in his bare feet. A beam of sunlight poured over him and she thought his form shimmered.

She blinked, but only empty air met her gaze, the quiet morning filled with the sounds of doves. She thought she heard the faint yip of a coyote in the brush, but she couldn’t be sure.

Alain was sitting cross-legged on the bed when she went back inside. His eyes were somber. “He’s gone?”

She nodded. “He said he’d be back. Do you believe him?”

Alain thought a moment. “I do. We fit together—do you know what I mean?”

“That’s a good way of putting it.” She pulled off her clothes and joined him on the bed. “I thought we fit very well.”

Alain cupped her face. “I’m not good with words, not like Jackson. But something that was empty in me filled again the moment I saw you. Maybe it was instinct telling me you were a werewolf like me. I don’t know.”

“It was fate?” she asked teasingly, though her heart warmed.

“I don’t know about fate. I only know I saw you and wanted you. *Ineeded* you in my life. I chose you, whether or not fate had anything to do with it.” He held her against him. “And I’m hoping you choose me.”

She kissed him softly. “Of course I do. I said I loved you, and I meant it. It wasn’t just the throes of ecstasy.”

“Good.” He pressed a kiss to her hair. “Because I love you too. Wolves mate for life, you know.”

“I know. And I’m perfectly happy to.”

“We can get a marriage license and do everything legal in the human way if you want.”

She sat up and stared in mock surprise. “Was that a proposal? Aw, how sweet.”

“Don’t laugh at me. I’m too much a wolf to be up on wedding customs, but I know women like white dresses and big cakes and a roomful of people we both barely know.”

She did laugh, loud and long. “A small ceremony with a few friends will be fine. It’s you I want.”

Alain stretched out and pulled Patrice on top of him. His body was warm and strong, and she loved it. “Good. Wolves don’t really go for tuxes.”

“Is there a marriage ritual for wolves? Or werewolves? I have the feeling it doesn’t involve wedding cake.”

“There is one.” Alain’s eyes darkened, the black of his pupil swallowing the silver. “It takes about a day and involves a bed—if you want it in a bed.”

Her body warmed, her breasts growing heavy. “I thought it would be something like that.”

“Want to start now?” Alain’s smile was wicked, his voice low.

“I have the day off.”

“Good.”

Alain kissed her. His lips were tender and warm, the kiss full of love.

Then he growled and pinned her to the bed. She laughed and arched her body up to his, loving how he could switch from gentle to rough and back so quickly.

“I love you, Alain.”

“I love you too, Patrice. My mate.”

* * * * *

Outside the bedroom window, the coyote watched them with liquid, dark eyes. Then he turned and trotted off into the mists, chuckling to himself.

About the Author

Allyson James is yet one more name for a woman who has racked up four pseudonyms in the first two years of her career. She often cannot remember what her real name is and has to be tapped on the shoulder when spoken to.

Allyson began writing at age eight (a five-page story that actually contained goal, motivation, and conflict). She learned the trick of standing her math book up on her desk so she could write stories behind it. She wrote love stories before she knew what romances were, dreaming of the day when her books would appear at libraries and bookstores. At age thirty, she decided to stop dreaming and do it for real. She published the first short story she ever submitted in a national print magazine, which gave her

the false illusion that getting published was easy.

After a long struggle and inevitable rejections, she at last sold a romance novel, then to her surprise several mystery novels, more romances, and erotic romances to Ellora's Cave, and became a bestselling author. She writes under several pseudonyms, has been nominated for and won Romantic Times Reviewer's Choice awards, and has had starred reviews in Booklist and Top Pick reviews in Romantic Times.

Allyson met hersoulmate in fencing class (the kind with swords, not posts-and-rails). She looked down the length of his long, throbbing rapier and fell madly in love.

Allyson welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorasave.com.

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