



Jade

Author: *Valerie Ullmer*

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Description: Jade never wanted a mate. She loved being an assassin and she had a family in her fellow assassins, their mates, and little Silas. She truly had everything she needed. But when Ghost assigned her to track the same immortals who tried to kill Xander's family, she couldn't refuse.

But the complication arises when Ghost requests she partner with Noah, a human and ex-special forces soldier. Jade has never worked with a human before, much less one that hated her from the moment he laid eyes on her. But she was a professional and if she could play a part in destroying the immortals who threatened her family, she could accept the human. If only she knew how to fight her attraction to him.

All Noah Hale wanted was to kill the immortals who lured his best friend and fellow ex-Navy SEAL to his death. He had no desire to be teamed with a beautiful tracker who mesmerized him the moment she turned her emerald eyes his way. But in order to stop other soldiers from pursuing the same fate, he needed to swallow his pride and work with a group of immortals he didn't trust.

As Jade and Noah track the group of shifters through the mountains of Colorado, the danger lurking around every corner threatens everything they both hold close. Will they be able to find a way through, together?

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Chapter One

Jade

Jade caught a scent of a human as she entered the fourteen-story building in downtown Snowfall. It wasn't just any human scent, but something that made all of her instincts flare. She knew that she'd never caught this particular scent before, but something told her that this human might be important to her. She tried to brush it off as quickly as the thought came, but she couldn't find it coincidental she smelled it in the same steel building owned by Ghost and housed the headquarters of Dark Company.

As she dismissed the fleeting thought of searching for the scent, her heart thumped once, hard, in her chest at the thought of not finding its owner. She forced herself to walk toward the elevator bank, ignoring the unwanted perusals she received from the men in the lobby. Even in an unassuming hoodie and black yoga pants, she drew unwanted attention. A side effect of being an immortal.

The elevator opened as soon as she pressed the up-button and she kept her gaze down as she walked into the elevator. She entered the code to get to Ghost's private floor, her movements too quick to be caught by the human eye, before she squeezed into the corner. Jade used her other senses as three men in suits and two women entered the enclosed space with her. There was no need to glance at the glass interior that covered the back wall to see what she looked like.

She sensed eyes on her. Instead of searching out the gaze, she whipped her long, straight dyed black hair into a bun on the back of her head with quick movements

before sneaking her hands into the front pockets of her hoodie.

Jade waited patiently as the car traveled toward the penthouse, her ultimate destination, but she couldn't help but try to find the intriguing scent from earlier.

After my meeting.

All she knew was he hadn't used the particular elevator she was in and the higher the lift took her in the building, the more his scent dissipated.

In her entire existence, or what she remembered of it, she'd never been attracted to...anyone. She'd never felt the pull to find someone either. But lately, she'd felt increasingly restless whenever she had any downtime and her skin tingled in a way that had nothing to do with signaling immediate danger. It was as though her body tried to convey something she didn't understand.

Her thoughts were interrupted when a man who had gotten into the elevator with her on the first floor stepped into her personal space.

"Hey, beautiful?"

Jade rolled her eyes and raised her head to glare at the man. Of course, he wouldn't take the hint that she wanted to be left alone. To emphasize the point, she crossed her arms and leaned against the wall, moving away from his intrusion.

The man decided to take this as an invitation and moved to wrap his arm around her waist. The move gave her a clear shot to his ribs and she took it, gently moving her elbow back and making contact. She flinched when she heard a distinctive crack, realizing she hadn't been careful enough. Before she could apologize, the elevator door opened and he ran off without looking back, holding onto his side.

She sighed.

Jade had never told anyone, not even Liv, who knew more about her than anyone else. But she hated being the center of attention. She'd gotten so desperate to avoid it that she dyed her hair black in order to detract from her naturally soft ginger hair, green eyes, and freckles that made her look young. But instead of diverting attention, she somehow drew more.

She wanted to be known for her fierce fighting and being a good friend. She couldn't care less what she looked like and even less if she had a mate. Xander had wondered about Frost for decades before meeting her, thinking he'd missed her. Reaper hadn't discounted his own mate, especially after Kai found Liv, but the moment he laid eyes on Ara, he knew she was for him. It had taken Kai almost losing Liv to recognize what he knew all along. And their Seth had grown up and married Aubrey, the sweetest vampire and woman Jade had ever known.

She enjoyed her life with her family, and loved her job because she believed that she made a difference. But each time another assassin met their mate, their mates took one look at her and expected Jade to be the competition. She never blamed them, but it hurt her a little each time it happened.

Gunnar was right when he described her to Liv as needing a lot of contact and that she loved touch. But it wasn't because she was seeking sexual pleasure. Being physically close to her family, being able to hold Silas and hug those close to her, made her red fox relax in contentment. It was why she loved it when Silas sought her out and they talked for hours about everything and nothing.

But being sexually intimate with someone required trust. She had ways to pleasure herself that didn't make her vulnerable to anyone.

Jade shook off her thoughts as the elevator car came to a stop on her floor. She would

find out what Ghost wanted and then head to Xander's. She promised Silas that they could shift and run through the woods to Kai's, where they would have dinner with the rest of the family.

As soon as the doors opened, she caught the scent again, only concentrated on this floor.

Well...shit.

Whatever Ghost wanted, he had a human in his office, most likely her mate.

How had Ghost known who the man was?

Jade schooled her features and turned toward his office before he came to find her. He would have scented her as soon as the elevator doors opened.

As she stepped out, her eyes locked on a tall man moving toward her from the direction she wanted to go. He felt familiar to her, but his eyes were locked on the floor as he strode down the hall toward the elevator bank. She was stunned when he turned his green eyes on her. Something fluttered in her chest and for a long moment, she couldn't help but stare at him. All she knew was that this wasn't the man who she'd scented earlier.

While she was five two, this man towered over her at close to six four, almost as tall as Reaper. When he smiled a wicked smile at her, images flashed in front of her but she couldn't capture them fast enough to remember what they had shown her.

Were they memories or had he been the one who had shown her?

He was a shifter, she could tell that much, but which animal, she couldn't narrow down while she had other things on her mind.

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While she'd been distracted, the man stepped into the elevator behind her and the doors started to close. She quickly turned to him.

"Do I know you?"

The only answer she received was a smile that left her even more confused than a moment before, but she didn't stop him from leaving. She had a sneaking suspicion she would see him again.

Shaking off the numerous questions swirling in her mind, she strode toward Ghost's office and knocked sharply.

"Enter."

With quick movements, she opened the door and slid inside before she closed it behind her. She kept her eyes on Ghost behind the desk as he sorted through several folders scattered on his messy desk. She'd told him that he needed an assistant to keep everything in order but he waved her suggestion away. She was aware of the human, in ways she had yet to understand, but she didn't look at him.

"Did you have an appointment with the shifter who just left?"

Ghost's head snapped up and gave her his full attention. She could sense the human who had been leaning against a bookshelf across the room had straightened at her words.

"No, I didn't."

“He left before I could question him, so I wondered if you were recruiting again.” Jade smiled and dropped into the chair closest to her.

“Last thing we need is more trouble.”

Jade laughed at this. All they had was trouble, interspersed with moments of family and laughter, but they’d all gotten used to the dangers their profession provided.

“I’ll search through the security footage and run facial recognition on what I find.”

She nodded, knowing that he wasn’t going to find anything. They wouldn’t have sent a recon shifter if he didn’t know what he was doing.

“I have an assignment for you.”

She didn’t answer. She interlaced her fingers and leaned back on the chair, placing her hands on her stomach in a casual move, and waited. Ghost texted their assignments. She couldn’t remember one instance when she or any of the others were called into his office.

Jade knew it involved the human, the one who stood without speaking a word. He somehow drew her to him in a way she couldn’t explain. It was as if every nerve ending stood at attention and she could sense whenever he moved, even a millimeter. And his scent, a combination of sweet and spicy that she’d never smelled on another person, called to her in a way that fogged her mind. But she couldn’t shake her head to clear it.

Her gaze darted to the man, knowing he wouldn’t be able to detect her minuscule movement. With her quick perusal, she noted that he was close to six three. He had blond hair that had been once cut short but had grown several inches, probably since he left the military. His eyes were dark blue, his arms were tanned, as she assumed the

rest of him was the same way, and he had long fingers that looked strong.

His lips were pressed in a thin line and his brows were down as he glared at her. When she turned her gaze back to Ghost after a split second of perusal, Ghost's lip was quirked up, as if he was amused by her inspection. But his look became serious once again.

"Anzu's group is alive and looking for new leadership."

Without thinking it through, she had moved from her chair to the corner of the room, opposite of the human. Her back was pressed against the wall as she stared in disbelief at Ghost. Her fists were clenched at her sides and a million questions ran through her mind.

"Are they safe?"

Ghost nodded. "They've been aware and prepared since the fight, Xander more than anyone else."

"Explain, please." Jade relaxed a fraction.

Ghost nodded toward the human. "Noah has intel that they are looking for a new leader and creating new members."

Jade knew exactly what that meant. "Fuck my life. Were they successful?"

"Not so far. Six men, all ex-Special Forces, were killed during the transition."

Jade wanted to rage. To go home and run in the woods for hours until the underlying pain for the men's deaths, those she didn't know, numbed her. Instead, she pinched the bridge of her nose and blew out a breath.

The man moved and his scent once again enveloped her and something tightened in her chest. She tightly packed the feeling deep down inside and promised herself she would deal with the confusion later.

“What do you need me to do?”

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“I need you to track the shifters and find their base of operations before you report back to me and we come up with a plan to eliminate them all this time.”

Jade nodded. “Just me or is Gunnar coming?”

She could sense the human bristle, but she didn’t understand if he didn’t want her in charge or didn’t believe she could find them.

“Noah will be working with you. He has a personal stake in this and he knew they were holding him in a place south of here.”

“Won’t they know he escaped and try to snag him again for another go at a transition?”

“Doesn’t matter. Noah’s ex-Navy SEAL and knows he’s taking a risk, but he’s willing to help us with this op. He knows about us. And I trust him.”

Jade nodded. She was reluctant to let a human to go on a mission, but she knew she would protect him with her life. She didn’t say it aloud, knowing he wouldn’t appreciate the sentiment.

When Ghost had first brought her into the fold, the other assassins doubted her abilities as well. That brought a smile to her lips.

“Stop that. Save it for Anzu’s crew.”

She nodded.

“You’ll take Noah to Kai’s and for the next couple of days, they will train him before you two set out.”

“I’d prefer if we left now.” Noah’s voice came out deep, as though he didn’t speak much. “And I’m not sure I trust this tiny woman to be able to handle herself.”

Jade bit back a growl, knowing that Ghost wouldn’t like it if she scared their only source of intel. But she watched as Noah crossed his arms over his chest, widened his stance, and straightened to his full height as he tried to intimidate her.

“Jade, no.”

“You should listen to your boss. You don’t want to get hurt.”

A growl escaped her throat at his taunting words. But she could feel her body warring between her curiosity of the man who made all of her senses flare and the desire to punch something hard. He moved into a fighting stance and at the moment, Jade blinked and turned to Ghost in confusion.

Ghost stepped in front of Noah, almost blocking him from her view.

“Let me explain a little about why Jade is here and not another assassin from my team. Jade is an expert tracker. She can find anyone in the world within seventy-two hours. She may be the smallest and the youngest of my assassins, but she is the deadliest. But what she has never done in her existence is kill or hurt a human unless it came as a direct order from me. She would never do anything to prove her strength because you challenged her, but I would recommend you not do it in front of the other assassins. While they won’t kill you either, they will make you hurt...a lot. And if you want to be part of this mission, I suggest you stash your resentment and listen to my orders.”

Jade watched Noah and his face remained passive during Ghost's speech, but nodded his understanding.

"I'm sorry for growling at you. That was out of line."

"And I'm sorry for coming across as a sexist, pompous asshole."

Jade giggled, almost disgusted with herself, but it was covered by Ghost's booming laughter.

"I'll meet you at Kai's later."

Knowing a dismissal when she heard one, Jade walked toward the door and out of the office. Noah closely followed on her heels and she turned toward him when he pressed the down arrow, calling the elevator. Jade brushed her shoulder against his arm and a shiver of pleasure ran through her.

She swallowed as they stepped into the waiting elevator. Being alone with the man unsettled her.

"Did you drive?"

Noah shook his head. "I dropped off my rental car. I was told I wouldn't be needing one."

She nodded and pressed the button for the lowest parking floor in the building. When she pulled her hand back, her skin brushed against his and this time, she heard him suck in an almost inaudible breath.

Was he as affected as I am?

It was too early to get the answers to those questions. Instead, she shivered in excitement as she thought about driving up to Kai's. Although she made quite a lot of money working for Dark Company, she liked to live frugally. She bought her small cottage in the mountains, filled it with books and made the space as welcoming as possible. She spent most of her time with Silas and the others either at Xander's sprawling house or Kai's. But her only splurge was an Aston Martin DB11 in Divine Red. The car drove like a dream.

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Without a word, they hopped in and she started driving up the mountain and waited patiently for Noah's questions.

"Why are the transitions killing us?"

"The short answer; we don't really know. But Liv, Kai's mate, has been working on comparing human and immortal DNA to figure out why some humans can make the transition. There have been four so far and Liv has come to the conclusion it's because their mates have turned them. Humans, while there are some exceptions, will die during the transition without being turned by a mate."

"Did your mate change you?"

Jade shook her head. "I don't remember anything about my transition or human life, which is unusual, but none of the immortals from Dark Company were turned by their mate. Well, Reaper met Ara a couple years ago and after she transitioned, she became an assassin. Kai turned Liv, both vampires. Reaper and Ara are wolves. Seth was turned into a vampire by Aubrey, his mate. Xander, a snow leopard, turned his mate Frost and they had a baby, Silas. He's the cutest thing and Liv suspects why Frost was able to get pregnant, but none of the other women shifters or vampires can."

"Why did you guys survive being transitioned by someone other than your mate and others don't?"

"We truly don't know, but Liv suspects that something in our DNA, something powerful, kept us alive. Ara is a telekinetic and grew stronger after she

transitioned. Actually, they grew tenfold after she became a wolf shifter.”

Noah grew silent as he processed what she’d told him. She understood that the world he’d known most of his adult life had changed and he had to process it anew.

“I didn’t know there were vampires.”

“Shifters are more common than vampires. Kai, Kane, Thomas, and Isaac are the only vampire assassins on the team. Seth and Aubrey aren’t with the company and Liv works in her lab. Kane lost his mate several years ago and while he’s thriving now, you can see a bit of sadness from time to time.”

Jade paused. “The group we’re tracking believe the only true immortals are shifters and they look down on vampires. How did you become involved in this situation?”

“My best bud, Sam, and I recently took early retirement from the SEALs. We were thinking about starting our own protection and private security company, but Sam heard of this lucrative deal where they paid ex-soldiers a lot of money, for what, I didn’t know at the time.

“Sam had gone behind my back and signed me up. We were transported to a farm in the middle of the night without any warning. They put us two to a room. I didn’t realize it at the time, but they had bitten Sam before they locked us in a room. I barely understood what was happening through words Sam could barely get out. On the second day, his body rejected whatever was happening inside of him and he died.”

They grew quiet after that. There was nothing Jade could say or do that would make Noah understand that not all immortals were the same. And it wouldn’t be fair for her to defend her kind. They were taking men who had volunteered for combat to defend this country and making them martyrs in a losing cause because they wanted power and money. She knew that both humans and immortals were capable of horrendous

acts, but Noah hated immortals because they took the one person who meant the world to him.

She wouldn't kid herself and believe he came to Ghost for any other purpose than to avenge his friend. It mattered not that Jade had found her mate because he'd deserved better. He deserved his revenge against those responsible for his friend's death. Hatred was his motivating factor. Hatred of all immortals.

And that meant he hated her as well.

Chapter Two

Noah

Noah had been surprised when the questions he asked were answered truthfully. But not as surprised as his reaction to the sight of the beautiful woman who drifted into the office of the immortal he'd chosen to partially trust.

He was a means to an end.

But when Jade had come into the office, he was taken aback by the way his heart beat harder in his chest and the way he seemed to track her quick movements with ease, an instinct that told him exactly where she was at any given time. He was aware of Jade on a level he'd never experienced.

The limited amount of time he'd spent with the only immortals he'd known, the vicious ones who thought nothing about building their numbers and taking power, and skewed his view of them. He could blame his hostility on his experience, but he could admit to himself as the car barreled up the mountain road it was because she had rattled him.

Nothing rattled him.

He had overheard some of the immortals, when they brought them food and water, about their plans on taking over Dark Company. When he escaped after Sam had died, he figured he would have a hard time finding them, but lo and behold, the company showed up after a quick internet search.

Noah tossed the idea about in his mind about going to the enemy of the immortals he'd escaped from, the ones who killed his friend, but in the end, it wasn't a hard decision. If a group of immortals could eliminate another, more menacing group, would they take it?

With Sam's excruciating death on his mind, he'd called Ghost from a pay phone and explained he had information that might be helpful, but only if he could be in on the takedown. Ghost invited him to his office and after a short conversation, Ghost declared he believed Noah and they were going to work together.

He had no qualms about using Dark Company to exact his revenge, but he did feel a pang of guilt as he glanced over and moved his gaze over her beautifully flawless face.

Noah had never been so affected by a woman before. From the moment he locked eyes on her, his senses went haywire. He could smell the softness of peaches and vanilla as she strolled into the room. He was mesmerized by how elegantly she moved around the room, and what took him by complete surprise was how unaware she was of how beautiful, almost ethereal, she looked. And he'd known immediately that she was a shifter.

Part of him rebelled against his attraction to her, but a larger part wanted to protect her while he got to know everything about her. But he was cautious and he would wait to see how their little mission went before he could trust her and explore his rising feelings for her. Hell, he was good at compartmentalizing his feelings and focused on his job, even though sometimes they ended in a clusterfuck.

He noticed Jade flinched when he talked about Sam and noticed that she hadn't said anything to defend immortals, only offering her condolences at his passing. And he knew that she was sincere, but now her silence was confounding.

Before he could ask her about it, a gigantic mountain house came into view and he managed to swallow back his surprise at the sheer size of it.

“This is Kai and Liv’s place.”

“The vampires.”

She smiled as he felt as though he’d been sucker-punched in the stomach. As Jade parked, Noah noticed movement coming from the shadows of what he assumed was the front door. A huge dark-haired man stepped from the porch, his arms crossed over his chest.

Jade stepped out of the car and Noah looked back and forth between the two. He could have sworn they communicated without speaking. It wasn’t through a look. He’d shared many of those with his team over the years. This was full-on communication, he was sure of it.

But whatever was said had the deadly-looking man dropping his arms and his stance relaxed as he looked at Noah, who had exited the car and stood by the door. He started toward Noah and as much as Noah wanted to tense at the advance, he held himself with his arms loose at his sides.

“Hi, I’m Kai.” He held out his hand, but before he could take it, Noah noticed a darting movement too fast for his eyes to focus on. He blinked and when he reopened his eyes, a small woman with wildly curly hair appeared at Kai’s side and she was smiling at him.

Noah shook Kai’s still outstretched hand before he turned to her. “Hi, I’m Noah.”

Instead of a handshake, she moved in for a hug, taking Noah completely by surprise. Tiny, yet strong arms wrapped around his torso and squeeze once, very

gently, before she stepped back and melted into Kai's embrace. He glanced up to see Jade smiling at him and the couple. Her bright smile relaxed some tension in his chest.

"I'm Liv. It's nice to meet you, Noah. I'm so sorry for your loss."

"Thank you. It's nice to meet you both." And he found that his words held sincerity.

Kai nodded toward the house. "Ready to meet the rest?"

Noah nodded, again looking at Jade when Liv broke away from Kai and pulled her in for a hug. Jade closed her eyes and smiled. Liv lingered in Jade's embrace and Noah could tell these two women cared deeply for each other.

"I'm not sure I like it dark. I miss your beautiful red hair."

Jade laughed. "I know. I miss it too, but I get less attention this way. It'll fade, eventually, and I'll go back to the way it was."

"You're beautiful either way."

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Noah silently agreed with the tiny vampire. He followed them inside and relaxed even further as he took in their comfortable home, but as he glanced around, he sensed danger, and reached out to lock the door behind him, earning a strange look from Kai.

He shrugged, unable to explain that he wanted to have the upper hand if Jade was attacked. He ordered himself to compartmentalize and walked deeper into the house.

Noah tensed when he spotted a white streak, much smaller than Liv's had been, head straight for Jade and jumped into her arms. He had to blink and when he opened his eyes, his gaze landed on a baby who looked no older than six months old, nuzzling Jade's cheek. But mid-caress, the baby paused and sniffed Jade and then the air around her, looking around until his gaze landed on Noah.

Noah felt affection swell in his chest and he swallowed hard when the baby smiled at him, but then Jade and the baby seemed to be having a conversation, another silent one, and Jade shook her head at something the baby had said. The baby scrunched his face, looking as though he was going to cry, but instead of a verbal outburst, it was as though his head exploded with sound and the word yes was screamed into his head. He wasn't the only one who flinched at the word.

Pounding footsteps sounded throughout the house before a man ran into the room. He had the same shock-white hair that matched the unhappy baby and he was followed by a gorgeous brunette, concern etched on both of their faces.

Apparently everyone heard the same scream in their heads and they flooded the room, all looking equally worried. The men were huge and the women were beautiful, but he moved back to the unhappy baby and found his gaze captured when he spotted the

usual sparks in Silas's eyes.

The man ran his fingers through his son's hair. "What's wrong, little man?"

I want Jade's mate.

Liv gasped and all eyes in the room moved to him. Well, all except Jade's. He could see a blush on her cheeks before her face was obscured when she turned away from him. Noah understood, a couple of seconds slower than the others, when he stated that Noah was Jade's mate.

Noah's attention jerked back to Jade, but before he could ask her what the little baby meant, he glanced around the room and found all eyes on him.

"What the—"

Kai cleared his throat before he could get the last word out. He didn't even want to think it in case the baby was in his head and listening to what he was thinking. He scoffed at himself, but not five minutes before, the baby spoke to everyone without opening his mouth, so anything was possible.

Noah barely registered the chuckles from his averted question as he watched the baby being picked up by his father and carried closer to Noah. Noah's eyes widened when the entire group moved closer to him, but his eyes moved back to the baby and stared into his unusual eyes. He blew out a breath when the group stopped a couple feet away from him.

"Hi, Jade's mate. I'm Xander. This is my mate, Frost, and our little boy, Silas."

"I'm Noah Hale."

“Would it be okay—”

Xander couldn't get his full request out before Noah found himself holding his arms out. Although he wasn't a danger to anyone in this room, he was a little surprised when Xander and Frost shared a look between them before Xander gently moved Silas into his arms.

He should have been concerned about the people surrounding him and the baby, but his focus was entirely on the baby boy in his arms and the overwhelming protectiveness he felt for him.

Hello, Silas. I'm Noah. It's really nice to meet you. Noah decided to see if his theory was right, if he could talk to Silas with his thoughts.

A surge of happiness rushed through him, taking him by surprise. Silas smiled at him and Noah felt as though he was given a special gift. At that moment, he could feel Jade's warmth and presence at his side and could feel himself relax a fraction more with her near.

So you can read my mind?

There was a chuckle that echoed in his mind. Of course I can.

How old are you, Silas?

I'll be eight months old in three days.

I've never met someone as brilliant as you are. Are you a shifter, too?

Silas giggled and snuggled into Noah's arms. He wondered how this child could trust him so easily, how any of them could. His hostility at Jade and his coldness toward

Ghost when he first met the man should have put the group of assassins on edge. Instead, they went back to what they were doing and left him with a very special baby.

I'm a snow leopard like Daddy and Mommy.

I would like to see that sometime.

Jade and I like to run in the mountains when it snows. She hides and I try to find her, and it's pretty easy with her red fur, but it's fun anyway.

Noah looked at Jade and he could sense that although she was reading something on her tablet, she was alert, even in her relaxed state. The scent of peaches reached him again and he had to bite his lip in order to prevent a moan from escaping his throat. Each moment he spent with her, the more he was drawn to her.

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Silas...how do you know that I'm Jade's mate?

Your scent matches hers and your colors match. You two are a bright-green color, Daddy and Mommy are bright blue, Kai and Liv are a mix between orange and red, Ara and Reaper are yellow, Seth and Aubrey are pink.

Noah turned toward Jade. "Did you hear what Silas said, about our colors?"

Jade shook her head, but before she could speak, a huge blond man trotted over toward Jade to sit down next to her, but Noah let out a growl that stopped him in his tracks. The man let out a loud laugh but moved toward the other side of Jade and dropped onto a comfortable-looking leather chair.

"Ignore Axel. He likes to rile every one. But no, I didn't hear. What did Silas say?"

"Our colors match—we are both bright green. And our scents are compatible."

"Colors?" Liv asked.

Noah repeated the color matches between the immortals, each of their eyes widening when Noah conveyed the information, while Silas snuggled into his chest and giggled at his family's reactions to this information. The stunned looks around the room was a little funny and Noah found himself chuckling along with Silas.

I like you.

Noah glanced down and smiled at Silas. I like you too, little man.

“Well, that’s new.”

Noah glanced up to see Xander smiling softly at his son. “What else can he do?”

“He can erect an invisible shield. We don’t know how far it will reach but it was enough to cover my house and the grounds when we fought the group we’re after now. He’s also strong and can read thoughts from long distances. And he shifted for the first time when he was three months old.” Pride came from Xander and Noah could understand why completely.

How are you going to protect Jade? You’re human.

Yes, but I am a highly trained human and I’m here to learn from your family as they prepare me for anything that might come when we do fight.

Silas placed his hand on Noah’s cheek. Why are you sad?

Noah looked up and he met Jade’s brilliant green gaze. Again, he found sympathy in her eyes for a man she never knew. She gave him a soft smile and although he still hadn’t figured out how to deal with the information that he was destined for her, he couldn’t deny their connection. He gave her a small smile back before he answered Silas’s question.

I lost my best friend, Sam. The same immortals that your family fought not too long ago are trying to turn humans into shifters, but it’s not working. Sam died after he was bitten. His heart couldn’t handle the pain.

Silas surprised him by wrapping his arms around his neck and squeezing. Noah smelled baby powder as Silas gave him comfort, and he knew how wrong he was to judge all immortals by what he’d gone through. Noah slowly wrapped his arms around Silas and took comfort from the little boy.

I'll be your friend, Noah. I'm sorry about Sam, but I'll be here for you.

Thank you, Silas. I would be happy to be your friend.

The rest of the assassins scattered, even Axel when Noah cast him a sidelong glance. Jade was the only one who stayed close, and for a reason he couldn't fathom, he blew out a relieved breath. Noah knew he was acting like an ass to her, sending her mixed signals, but he knew that at that moment wasn't the right time to talk to her about it.

How old are you?

I'm thirty-three. I just retired from the Navy after fifteen years. Sam and I were going to start a business together but that didn't go as planned.

Are your parents around?

My dad still lives in the small town I grew up south of here, Trinidad, but my mom moved to the east coast after they divorced. I haven't talked to either of them since I joined the Navy. We never really got along.

Noah knew that Jade was listening to him. For some reason, Silas included her in the conversation and although he could sense her floating around in his mind, she didn't speak to either of them. Noah liked that he could share some of his life with her, even if he couldn't tell her directly.

Why?

Silas was curious and Noah found that he didn't mind answering questions.

It's kinda hard to answer. They had my older brother, Steven, and then I came alone

two years later. So when we grew up, I depended on my older brother more than my parents and we're still close, but our parents don't really contact us and we are fine with that.

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Where does your brother live?

Steven's in California. He's married to his wife, Amy, and works as a financial guy for a tech company out there. We talk every month or so and I know he's happy.

Silas patted his cheek and smiled. Noah thought his life had been turned upside down by the information that immortals existed, but meeting Jade and her family, especially little Silas, had lowered his anger. Not enough to forget what the others had done, but enough to know that he would do whatever this group of immortals asked. Their lives were in danger as well, and yet they invited him, a hostile human, into their home and Xander never questioned him with his son. All he knew was that he trusted this group.

He and Silas talked for a couple of hours as it grew dark. He could sense the other's milling around, not really paying attention to him. He glanced over and caught Jade's gaze and in that moment, he knew he would like to get to know her. She must have understood what he meant, as a small smile formed on the corner of her lips.

It was obvious that the group of immortal assassins were close. He was included without question and he would work hard to prove his worth on this mission.

His conversation with Silas started to wind down and when his beautiful eyes started to close, Noah felt something catch in his chest. He already loved Silas and he had the next few days to get to know the others and Jade.

"I can take him and put him down in his bed."

Noah glanced up and Frost was smiling at him. When she looked at her son, her face

softened and Noah almost regretted their time alone had come to an end.

“Don’t worry. You’re one of his favorite people now. He won’t leave you alone.”

Noah groaned and glanced up. “That obvious, huh?”

“Yeah, but only because he’s got us all under his spell. I’m glad you’re safe, Noah. We all are.” Frost reached for Silas and Noah watched as he settled against his mother’s shoulder.

“Thank you.” Noah glanced at Jade and she reached over and squeezed his forearm. Heat shivered up his arm and into his chest, warming his heart even more.

Noah watched as Frost took him up the stairs. “So Silas has a bed here too?”

“We all have a room with a bed, toys, clothes—everything Silas would need—in our houses. But he doesn’t sleep without Xander and Frost close. Since both Xander and Kai have the biggest houses, we’re usually at one or the other.”

Jade paused for a long moment before she captured his gaze.

“I know this is a lot to take in. If I had a choice, I wouldn’t have thrown you into the deep end if it wasn’t important. But now you’ve learned that you are my mate. I’m not asking you to make a decision anytime soon, but I want to ask you to think about it.”

Noah perused her face and realized she thought he would reject her outright. Instead, he took her left hand in his right and squeezed once. “I need to get through this mission and avenge Sam’s death. Then we’ll talk.”

She nodded and soon after, they were called to dinner. Noah stayed silent, choosing to listen to the cacophony of voices around him, learning about their personalities and

strengths from simple dinnertime conversation. It was almost normal and while Noah didn't know what his future held, he understood that being included in this group might not be a bad thing. And being the mate of a gorgeous woman...well, he had no answers. Yet.

Chapter Three

Jade

Jade sighed as she flung another unneeded piece of equipment onto her bed. She knew Noah would pack the essentials, but being with a human in the woods in the middle of winter, she wanted to be prepared for everything. She knew he had his winter gear, but she packed extra heat packs and thermal clothes and blankets and MREs.

It wasn't as though she had planned to stay away from Noah during his training. But when Noah agreed they would explore the connection between them after they tracked and eliminated the immortal shifters who were a danger to everyone, she didn't want to pressure Noah into anything so she stayed away.

Jade had been thrown off-kilter when Silas announced to everyone Noah was her mate and further surprised them when he mentioned each couple's colors, expecting Noah to freak out and walk out of the house. Instead, he was calm about the entire situation.

It helped that he was enamored with Silas from the first moment they looked at each other. It stirred desires that Jade had never felt before and knew to be impossible. Liv confirmed it after Frost had gotten pregnant earlier in the year. Jade and the other's weren't able to get pregnant. At the time, it never occurred to Jade to want a family because she loved her job and she'd never given a thought about a mate of her own.

But seeing how gentle and caring Noah had been with Silas, Jade could feel desire for a family of her own.

When Noah told her that they would take care of their problem and then talk, her heart jumped in her chest because she knew he was giving her a chance. That was, until she overheard him yesterday speaking to Kane.

“I should’ve turned her when I had the chance. But every time she brought it up, I dissuaded her by saying it was too much of a risk, too much pain. I regret that every day. If I had a chance to turn back time, I would have bitten her, flooded her with my venom the moment she told me she loved me. Trust me, man. Mates are rare.” Kane’s voice wobbled at the end.

Noah nodded. “I understand, I really do. But I need to concentrate on eliminating Sam’s killers before I can think about my future. And I’m not sure if Jade’s for—”

He was interrupted before Jade could hear the rest.

During Noah’s training with the other assassins, she either spent time with Silas or hidden from view where she could watch Noah’s progress. She was impressed by his intensity learning what he needed about how immortals moved. Since he didn’t need to worry about vampires, they taught him how shifters moved (they usually came at you head on, while vampires would use stealth to their advantage). He also had great senses, not missing anything whenever there was movement near him or he was distracted by another fight.

Although he didn’t have the strength and speed of the shifters he was sparring with, he was accurate with a weapon and could strike with a knife in a way that impressed the most hardened assassin. Kai; she was talking about Kai.

For the past two days, they’d been conditioning Noah, sparring with him, and teaching him how to detect movement from shifters. The larger, the easier to spot.

“This group is untrained and stupid, so that makes them predictable. They will come

at you without stealth or grace and they will fail almost immediately. Then they will try to gang up on you, sensing you're human, and they will try to separate you from Jade. Don't leave her side. Fight back-to-back if you have to, but under no circumstance should you be separate from Jade. Also, if she tells you to do something, you need to comply immediately. There is no questioning her in battle, because she will do everything in her power to save your life, even if it means she sacrifices herself."

Fuck, Kai, could you calm the fuck down a little? He's a soldier—he knows all this.

He's human and although well trained and deadly, he's a target. Don't forget.

I won't and I don't think he will either.

"Since venom from vampires will kill shifters, Jade will have a gun filled with bullets that contain small capsules of venom inside that will explode on impact. We want to see how quickly it incapacitates or kills them so we can use it in the final battle. You have a limited supply, but since Liv figured out a way to stabilize the venom once it's harvested, we will work on more for later. And whatever you do, for fuck's sake, stay alive and don't get bitten. If you are bitten, there's not much we can do for you. Got it?"

Noah, who had been staring at Kai with an impassive face, nodded his head. "Yes, sir."

"Cut the sir shit."

Noah and Kai laughed and the group went back to their training.

Kai and Reaper had wanted her to train with Noah that afternoon, but Jade had begged off to get their weapons and other essentials packed. She knew she would have

nothing to show him. She was deathly afraid she might hurt him in some inadvertent way and she would never take that chance.

So she picked up another .45 and checked the magazine was fully loaded before she slammed it back into position. It joined the four others Jade already checked. She would carry the MP5 with her during their hike and she would have two more for Noah when he needed them. She also packed enough ammunition they could survive a couple of firefights, enough for a strategic retreat.

The last thing she packed were extra batteries for the satellite phones, one for her and Noah, that had a direct line back to the team. She sensed Reaper at the front door as she zipped up her pack and listened to his distinct footsteps before he loomed in her bedroom doorway.

The silence that stretched between them was a tactic Reaper used to push the others off-kilter before they spilled their guts, but it never worked with Jade. She continued to ignore him as she set her pack by the door.

Reaper sighed. "You can't deny the most fundamental part of who you are."

"I'm not denying it. He asked to give him time, to get through this mission and eliminate those who killed his best friend, then he said we would talk about it. I'm doing what he asked."

"But you should be training him so he could learn your movements and how you respond to an attack so he could have your back."

Jade turned her glare to Reaper. "I know how you were when we trained Ara and you didn't participate because you were afraid that you would pull your punches and she wouldn't learn anything. I'm afraid of hurting him because he knows too much. I will demonstrate my fighting technique so he could learn, but I refuse to spar with him."

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“You’re right.Sorry about that.”

She shook her head and waved off his apology.Jade felt sensitive about the subject.She couldn’t remember anything about her past life and although she found her place in the world with the assassins, she never felt wanted.And Noah being hesitant to be her mate reinforced the fact that she still wasn’t wanted.

Except for my skills as a tracker and fighter.

Shaking her head, she stopped her morose thoughts and nodded at Reaper.She was ready.

Jade followed Reaper to the clearing outside Xander’s house where they’d recently fought.She laughed when Silas waved his little arms at her and went to press a kiss on the top of his downy head.“I love you, little one.”

I love you, too, Jade.

Reaper moved near Noah so he could explain the way she fought.Jade was surprised when Noah gave her a short nod and a small smile.She would take it and smiled back.

Jade stepped into the clearing and turned toward Kane, always the first in the group to attack.He was a blur, even to her eyes, but Jade had honed her senses over the years, especially after getting her ass kicked by Kai so many times.She calmed her heart and relaxed her muscles, making tracking the gung-ho vampire easier.

The moment he reached for her, Jade ducked and timing it just right, she lifted up and

planted her shoulder into his gut, before she twirled around. Using the momentum of the action and her strength, she launched him through the trees and out of view.

She swung around in time to capture Axel's fist in her own. She twisted her wrist lightly, but the movement was enough to make the lion shifter lose his balance and flip in the air. He landed hard on his back and, with one strike to his sternum, Axel groaned and dropped his head on the ground.

Ara lifted her off the ground before she could strike Ax again. Jade waited until she reached a sturdy branch. She reached for the branch, flipped herself so she could stand on it, and without hesitation, she launched herself at Hunter. The surprised look on his face was nothing compared to when she lifted him easily and threw him at Ara, who hadn't been expecting that counter. They tumbled into each other and she heard Reaper growl at her actions, but she ignored him.

Gunnar snarled at her and she blinked. She loved the way his soft gray hair would sway with the wind, but he snapped his sharp teeth together and charged. She sensed Kane coming back for a second round and dropped onto her back as he flew past her, hitting a tree and felling it.

"Hey, leave the trees out of this," Xander huffed.

Gunnar reached her and snapped his teeth at her neck. She let him get close enough before she brought her knees to her chest. When she pressed her legs up to make contact with his chest, she sent him flying into the air and out of view. Silas chuckled to see a gray wolf flying through the air and that made her smile.

Thomas and Isaac, the two vampires who liked to fight together, reached for her and she darted out of their grip. They might be vampires, but she was faster. She maneuvered them until they were close enough she could feel the brush their strikes against her skin without actually landing. As they recovered and attacked again, she

determined where they were to strike next and darted away in time so their strikes landed on each other. The force of their dual hits against each other sent them out of sight.

Xander shifted and Jade immediately followed suit. He growled at her, showing his large teeth, and she danced away. Xander charged and she rolled under him, his teeth missing her neck by millimeters. She unrolled from her tuck and pushed off the ground, landing on Xander's back before he stopped his momentum. She pressed down on his shoulder blades. From his own forward momentum and the force of her body, his legs gave out and he skidded on his face for a few feet before stopping.

Ghost, in his white wolf form that she rarely saw, then jumped on top of her, pinning her to the ground. She immediately bared her teeth and growled, as did he, and they snapped at each other, trying to find a vulnerability. Getting nowhere, she moved and tried to head butt his leg. He noticed her actions and when he moved it, she shouldered Ghost off her and pounced on his back, bringing her mouth around his neck and squeezing slightly. She backflipped off of him and waited.

Kai was always her last opponent because he liked to be patient, looking for vulnerabilities in his enemies. She learned patience from him.

She scurried up the tree and rained branches and dead leaves down upon his head, chuckling to herself at her actions.

"Kai was the most talented fighter until Jade came along," Reaper explained.

Jade heard Noah grunt and that split second of distraction allowed Kai closer. She jumped toward Kai, swiping her paw across his chest. When she heard the small grunt of surprise, she continued with her assault. She moved quickly, striking him on the legs, the Achilles, across the back, all while using the trees to ping-pong herself around Kai.

She continued with a strike on the back of his neck, his wrists, the back of his legs before she landed on all fours several yards from Kai and stared at him.

Kai nodded at her, telling her that if her claws hadn't been retracted, her attack would have worked perfectly as she moved from artery to artery with swift and precise strikes.

"Her moves are always practical and logical. Also, they are the quickest way to eliminate a target. She will never allow herself to be overwhelmed and will separate the enemies before slowly killing them until there isn't anyone standing. Your job is to keep those who don't fight fair off her back until she's done. But she's always got your back. Don't forget that. Protect your six and hers and you'll be fine."

Jade moved toward Liv, farther into the trees, where Liv handed her a hoodie and a pair of jeans. She hugged Liv and smiled when she pressed a smacking kiss to her cheek that caused Liv to giggle. She walked back toward the group.

"Inside for one last mission briefing," Ghost announced.

Jade caught Silas as he jumped into her arms. She buried her nose into his stomach, loving the baby smell and something uniquely Silas, before tossing him in to the air. She laughed as he giggled and soon, she had him cradled in the crook of her arm. "I love you, little one, very much."

I love you, too. I'm gonna miss you and Noah while you two are gone.

We'll miss you, too.

Of course we will, buddy. We'll be back soon, though. Jade wasn't surprised Silas included Noah in the conversation.

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Okay. But come home safe.

Silas sighed. Okay, Daddy, I'll go upstairs and play. The entire team heard that and chuckled.

Silas kissed her on the cheek before he jumped from her arms and sprinted up the stairs. They took seats around Xander's living room and Jade was surprised when Noah sat next to her.

"Do you guys know where you're headed?"

Jade nodded. "Based on Noah's intel and where the failed shifters headed after they lost the fight, their camp is most likely in southwest Colorado, somewhere near Crested Butte."

"Why there?" Reaper asked.

"I suspect because it's near a popular ski resort where they could 'recruit' new members. Also, there is a lot of open land where they could set up a headquarters without being noticed coming and going."

"When?" Ghost asked.

"There is a snowstorm forecasted for the end of the week. It should take us half a day to hike and find their headquarters, so if we head out tomorrow and find their camp by mid-afternoon, we'll be back by Thursday at the latest. The snow will come in on Friday afternoon—well, that's when it's predicted."

“When we get their intel, we’ll start with our plans, but we won’t finalize them until Jade and Noah get back and she can show us the layout from memory. Jade, have you and Noah been working on your mind link?”

“No.”

“What do you mean?” Noah asked.

Ghost explained, of course. “All the assassins have been successful at teaching themselves to mind link. It’s what Silas can do with ease. Usually it’s hard to master, but since you are mates, you two should find it easier to mind link.”

“But I’m human and I thought Silas was special, that’s why he could, even with me.”

“Yes, Silas is special, but you should be able to master it with Jade because you’re Jade’s mate.”

Jade opened her mouth to protest, not wanting to force Noah to do anything he would be uncomfortable with. He hadn’t accepted her yet, and this was the last thing she wanted Noah to know about.

“It would help coordinate in combat situations instead of using coms.” Noah turned to Jade and gave her a determined look that she couldn’t dismiss.

Jade nodded. “We’ll work on it during the drive down, the hike, and downtimes.”

“Thank you.” Noah nodded at her and turned back to Ghost.

“Okay. You’re both packed?”

Noah and Jade both nodded. Noah didn’t need to know that she packed him extra

provisions.

“Then we’ll see you off at sunrise.”

As Ghost ended the meeting, Silas flew out of nowhere and landed in Xander’s arms. He smiled at Xander, knowing his daddy wouldn’t be mad at him, even though he hadn’t stayed upstairs. He hugged Xander and his mom, before he hopped down and climbed onto Noah’s lap.

Jade smiled into her hand when Noah wrapped Silas close and they started a conversation that only the two of them could hear. She loved that Noah had accepted her family so easily, but as she watched Noah and Silas’s faces light up as the conversation continued, Jade wished that in time, she could get through Noah’s wall and truly connect with him.

Chapter Four

Noah

Noah and Jade had been trekking through the woods for a couple of hours. They drove down from Snowfall, leaving at dawn, and arrived at the outskirts of Crested Butte a little before nine. Noah was used to long expeditions, albeit not through the snow, but at least he could admit he enjoyed the cold much more than the desert heat.

He learned the hard way how much Jade hated mornings, and she hadn't put up a fight when he offered to drive her Land Rover. Noah, despite being out of the Navy for close to six months, hadn't stopped getting up at daybreak. He needed about five hours of sleep to be functional, but the way Jade mumbled whenever he took a corner too fast, she loved sleeping in.

Over the past few days, Noah had changed his mind completely about the assassins and especially Jade. The group had shown him nothing but kindness and like in BUD/S, he knew that they pushed him as hard as they did because their lives were at stake. He didn't mind the extra training and although he was far from out of shape, his stint with the assassins had honed muscles and improved his reaction time.

During quiet moments, usually late at night or early in the morning, his thoughts would revert back to Jade. Liv had shown him some pictures of her with her natural red hair and he was mesmerized. The red brought out the freckles sprinkled along her cheeks and although he already thought her beautiful, he could see the red fit her perfectly and he wanted to see for himself what she looked like with it back to her natural color. But nothing could detract from her natural beauty.

Noah had spoken to all of the assassins and while they started off with combat techniques, they inevitably turned to the mates of the immortals. None of them had fought the truth when they learned they were mates, but Liv thought Kai didn't want her, Ara worried she brought danger to Reaper and the rest of the assassins, Aubrey didn't want to hurt Seth but in the end realized they all realized they couldn't live without their mates. Frost was the odd one out, she felt the connection with Xander the moment she laid eyes on him.

Noah could tell how much they complemented each other. Kai was quiet and brooding while Liv was bubbly and friendly, but it was obvious how much they loved each other. Reaper and Ara were both quiet, but they were similar in intensity. Seth and Aubrey couldn't stand to be out of sight of each other, while Xander and Frost sought each other out and worried about the same things, mostly about Silas. But none of them felt smothered or doubted their feelings for one another because the immortals had mates, unlike humans who don't.

Noah fought his attraction from the moment he met her, but he also ignored his instincts, those that kept him alive in more than one situation. But after Sam had died and what he knew of the immortals before he'd met the assassins had built his distrust until he'd taken it out on Jade. He had gotten used to listening to his gut because it had never let him down. But he rebelled against every truth that had been laid out before him, and as they walked through another copse of trees, guilt swamped him and he felt the need to apologize.

He wanted to try their mind link because if it was successful, it would be the final truth that solidified the foundation of who he was to Jade.

Concentrating on his words, he pictured Jade before he spoke. I'm sorry.

Jade gasped and he knew in that moment, he'd accepted his destiny.

I allowed myself to become prejudiced against all immortals after Sam died. But as I got to know you and your family, I realize now how wrong I was.

Jade's voice came back as clear as if she were in front of him. Losing anyone is hard, but you watched your friend die painfully because they lied to both of you and were planning on using you. I completely understand. If I were in your shoes, I'm not sure I would have been as forgiving.

Yeah, but that's one of the things I'm apologizing for. I think I freaked out a little when Silas explained to me that I was your mate and I ignored you. I talked to the assassins with mates and they explained to me it's not a compulsion to be with you, which I misbelieved what our relationship would be.

Noah, not used to so much self-reflection, breathed a sigh of relief when he heard Jade giggle in his head. He glanced up and noticed he closed the distance between them and now she was within arm's length. He scanned Jade's beautiful face, noticing that she wasn't even winded, despite the ten-mile hike, uphill, they'd already completed. He was grateful he kept up his running and exercise schedule.

"To be honest, if you think about the concept of being a mate, it's a little daunting. Immortals, for a reason we don't understand, are enhanced in every way when we transition. That includes our enhancing our looks. And to be honest, I never thought of having a mate, not like Xander. But you took me by surprise, so I can understand why you had to think about it. And I'm still going to let you do just that—think about what you want when there isn't a danger lurking over all of our heads."

Jade started to turn and start their trek, but he reached out and clasped her hand in his larger one.

"I know you want me to think about it, but I wanted you to know that yes, I am

attracted to you, but it's more than that. I feel as though there is something missing when you're not near me. I feel stronger when we work together and I'm looking forward to running into some shifters so we can see just how good we are together." Noah slid his thumb along the palm of her hand, eliciting a shiver from her.

"I've never been as affected by any woman and the entire time you fought against your fellow assassins, I was torn between pulling you out of the fight or enjoying you making it look easy. And for an odd reason, watching you fight solidified how much we complement each other."

Jade's expressive green eyes were wide after his confession and she didn't move away when he stepped closer to her.

"I know I'm not the most effusive man, but I am sorry if I hurt you."

Jade searched his gaze for the truth and found it immediately. He smiled at her when she relaxed and squeezed his hand back. At that moment, her scent shifted slightly, adding a musky note to her already addicting peaches and vanilla scent, drawing him in even more.

Noah knew that in that moment their dynamic had changed and the solid weight that had settled in his chest from his treatment of her vanished.

"I only want you to be happy and if I can do anything that helps you with that, including getting revenge for Sam's death, I will gladly do it. I'm sorry that I didn't get to meet him."

He nodded. "He would have liked you. And as for our relationship, we should do whatever feels natural."

Jade nodded and, unable to stay away from her any longer, he stepped up close and

raised his right hand slowly, moving it around to cup the back of her neck. He loved feeling her sweet breath on his neck.

“Can I kiss you?”

He gazed into her eyes and became mesmerized by the sparks glittering at his question. Jade licked her lips, pulling his gaze down to her beautiful light-pink lips. And being this close, he could see the smattering of freckles on her cheeks and found he wanted to kiss each one of them.

“Yes, please.”

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Something simmered in Noah's blood the moment his lips met Jade's. It was a simple pressing of the lips, yet powerful. He couldn't help as he swiped his tongue against her lower lip and groaned when she opened for him. For that one moment in time, everything else fell away.

He explored her mouth, savoring the cool mint and the taste of pure Jade. His hands explored her back and when he encountered her hair, he itched to remove it from the tight knot on the back of her head. Noah hadn't seen her with her hair down in the time they'd known each other.

Shaking his head, he realized then they had gotten too distracted from what they were meant to do and with reluctance, Noah slowly broke the kiss.

Noah had to blink several times in order to focus, and when he did, a smile played on the corner of his lips as she still had her eyes closed and there was a faint blush on her cheeks. She brought her fingers to her swollen lips and brushed them lightly against her skin before slowly opening her eyes and looking at him with a dazed expression.

"Was that your first kiss?"

She nodded.

"How is that even possible?"

"None of the men I've ever met were my mate, so I never bothered. Not even for experience."

“What about before you transitioned, when you were human?”

She shook her head.

Noah had noticed the sky had started to darken, making the air around them cooler. He was dressed so warmly he hadn't noticed. He took a moment for a quick glance around. They were in a ravine underneath an open sky and they would be hard to find in that spot unless you knew exactly what you were looking for. “We should make camp here for the night.”

Jade agreed, but when he reached for her backpack, she was slow to turn. He pressed a quick kiss to her cheek.

He unpacked what they needed for the night before setting up the tent. With a perusal of the terrain map of the area, he determined they were ten clicks away from their destination and decided it was safe enough to build a fire.

As the fire crackled and the warmth seeped into his body, he ripped open the chicken with egg noodles and vegetables MRE and handed it to Jade, choosing the brisket one for himself. They listened to the animals moving in the dampened quiet only the snow could provide and the crackling of the fire that warmed them as they ate.

“I don't remember anything about being human. I can't remember my transition, or anything before Ghost found me in a deserted cabin on the outskirts of Snowfall fifty years ago.”

“Xander, Reaper, Kai, and Aubrey all remember theirs. Is it weird that you can't remember yours?”

Jade smiled. “I'm glad you had a chance to get to know them. Especially Silas.”

“It’s easy to like Silas. And I notice that he’s curious about everything, so you end up talking about yourself without realizing how much you divulge.”

Jade laughed and he found himself wanting to hear the melodic laugh more often.

“It is odd that I don’t remember. I did have my birth certificate in a pocket, but everything but my first name and my date of birth was blocked out. Ghost tried to get document experts to find out more and Xander had taken a crack at it, but every turn was a dead end. All I know is I’m Jade and I was twenty-one when I became a red fox shifter. I sometimes wonder if I left behind a family, if they worried about me or if they were glad to be rid of me.”

Noah reached over and squeezed her hand. He refused to placate her because in reality, he couldn’t know the situation she’d left.

“Was your fighting innate or was it training?”

Jade laughed. “Training, definitely. When Ghost first hired me, I had no clue what to do and would refuse to hurt anyone. When I realized it was needed in order to save my life and make me a better assassin, I was all in. Learning was easy for me and I truly enjoyed the sparring. But tracking, that’s something innate in me.”

“What do you mean?”

“Choosing a direction is more than picking up a scent or a physical trail. Both humans and immortals have motivations and once you understand them, tracking is easy. These immortals need room but an area that is undetected. I searched farms within a thirty-mile radius of Crested Butte, the town you remember driving through, and found what farms and ranches had been deserted long ago but hadn’t fallen into disrepair. The only one that fit is the one a short walk from here tomorrow.”

Noah nodded, understanding. “But what is this crew’s motivation?”

“They are unorganized and lazy, but greedy. They believed Anzu, their old leader, when he said they could destroy Dark Company and kill all of us and then they can take over. Dark Company has an exclusive contract with the government. We’re considered deeper than black ops, only getting the contracts where human methods have failed to eliminate the target.

“But when they fought us, they were decimated. It was because we are trained and work well together as a team, but they only saw that we had numbers on our side. There are many more assassins who are stationed all over the country and world, and they came together for Xander and Silas. And because these men saw they were defeated by so many, they believe numbers are the one thing that will win a war.”

Jade squeezed his hand, and Noah swallowed hard.

“They know that they will fail at the transitions, but it doesn’t stop them from trying. Humans, to them, are disposable unless they suit a purpose.”

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Noah rubbed a spot on his chest as he thought about Sam.

“Is that how Gunnar tracks?”

“Gunnar is more of a traditional tracker. He has a great sense of smell, better than I ever had, and can pick up a trail that I would miss by sight. We work in tandem because we both have strengths that play off each other.”

“Does anyone else know about your past?”

“No. I’m no different than the rest of them. Besides, if I have no starting point, I have no clue where to go.”

Noah laughed. “Each of you is different. Unique, in your own way.”

“Most people only see what’s on the outside, even those I consider family.”

“What do you mean?”

Jade laughed, but it was hollow. “Most women see me as a threat. The first time I met Liv, Ara, Aubrey, and Frost, they all believed me to be a challenger for their mate’s affections, but it doesn’t work that way. And I don’t clear the air, but they come to realize that I’m not on their own.”

“I can understand that.”

“Why did you want to be a SEAL?”

“I joined the Navy to get out of Colorado, see the world.I learned about the SEALs after two years of being enlisted and my CO recommended me because I liked to push myself to do more.When I passed BUD/S, I loved the camaraderie I felt with my team.After years of being deployed, I found myself slowing fractionally, but enough that I might put others in danger if I was a split second too late.I don’t miss the combat, but I miss the guys and feeling as though I was doing something important.That’s why I went with Sam when he applied for the mercenary position.”

Jade’s green eyes hardened as she was reminded of the monsters they were after.“I promise you, we will find them and eliminate them.All of them.”

“I believe you.And I trust you, Jade.”

She smiled at him.They talked more about some of the people he’d met around the world, and before long, Jade yawned.They settled into the tent, bringing only one to save room.He laid there for a long time, listening to her deep breathing lulling him to sleep.The last thing he remembered was that her scent had shifted again.This time, he could’ve sworn he detected eucalyptus.

Chapter Five

Jade

Jade had awoken several minutes earlier after the best sleep she'd had in years, and watched Noah as he slept deeply next to her in his own sleeping bag.

The day before had been full of surprises. She hadn't expected him to apologize, but it was the kiss that rocked her world. And when she slowly recovered, she realized she would never be the same again.

Hearing his apology through their mind link solidified for her that they were destined to be together. When she told Noah she was willing to give him space, she had been willing to sacrifice her happiness for his. If he decided that he didn't want to be her mate, she would have let him go as soon as their objective had been completed.

Part of her knew that his rejection could have severe consequences, but she thought if she had been in the same position, not having a choice because fate had destined Jade to be with someone, she would fight it with everything inside her. And she couldn't do that to Noah.

But when he said he wanted to see how their relationship progressed naturally, she felt the coil around her chest loosen. There was always a possibility that he could change his mind, but she decided not to dwell on the fact until it happened.

Jade listened to Noah's deep, even breathing and memorized the sound. Pushing her senses farther out, two things had her brow furrowing, one more serious than the

other.

First, the snowstorm that was predicted for the end of the week had accelerated its pace. The wind whipped around the tent before dissipating, bringing in the heavy scent of snow in the distance. The storm would probably arrive the following afternoon at the latest, which moved up their timetable.

The second, and most worrying, fact. The breeze brought the scent of two distinct bear shifters and they had been close to their camp within the last two hours. They were closer than either she or Noah realized, which meant they could find their base in a couple of hours and hike back to the car by this afternoon.

Since they hadn't destroyed the tent, Noah must've pitched it somewhere invisible until you got close enough and the wind pushed their scent in the other direction, leaving the bear shifters unaware. With any experienced assassin, they would have scented both of them right away and attacked.

Or they were playing with them.

Jade's eyes shot open at that particular thought, a feeling of dread washing over her. It was supposed to be a recon mission, but they might have a fight on their hands and she had to prepare Noah.

Jade barely touched Noah's shoulder to wake him and he immediately sat up, aware and scanning his surroundings. Jade explained everything and Noah stood, packing without question.

"We should find a cave or another type of cover, so if we need to hunker down or escape, we have some place that isn't easily accessible and we can hear anyone approaching for several miles," Noah suggested.

Jade agreed and within minutes, their campsite looked as though no one had been there and they hiked west, heading away from their ultimate destination.

They lucked upon a hidden cave, several feet from the ground but surrounded by trees and scrubs. They set up the tent and unpacked the non-essentials, before donning their lighter packs and heading in the direction of the shifters' scent.

Despite the occasional wind gust letting Jade know she was on the right track, the weather held. By mid-afternoon, the scent brought them to a series of wooden barns and smaller, one-room cabins, but no house on the property. The way it was set up, it had been obvious that it was an abandoned ranch.

"I remember arriving on a long dirt road, but we arrived in the dead of night and they hadn't turned out their headlights. This place has no outside lighting."

Jade nodded. "I smell a variety of scents, but there are too many to nail down a hard count." She pulled out her GPS receiver and shot a quick text to Ghost with the longitude and latitude of the place.

"I don't see movement, but there's no dissipation of the scents. It's like they are near..."

Noah's eyes lightened in realization. "Underground."

Jade sent that information off to Ghost, wondering if he could get a scan with heat signatures of the property.

Noah stilled next to her and she scanned her surroundings, wondering what he picked up on.

"I have a bad feeling. The kinda feeling I got before a mission went south and people

died.”

Jade glanced down and caught the message Ghost sent.

Intel received.Come home.

“Let’s hike back, spend one more night and head back to the car in the morning.We’ll have plenty of time to avoid the storm.”

Noah nodded but moved his MP5 against his chest, joining two holstered HK Mark 23 .45 caliber handguns.They trekked back toward the cave.The only sound was their breathing and the crunch of snow under their boots.

Jade sensed company and tapped Noah twice on the shoulder, their signal trouble was near.She pointed to the cluster of small pines, perfect for camouflage.Noah raised his eyebrow and she nodded toward the tall pine and pointed up.Noah nodded once and set off toward the trees as Jade leapt up onto the highest branch that would hold her weight, about fifteen feet in the air.

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She wanted to glance around and see if Noah was safe, but she refused to look anywhere but the clearing where she knew the shifters would be coming through. Their two pursuers burst through the copse of trees and into the clearing and without hesitation, Noah shot one of them in the forehead, causing his brains to explode out from the back of his skull as the bullet expanded on exit.

Jade dropped onto the second shifter. She scurried from his back to his chest and pulled out the 9 mm that had bullets filled with Kai's venom. She pressed the gun to the shifter's chest and put two slugs into his heart. There was a gasp that sounded almost like a screech of pain and she vaulted from his chest and she landed on the ground.

With widened eyes, she noticed the shifter's veins darkened as the venom spread from his chest, up his neck, and turned his eyes black. His fists were clutched against his side, and when she happened a glance down, inky splotches darkened his skin as all his blood turned black. He fell back where he lay, dead.

It took her a few minutes, and then, for good measure, she extended her claws and with a clean swipe, removed his head from his body. She watched in horror as his blood, now thick, oozed from his body and splatted onto the snow.

That was fucking disgusting.

Shaking out of her surprised stupor, she walked over to the shifter Noah shot and removed his head the same way.

“We should get back before they realize these two are missing and find us here.”

“Huh.Is that because of the vampire venom?”

“Yeah.Ghost will be excited that it’s effective, but I’ll be sure to show him exactly what it does.”

They picked up their packs and Jade found one of the perfume bottles she packed and broke the glass against the tree to hide more of their scent.The perfume would overwhelm their senses and hopefully throw them off track.

As they started their hike, Noah cleared his throat.“Why did you remove their heads?”

Jade glanced at him.“Didn’t Reaper tell you that immortals can regenerate?”

“No, I don’t think so.He and the others told me I have to sever the brain stem when I shoot them, but I don’t remember anything about regeneration.Seriously?”

“Remind me to punch Reaper for not telling you.Anyway, we can regenerate from gunshots and other wounds, but once our heads are detached, an immortal can no longer heal themselves.”

“How much damage can you take before regeneration fails?”

“Well, Reaper had been shot in the heart seven times with hollow point bullets and it killed him.Ara brought him back from the dead.Anything that doesn’t shred heart tissue isn’t fatal.You can shoot them in the head, even severing their brain stem, but they could regenerate.Most wounds will heal in a couple of hours, but more severe wounds, most immortals lose consciousness and will heal as they sleep.If it’s severe enough, get a hold of Ghost and have him send Ara.”

Noah grew quiet as they ate up the miles, the adrenaline still rushing through their

veins from the takedown. She couldn't call it a fight. And Jade knew they were getting close.

"Do you feel guilty for killing the immortals?" Noah's question was quiet, but carried to her.

"No. We're just like humans. Some want peaceful lives without conflict, and others seek power and control over others. Most likely, they were greedy and vicious as humans, and when they were turned, every bad trait multiplied until they thought nothing of killing, human or immortal. I have no problem killing, if it's for the greater good."

Noah chuckled. "You know, you're sexy as hell when you go badass."

A burst of laughter escaped her throat. "Are you flirting with me, Mr. Hale?"

He nodded. "But I'm also trying to distract you from the fight. You still seem keyed up."

She clenched her fists against her sides. "I felt such a rush of disgust when the bear shifter caught sight of you, and I think I let the rage take over for a moment. I'm trying to rein it back in. I don't want to run into anyone else. I'm feeling very protective of you right now."

Her breath caught in her throat when Noah wrapped his arm around her lower back and placed his hand on her hip. Jade watched with wide eyes as Noah came closer and her breath caught in her throat. He stopped several inches from her lips, but his blue eyes sparked with desire and she almost moaned aloud when she thought about what his lips felt like pressed against hers.

Jade's gaze dropped to Noah's lips and she felt his other arm slip around her back and

he opened his large hands on her back. She forced her eyes up and met his gaze and sucked in a breath at the desire that shone through. Desire for her.

“Can I kiss you?”

“Yes,” she breathed.

Jade felt the same skitter of electricity in her veins, but this time, her blood turned to molten lava when his tongue traced her lips, getting her to open for him, before he delved inside, tasting her and moaning, asking her to taste him back.

She lost herself in the sensations, not holding back and moaning into Noah’s mouth as his hands opened over her back and rubbed his thumbs along her spine, sending shivers throughout her untried body.

Without breaking the kiss, she stepped forward and clutched at Noah’s hips, bringing him closer while being careful of her strength. The last thing she wanted was to hurt him because she lost control. Being this close to him, feeling his warmth and savoring his scent, had her moaning into his mouth.

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She wanted more, but she had no idea if he wanted the same.

As soon as the thought formed, Noah stepped closer and brushed his erection against her stomach and moaned as he branded her. Her knees shook as desire pooled in her belly and she couldn't help but cling to Noah.

He broke the kiss but they couldn't stop touching. She knew that he truly wanted her and she wanted to be free to show him how much through touch.

While breathing hard, she reached forward and brushed her fingers across his lips, memorizing the feel of them. With her fingers still tracing them, Noah spoke.

"I want you, Jade. I want to explore every inch of you, drawing out sensations you've never experienced before and searing every sensation and sound into my mind."

Jade could feel her body shaking in anticipation at his words and she couldn't stay away and wrapped her arms around his shoulders and pressed her lips against his. After another scorching kiss that left her panting, she lifted herself onto her toes, bringing her lips close to his ear.

"I want to touch you, too. To make you feel as good as you already make me feel."

Fire banked in Noah's eyes and she reached for his hand, turning them both toward the cave.

"Well, what are we waiting for?"

Noah laughed, and they both rushed up to the cave, her heart beating hard in her chest. There was nothing she wanted more than Noah.

Chapter Six

Noah

Noah almost laughed at Jade's enthusiasm for them to get back into the cave, until he remembered that she had no experience with men and her innocent reaction was based on her trust of him. After knowing each other for almost a week, it was heady to realize that Jade truly did trust him. She'd never even shared something as innocent as a kiss with another man. Although beautiful, she had no real understanding how truly stunning she was, but he had to make her understand that he didn't want her because of her beauty. No, he wanted everything that encompassed Jade.

"I didn't mean to pressure you into this. I wanted to tell you how I felt, and if we're moving faster than you wanted, please, just let me know."

Jade shook her head. "I've been drawn to you before I'd laid eyes on you. I scented you when I walked into Ghost's building, and because I didn't understand what my body was trying to tell me, I had no idea what it meant at the time. But I do now and when you touch me and kiss me, it feels indescribable and I want to feel that again. I know you're not pressuring me into anything, because I want you."

"And I want you. We'll live in the moment."

"Yep, and I don't want to overthink this because I'll start analyzing everything. And I want to enjoy everything we do."

Knowing they were on the same page, they quickly ate up the miles back to the

cave. When they reached the entrance, Jade turned around and scanned the area. He kept quiet, knowing that she would use all her senses to see if they'd been followed. When the wind shifted, he watched Jade's face and noted that it remained passive as she took one large inhale. He had been watching her expression since they'd met and he would have known if she detected anything off.

"All clear?"

"Clear."

He shrugged off his parka and gloves, and the thermal fleece jacket underneath, leaving him in a thermal Henley. With quick movements, he set up and switched on the two portable heaters and the three LED lanterns Jade had brought, giving a soft glow to their space.

As he finished setting up the last of the lanterns, he startled when he heard a deep rumbling, as if they were having an earthquake, but there was no movement under his feet. Noah turned around and watched as Jade easily dragged a boulder and partially blocked the entrance to the cave and kept their scents from drifting outside. He could still see the orange glow of the setting sun through the space between the boulder and the cave.

Noah hadn't realized he'd moved, so when Jade turned back inside the cave, she was pressed against him, her warmth bringing a smile to his face.

He released her long hair from its hold and ran his fingers through the soft locks. Unable to stay away a moment longer, he leaned forward and pressed a kiss to her lips, savoring her taste as he gently explored. There was no rush in getting to know each other intimately. Rather, they wanted—at least Noah wanted—to map her body and find where she loved to be touched.

When they broke the kiss, he lifted her easily in his arms and while she was pressed to his chest, he buried his face against her neck, breathing her in.

“The more time we spend together, your scent seems to change.”

Jade leaned back slowly and met his gaze.

“When we met, I could detect a hint of peaches along with vanilla, but your scent becomes...well, it’s going to sound ridiculous, more earthy. I sometimes still smell the vanilla, but mixed in is lavender and pine.”

She shrugged. “Maybe we’re more in tune to each other and my scent is changing based on you, adapting to more familiar scents. I remember Kai telling me Liv’s scent never changed, but I don’t really know about the others. And to me, you smell like the earth dampened after a heavy rain.”

Noah, unable to stay away, captured her lips in another kiss. He had been holding her against his body and loved when she wrapped her legs around his hips, pressing them closer. Like the actions that came before, Noah felt as though everything elemental in him knew by this movement alone that they were made for each other.

Jade panted as she pulled back. The beautiful green haloed her blown pupils. “I’ve never craved a touch as much as I want yours, right now, but before we make love, can I explore you?”

Noah swallowed and absorbed a shiver that ran through him as she waited in anticipation of his answer. “I would love for you to touch me.”

He loved it when Jade took charge, and after his answer, she captured his lips in a searing kiss that had his cock throbbing against the zipper of his jeans. Noah felt the loss when Jade hopped down out of his hold.

They held each other's gazes for a long moment before her fingers skimmed along the bottom hem of his shirt, and when she touched his already scorching skin with her soft, cool fingers, he sucked in a breath and bit his bottom lip to prevent the moan from escaping. It was a simple touch but it set his body on fire.

As her hands slid tortuously slow up his clenched abs, Jade surprised him by standing on her tiptoes and nuzzling into his neck. When he sucked in a breath, she moved her hands around his sides and onto his back, all while nibbling on his skin underneath his ear and lower, to where his shoulder met his neck. This move sent heat and a pounding pulse straight to his cock.

"Fuck!" Noah shouted when Jade scratched her nails down his back, causing his entire body to shudder. He took a deep breath to prevent himself from throwing Jade onto their makeshift bed and ravishing her body.

With quick movements, she pushed his shirt up and off, groaning as she saw his naked chest for the first time. In the military, you had to be in shape. It was a matter of life and death. And in the months since his discharge, he'd been diligent with his exercise routine. Never in his life had he been as grateful for it as when Jade raked her eyes over his exposed skin and exhaled a half moan, half plea.

"Anything—whatever you want to do, just touch me." His voice came out gruffer than he wanted, but he saw the flare in Jade's eyes and knew she understood his desperation.

Jade started by kissing down his chest, taking her time as if her lips were exploring every curve and indent, while causing the most delicious ache to run throughout his entire body. Her lips explored his pecs, her tongue drawing across his nipples, before she traveled lower. She kissed his belly but he was distracted by her hands moving all over his exposed skin, but when she dropped to her knees, he sucked in a deep breath and prayed he wouldn't embarrass himself.

Her fingers deftly opened the top button of his pants and he groaned when her fingers brushed his hips and she pulled the waistband down a couple of inches. That groan turned into a deep moan when she pressed her mouth against his skin. He hadn't been aware, until that moment, his hips were an erogenous zone.

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When she pressed her mouth a couple of inches above his straining cock, he moaned her name, not recognizing the deep reverberation that escaped his throat. She surged to her feet and cupped his neck, bringing their mouths closer. He leaned down to meet her swollen, soft lips against his.

His cock throbbed as she slid her tongue against his. The kiss deepened and he wanted to press his body to hers to relieve some of the throbbing pleasure he received whenever she touched him, but she was in control and he didn't want to take that away from her.

They broke the kiss, both taking deep breaths, and he watched as Jade bit her lower lip and glanced up, meeting his gaze.

“Could you lay down?”

He nodded and started to move, but she gently stopped him with her hand on his forearm.

“Could I undress you first and then explore?”

Unable to find his voice, he nodded and faced her again. She made quick work of his pants, but when she slid them off, he found himself still clothed in his boxer briefs. With slow movements, she lifted his arm and traced the veins on his forearm before dropping his arm at his side and, using just her fingertips, traced the cut from his abs down to the waistband of the only remaining item of clothing he had on.

Her touch elicited a shiver of anticipation of what was to come.

“You are the sexiest man I’ve ever seen.”

Before he could respond, her thumbs hooked the waistband of his underwear and slowly lowered them over his hips and down his legs. The pounding pulse of need almost had him reaching for her, but he clenched his hands at his side, knowing this was her time to explore and he could get through it.

Hopefully.

This sweet, delicious torture was almost too much for him and he opened his mouth to beg—for what exactly, he had no idea—but it came out as a choking gasp when her small hand palmed his naked cock for the first time.

The moment she stood up to see his reaction, he slid his hands through her hair and brought her closer before he brushed a kiss against her lips. Even that minuscule touch stripped away a little more of his control.

The chaste kiss was as powerful as anything he and Jade shared. “Touch me, mark me, make me yours.”

“You don’t know what you’re fully asking, but I will touch you and bring you pleasure. I want to make you happy.”

“Fuck, baby. You make me happy.”

Jade smiled at him and stepped back, raking her gaze on his now naked body. He didn’t know what he expected, but when Jade’s eyes grew bigger and she clutched her hands into fists and then tucked them under her arms, he managed to regain some control. She looked nervous about touching him, but he wanted nothing more.

Glancing over his shoulder, he found the sleeping bags a few feet from where he

stood.He stepped backward until he felt the fabric and, without taking his eyes off Jade, he lowered himself down onto the makeshift bed and laid back.

He sucked in a breath to steady himself and before he could blink, he spotted Jade kneeling between his legs.Her skin was hot when she ran her palms up the top of his feet to his shins.Since this was all about Jade, Noah held his hands near his sides.

“How do you like to be touched?”

Noah opened his mouth to speak, but the words stuck in his throat.This wasn’t a typical woman.She was Jade and his destined mate, and her touch set him alight.“However you want to touch me.My body is already humming from being able to kiss you.I have a feeling that any touch from you will bring me pleasure.But this is about you and what you’re comfortable with.I would say do what comes naturally.”

Jade exhaled shakily and gave him a short nod.She continued with her touch of his legs, brushing her delicate fingers over his inner thighs, drawing a breath from Noah.But when her mouth followed the trail of her hands, his breathing pushed out a series of low, deep moans.

Her tongue darted out and she tasted his skin and the sensation shot jolt straight to his cock, which pulsed visibly against his stomach.She started to crawl up his body but paused.He wondered if she wanted to stop, if they were going too fast.But instead, he almost choked on his tongue when she straighten up, still on her knees, and whipped her shirt up and over her head, leaving her beautiful pale skin with a smattering of freckles in full view.

Noah stopped breathing.She was the most exquisite creature he’d ever seen before.He must have mumbled it aloud because a blush stained Jade’s cheeks.

“It’s true.You are.”

With movements that looked blurred to Noah's human eyes, Jade stripped off the rest of her clothing, throwing them into the same pile she created with Noah's clothing. His mouth watered at the thought of tasting each inch of her body, but all thoughts scattered when she moved up his body to kiss him.

"Touch me," she begged against his lips.

He splayed his hands over her back and pressed her against his body for the first time, savoring her heat surrounding him. His hand caressed her back and down the curves of her ass, loving the gasp as his hands cupped her, pressing her against his cock for just a moment. Her breasts pressed against his chest and the feel of the hard tips against his skin almost felt surreal. Noah had never been as turned on in his life.

Noah captured her lips and savored her taste. Each kiss was exploratory, but he noticed that she told him with each kiss what exactly she liked. When the sensations became too intense, she broke the kiss and buried her face against his neck. Each breath against his heated, slicked skin sent shafts of pleasure throughout and he held her tighter.

"I'm going to taste you, all over. Is that okay?"

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Jade lifted her gaze and he made sure she could see his affirmative nod. She wasted no time straddling his waist and sitting on his stomach. He could feel her heat and groaned aloud as her tongue darted out and flicked a long lick against his right nipple. She paid attention to both before kissing down his stomach and across his hips. He was getting addicted to feeling her mouth there.

“Can I touch you...here?”

With her words, she drew her pinkie a small way down the head of his cock.

“Yes, please. Touch me.”

Jade reached out and wrapped her hand around his cock, both of them moaning at the movement. He watched Jade's face and her fascinated looks as her hand traveled down his cock until she reached the base, before slowly sliding back up to the head. After a few strokes, a bead of pre-come pooled at the head and when Jade spotted it, her tongue darted out and tasted him.

Noah thought she wouldn't continue after she paused her actions, but he was taken by surprise when she swallowed the head of his cock, her tongue flittering on the sensitive skin and drawing a shout from Noah's tight throat.

“Is this okay?”

“More than okay. You took me by surprise because I figured you would be put off by the taste.”

Jade shook her head. “No, you taste wonderful, tangy and salty.” And to prove her point, she bent down and swallowed his crown before slowly moving down, taking more and more of him in her mouth.

With no experience, Jade reduced Noah into a puddle of pleasure using only her mouth and tongue. Words were spilling out of his throat. He was torn between watching her mouth stretched over his cock or tilting his head back and trying to stay calm, breathing in deep and hoping he didn’t embarrass himself by coming too soon. He lost all sense of time and place as Jade drove him out of his mind.

Noah felt the familiar throbbing of his release and fumbled with the words to warn Jade. Finally, he pushed the words past his tight throat.

“Jade, baby, I’m gonna come. Move...your mouth...”

Jade shook her head and sucked him harder, flicking her tongue along his slit. He allowed his body to take over and with a shout, Noah fell back as his body trembled through the best release of his life. Having her mouth on him throughout his orgasm had him shivering uncontrollably.

When his mind had rebooted and his senses weren’t centered around the pleasure she’d given him, he felt Jade by his side and he curled an arm around her, bringing her closer, not leaving an inch between them.

“Give me a few minutes, baby. I want to taste you now, but I don’t think my limbs will cooperate as of yet.”

Jade’s laugh filled him with warmth, and when she kissed him, nothing could make him change his mind about this woman and he knew that she was meant for him alone.

Chapter Seven

Jade

Jade felt the hum of satisfaction radiating off Noah as she lay next to him. Close to a week ago when they'd met, she couldn't fathom Noah being interested in getting to know her, much less being so open about the fact that he was her mate and seemed to be accepting of his new reality.

But she had spent the last few hours tracing every inch of his skin and still didn't feel as if she knew him well enough. She savored the sounds she drew from his throat and whenever he moaned, she felt as though she'd been given a gift.

Noah, by nature, was an observer. He learned a lot about people by the way they acted, and if he silently stood apart from everyone, they would eventually forget he was there and give way to their true selves. So when he trained with the assassins, she thought of him as standoffish and uninterested in her, but he needed time to process what she might mean to him in his life. She understood perfectly, and as the only sound in the cave was the humming of the heaters and their deep breathing, she found herself more content than she'd ever been.

"What are you thinking about?"

Jade brought her head up and met his eyes. "I'm trying to figure you out, I suppose. I can understand you not wanting to get involved with more immortals, especially what happened after Sam, but today, you seemed to have... I don't know, reconciled your feelings."

Noah turned toward her, still cradling her pliable body against his. When he caught her gaze, she noticed his eyes sparked with something unidentifiable.

“My judging you and the assassins before I met them was a mistake. But the way everyone welcomed me and talking to them made me understand exactly how wrong I was. I know you kept your distance because you didn’t want to pressure me into anything. It gave me time to think about the feelings you stirred in me from the moment we met.”

Jade opened her mouth to ask the question she wasn’t sure she wanted to hear the answer to, but Noah beat her to the chase.

“And no, the feelings are partly because of how beautiful you are. Although you’re a highly trained and deadly assassin, your concentration on being the best in everything you do, whether it be with your family, or with Silas, or being the deadliest assassin out of the group—you do it with your whole heart. You put others before yourself and even though I hurt your feelings, you never held it against me.”

She was stunned silent and he cupped the back of her head and kissed her.

“I’m curious to see you with your red hair.” Noah moaned into her mouth as he deepened the kiss, until she shook in his arms from the pent-up desire. “Can I make you feel good?”

Jade breathed, “Yes.”

Noah rolled Jade on her back and when he pressed his body down on hers, she sucked in a breath as her nerve endings exploded with sensations. She wrapped her arms around his torso and begged him silently for more.

He gripped her wrists in one hand and moved her arms above her head as he pressed

his mouth against her neck and nipped the sensitive skin around her ear. Her hips jerked up and she felt his renewed hardness against her thigh and moaned aloud.

The sound spurred Noah in movement and he kissed down her neck.

She arched toward Noah's mouth, wanting to feel his mouth on her breasts for the first time in her life. They ached for his touch and when he drew one nipple into his mouth, flicking his tongue against the hardened nub, the keening sound that left her mouth sounded so foreign, it took her several moments to realize it came from her. Instead of stopping, he continued between the two until she could feel her body shaking and she clutched Noah close.

"Yes, I love being able to touch you."

Noah's mouth trailed down her stomach and when he kissed around her belly button, she tensed.

"What...what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to make you come in my mouth using my tongue and fingers, and after, if you want, I'm going to make love to you."

Everything froze in that one moment. She opened her mouth to beg for exactly that but no sound came out. Noah, misunderstanding her silence, surged back up and cupped her face.

"It's okay, baby. We don't have to do anything if you don't want to."

Jade shook her head and forced herself to speak. "No, no, I want that, what you said, but I think my brain stumbled over itself when I tried to picture it in my head."

Noah chuckled and buried his face into her neck. “I love your innocent reactions. They are an unbelievable turn-on.”

“Everything you do makes my body vibrate.”

“Then you’re going to love this.”

Noah kissed down her body again, but this time, he settled in between her thighs. “Let me know if you want me to stop.”

She barely nodded when his head bent down and he licked a small swath of skin on her inner thigh. She sucked in a deep breath and waited for more. He licked the other one and without further teasing, pressed his lips around her clit and gently pulled it into his mouth. And if that wasn’t devastating enough, he swirled his tongue around it in a way that had her bucking her hips and moaning his name.

“Oh, fuck.”

Noah chuckled against her clit and the sensations exploded through her body. In the next few minutes, or it could have been hours since Jade lost all sense of reality, Noah brought her to the precipice of orgasm before backing away and making her growl his name. Her body was buzzing and without realizing, she had gripped a rock behind her head and it disintegrated in her hands.

“Noah. I don’t...can’t...”

Noah glanced up and when she spotted his lips coated with her wetness, her body shivered and she felt a surge of wetness pour down, soaking the bag underneath her and earning a groan from Noah.

“Fuck, baby. I want to try something.”

She didn’t care as long as he touched her.

He slid one finger inside and she immediately clamped down on it, loving the feeling of him inside her, even if it was his thick finger. With slow, deliberate movements, he moved his finger in and out, searching for something she didn’t understand. After several minutes, he added another finger to the movement, and this time, when he crooked his finger to the right, Jade’s orgasm struck with a ferocity that left her breathless. She was aware enough, but barely, when she arched her back and her body released with a splash.

“Oh, fuck.”

His words sounded as if he was in awe, but her body was shaking with such desire that she could only beg for more.

“Fuck me, Noah.I need you inside.”

When Noah came into view, she noticed his hand was wet and when she dropped her eyes lower, so was his chest.He crawled up and kissed her with an intensity that brought back the need for him.She loved kissing him, it was something intimate she could share with him, but now she wanted to feel him inside.

Noah braced himself on his left forearm and reached for his cock with his right hand.As he brushed his cock against her entrance, it took everything in her power not to lift her hips and demand more.And with a slow ease, his cock pressed inside and she held her breath as the sensations enveloped her.

“Yes, more.”

Noah brought both hands up to cup her face and when he leaned down to kiss her, he drove his hips forward, plunging his cock all the way inside her.Without thinking about it, she clamped down on his cock and drew a moan from deep in his chest.

“You feel so good.”

“So do you, baby.So tight and wet for me.”

She wrapped her legs around his hips and forgetting the reason why she shouldn't move, lifted her hips and fucked herself on his embedded cock.She knew he was large when she took him in her mouth, but the sensations having him in her were better than she could've imagined.And he hadn't moved yet.

As she opened her mouth to beg, if need be, he pulled his hips back until his cock was

just inside before he surged back in, drawing a moan and had her clutching his back.

“More.”

He gathered her in his arms and with his mouth on hers, pulled out and drove into her, over and over again. He knew he didn't have to be gentle and she was grateful he wasn't.

She leaned her mouth toward his neck and licked the sweat from the hollow of his throat, loving the taste of him. Having him inside her made her feel alive and when he hit a spot that made her see stars, it sent shafts of pleasure up her spine.

His thrusts were relentless and she loved every minute of it. Her hands weren't idle as she clutched at his back and when they moved to his ass, she could feel his muscles expanding and contracting as he drove into her.

She tensed when he moved his hands from her head to her hips, and soon she found Noah on his back and her seated on his cock with her hands on his chest.

“Fuck me, baby. Take your pleasure.”

Testing her movements, she raised her hips and found the delicious slide of his cock inside her to be more intense. She raised herself a little more, in the same way he had before until just the tip was inside her, before she dropped back down.

“Holy fuck that feels good.”

Jade squeezed his cock and kept her muscles tensed as she drove herself onto him over and over again. She always wanted to feel this good, to have Noah inside her, but suddenly she felt guilty because she was taking her pleasure and not thinking about Noah.

“Is this...good for you?”

Noah gripped her hips and groaned as she came down and gave her hips a little twist.

“Better than good.I’m getting close.”

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Jade kept up the movements, but took a moment to glance down.Noah's chest and neck were flushed and his eyes were glazed as he devoured the sight of her on top of him, taking her pleasure.His hands squeezed her hips when he spotted her gaze on him and she could tell that he tensed.

His thumb came to rest on her clit and the next time she dropped down onto him, he flicked her clit with his thumb and that was all it took for her release to strike.Her spine tensed and she threw her head back, bracing her hands on his taut stomach as her orgasm left her breathless.Sensation exploded throughout her body, but his voice broke through her pleasure haze and she concentrated on what he said.

“I’m going to come, baby.”

“Yes, inside me.Come inside.I want to feel everything.”

Noah wrapped his arms around her back and with a quick turn, she was on her back staring up at Noah's face.He had a look of such intensity on his face, she shivered as the last of her orgasm waned.But once she relaxed, he slid his hands underneath her ass and drove into her, lifting her hips to meet his thrusts.

“Fuck, baby, you’re perfect.”

Her body started shivering with a new sensation of an orgasm lingering up her spine.With two more thrusts, driving him down into her body, he screamed her name and emptied deep inside.His throbbing cock set her off again and she found her muscles clenching down on him.

Taking her by surprise when she spotted his corded neck as he dropped his head down onto her chest, her mouth watered at the urge to bite down and mark him as her mate. But as soon as the thought came into her mind, she dismissed it.

They'd never spoken about transitioning and what it entailed. Now she had an inkling of what each of the assassins went through when they saw their mates go through the transition, in pain and not being able to do anything about it. She would never do that to him. And knowing how he felt about Sam's death, she would never take his choice away from him. Instead, she licked the spot where she would have marked him, leaving an invisible mark that only she knew about.

Noah dropped down on her and she laughed, holding him close as he buried his face against her neck and used her hair as cover. Knowing they were both exhausted, she reached for the second sleeping bag and placed it over both of them. With the heaters in the cave, they didn't need a lot of covering, and Jade was happy to have Noah on top of her, acting as a blanket.

"Is this okay?" Noah asked.

"Yeah, I like holding you. I know I'm smaller than you, but your weight feels so good on me."

Noah chuckled.

"Well, now I know sex makes you giddy. I'll have to use that to my advantage." She let out an evil laugh that was spoiled when Noah joined her with a full, throaty laugh. That sound alone made her happy.

"I'm torn between sleeping or grabbing some food."

"How about we take a nap and then eat dinner? We're going to head out early

tomorrow to miss the storm, so if we eat later and then in the morning, we'll have enough energy to get there in record time. I estimate about a four-hour trek back from this spot."

Noah nodded against her neck, not even managing to lift his head. "Sounds good." His voice was slow and measured.

She pulled him closer and pressed a kiss to his forehead. "Sleep, Noah."

"Okay."

And as Jade closed her eyes, the steady breathing of Noah's breath against her skin and his warmth pulled her under and soon, she was asleep.

Chapter Eight

Noah

Noah shivered as the cold breeze drifted through the pines, bringing with it the threat of snow on the horizon. They had been walking for close to three hours and were almost at the car, but in those hours, the temperature had dropped twenty degrees so it hovered around ten degrees above zero. Even with the trek through the mountains where he had on his thermal layers, heavy parka, insulated ski pants, two layers of socks, and snow boots, he shivered.

He glanced at Jade. Her head was down and pushed through the wind, but she looked as though the cold temperatures didn't affect her, which they probably didn't.

When he'd woken before the sun started to rise, he could feel the chill in the air, especially because he was naked under a layer of sleeping bag. But Jade had radiated heat and without thinking about it, he moved her on top of him. She was a lightweight and the warmth that came from her body lulled him back to sleep.

The next time he woke, Jade had her arms crossed on his chest, her chin resting on her hands as she watched him slowly come into consciousness. He could tell she was worried about his reaction to her after a night's sleep, but nothing had changed his mind about her. He reached down and gripped her waist before he pulled her up for a scorching kiss. She gave a little squeal of surprise that turned into a moan and Noah deepened the kiss.

He could smell her arousal and when she tilted her hips, he could feel her wetness

and heat against his stomach.

“Please, Noah.”

Her words snapped something deep inside him and he flipped her onto her back before he kissed her, putting all of his desire into that one kiss.

When they made love, it was soft and slow, lingering kisses and touches. Far from the untamable desire that exploded from them the first time. It was sweet and hot at the same time and when they found their release together, their names were whispered and carried off in the quiet morning.

Noah had no idea why this would have affected him more than their heady first time, but he found himself studying Jade. The way she walked, with destination and purpose in mind. The way she looked back at him often, making sure she didn't leave him behind. And the small smile she would give him when she remembered making love to him, and the wicked one when he knew she wanted to do it again.

She was both a vixen and the most innocent woman he'd ever met. He could tell the first time he touched her. Her gasps and moans caught in her throat as his touch surprised her. Noah knew that he could have a lifetime with Jade and she would still surprise him.

Noah was pulled from his thoughts when big, fluffy snowflakes drifted down from the sky. At first, they were absorbed into the mushy, snow-covered ground and melted on their clothing, but within minutes, the snow had accelerated and they couldn't see five feet in front of them. And to add insult to injury, the wind started blowing from the west.

“Noah, we have two choices.”

He nodded for her to continue.

“I carry you on my back to the car and we try to drive out of here before too much snow can accumulate or we find another place to camp tonight, having no idea where that might be. It’s your choice.”

Knowing their chances weren’t good at finding another spot like the cave they’d left, he put away his pride. “Let’s get outta here.”

Jade handed him her pack and he immediately dropped it in the snow. “How much shit did you pack?”

She laughed at his expression, but instead of answering him, she strapped the pack to her chest, turning around so he could secure the straps around her back. Jade glanced over her shoulder and nodded for him to come closer.

“Okay, time to hop on.” Her words were almost absorbed by the snow falling at a steady pace.

Without time to waste, Noah hopped on, hoping he wouldn’t throw off her balance and they would both end up in the snow. Miraculously, she reached for his thighs and wrapped his legs around her waist as he wrapped his arms around her shoulders, allowing her the chance at movement.

Jade already started moving before she had adjusted Noah on her back. Although he remembered she was immortal and immensely stronger, faster, and an absolute badass, it still took him by complete surprise how easily she carried Noah. He calculated that they covered several miles in fifteen minutes. He couldn’t tell how close they were to the car, but Jade’s pace increased as the snow started coming down harder.

“I don’t know if we’re gonna be able to drive out of here.”

Jade looked grim as she took in the accumulation as she slogged through the thick snow. “Yeah, but it’s a Land Rover so we can raise the body and see if that will work. If not, we’ll try to get into Crested Butte and look for a hotel.”

He knew they were twenty minutes from town, but they’d taken all dirt roads to get to where they’d left the SUV. He hoped that it was snowing less where they were going.

“We’re about a quarter of a mile from where we parked. When we—”

Jade froze and Noah had no idea what she sensed. In the next second, Jade jerked her body and without warning, she fell backward, flipping at the last minute so her back slammed into the snow and her arms were wrapped around his torso. The moment she landed, she flipped him so her back was exposed and that’s when he noticed.

Blood.

A lot of blood.

Jade rummaged in the pack and pulled out his MP5 and shoved it in his hands. That was when he noticed the blood soaking through her white and pink parka at her right shoulder. He tried to surge to his feet and put pressure on the wound, but her hand opened on his chest as he went to move and she pressed him back down.

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“I’ve got to look at your wound.”

She shook her head, her face the mask of seriousness as she lifted her head slightly off his chest. When she couldn’t hear anything from that position, she slid down his body toward his feet and soon she was kneeling at his feet, one knee down and one up. Without looking at him, she slid one of his HK Mark 23 .45 caliber handguns from his holster and brought it eye level as she scanned her surroundings.

“That scent, from the man I ran into at Ghost’s office—it’s here. He’s here. I didn’t smell it at the farm the other day. But some of those scents are here, so I figure we have five enemy combatants and they are closing in on us.”

“What’s the plan?”

A low, angry growl slipped from Jade’s throat and when he glanced up at her face again, he was happy that her anger was directed at the shifters who surrounded them. He’d never seen her like this and he believed she could take out entire armies if she were so inclined.

She slipped off her coat, which left her in a white tank and white ski pants, along with white boots. She was almost invisible in the snow. With quick movements, she tied her hair into a bun before she slid a white cap over her head, covering her black locks completely. She was bleeding and when he went to press against it, she shook her head.

“It’ll heal. Regenerative, remember?”

He nodded and savored the small smile she gave him before her face became threatening.

“The plan. I’m gonna kill these fuckers and then we’re getting out of here. This is a strategic position. You’re higher than they are and because they aren’t circling us, just coming straight at us, it will give you an opportunity for a clear shot. At your one o’clock. You should see them through your scope.” With that, Jade stood and moved away from him.

Fuck. Fuck!

He felt so fucking helpless. Yes, he was a fucking SEAL for fuck’s sake, but he couldn’t do anything without the distinct possibility he would be dead at the end of this. Well, he could do one thing, and with that, he moved the MP5 around to his back and pulled another case close to him. He assembled his .308 Winchester and within moments, had his right eye on the scope and searched for any sign of Jade or the shifters after them.

For long sweeps of the landscape from their eleven o’clock to their two o’clock, there was no movement. Then a streak of white caught his attention and he stopped his sight on Jade, who quickly jumped on the shifter who towered over her by feet. She wrapped her legs around his torso and with one swift movement, sliced her claws along his throat and Noah watched as the head rolled off his body and became lost somewhere in the snow.

Jade flipped off the body and without hesitation, kicked the detached head. She had punted it so hard that the shifter who ran toward her when he heard the commotion had his skull indented. When the head dropped again onto the ground, the shifter was unrecognizable and dropped to his knees. She dispatched him in the same manner.

Two down, three to go.

He caught sight of a man in a knit cap, who was tall and thin, standing on the sidelines, watching Jade take care of the other shifters. Firing a warning shot, the man jerked his head to the side and searched for where the shot came from. Unable to do so, he ducked back into the trees and Noah lost sight of him.

In the meantime, Jade had found the other two and slit their throats. They were on their knees, bleeding out. Jade said something indecipherable from his position, before she once again took care of their heads.

When she turned back toward Noah's position, he could tell her gaze and hearing were attuned to her surroundings. He made continuous passes over the landscape, making sure to cover her back, but he didn't see any movement and wondered if the last guy had ran with his tail tucked between his legs.

It wasn't until Jade stood a few feet in front of him that his world came to an abrupt halt.

Noah had been scanning the area around them to make sure Jade got back to him, but he must've missed one because he heard a crack and a grunt, but didn't correlate those two sounds. He saw the muzzle flash, but before he could take a shot, five more shots rang out in quick succession.

He moved his eye away from the scope as Jade jerked forward, bullets obviously entering her back and with horror, watched as they exited her chest. Blood flooded down her white tank and over the ground in front of her.

Noah reached her as she dropped to her knees and he laid her on her back in the snow. He searched her face and when he met her gaze, he noticed she was still conscious.

Barely.

“Remember.Time...need time.”

Jade closed her eyes and although he could detect the rise and fall of her chest as she breathed in her unconsciousness, he jerked back into reality.He needed to get rid of the last target.

He scrambled over to his .308 and with measured movements, found the shifter holding his AR-15 out in front of him, searching the near blinding landscape, searching for them.Noah took a measured breath in and a measured breath out and pulled the trigger.The man’s head exploded, but it wasn’t enough.He reloaded with sure, deft movements and breathed in and out, before taking one more shot, severing the shifter’s spine in a way that had his head dangling from his body.With a sickening roll, his head lolled to the side and the tendons that kept his head in place snapped and his head rolled away from his body, which landed in the opposite direction.

Close enough.

Knowing they were several hundred yards from the SUV, he struggled with the pack and locked it on his back before he lifted Jade and draped her over his shoulder in a fireman’s carry.With short steps, he made his way to the SUV, praying they wouldn’t run into any other shifters on the way.

He had the keys in his pocket from driving down from Snowfall, so when he reached the SUV, he breathed a sigh of relief and unlocked the car.He leaned Jade in the front seat long enough to drop the seats in the second and third row and put the pack down, shoving it to the far corner out of the way.They would be needing the supplies in that pack.

He then threw some blankets on the floor before he lifted Jade and lay her down.He covered her with as many blankets and sleeping bags he could find, before closing the door, ready to drive them the fuck out of there.

He threw his pack into the passenger seat and when he slid into the driver's side and buckled his seat belt, he finally had a chance to look outside.

Well, we're fucked.

Too busy trekking through the snow to get Jade to safety, he failed to realize how much snow had fallen during their fight with the shifters. He turned on the SUV and flicked on the windshield wipers. It had dumped a half a foot of snow onto the ground in the past half hour and it didn't look as though it was letting up anytime soon.

Noah turned back to Jade, lying too still and silently in the back.

Please don't die.

Chapter Nine

Noah

Noah allowed himself to wallow for a bit, wanting to take his anger and helplessness out on the steering wheel, but instead laid his head down on his hands and took in deep breaths until he was calm. He had no idea how long he sat there, but when the cold seeped into the cab from the wind whipping outside, he was pulled him from his pathetic musings.

Knowing that the snow and clouds would insulate them, but not enough, he searched for the portable heaters and knew they had enough propane to heat the car for three more days. He didn't want to set up the lights in case they were spotted. The last thing Noah wanted was to be trapped in an SUV and have shifters close in on both of them. He didn't truly know if it would do much good since shifters mainly tracked by smell, but Noah wasn't taking any chances of them being spotted in any case.

Noah had to wait for Jade to reawaken after her body healed itself. He understood how lucky they were that none of the shots had been headshots, not certain she would survive something as severe as that. He wasn't certain how she'd survived after so many bullets hit her center mass.

He knew he should have asked more questions about their healing abilities when he had the chance, but even finding their hideout and trekking back to their cave and watching Jade dispatch those two shifters hadn't allowed reality to set in. Jade had taken care of them so easily.

And because the shifters were so powerful without weapons, it was preposterous to him they would have heavy weaponry, enough to bring Jade to her knees.

But he took comfort in her words. She needed time to heal and now that they were stuck in a snowstorm, time was one thing they had an unlimited supply of.

Noah had checked to make sure Jade was breathing steadily before he decided to go through their supplies. He pulled out three canteens, twenty-two MREs, an extra propane tank for refilling the heaters, LED lights, ten magazines for his two .45s, two boxes of .308 cartridges, two combat knives, and several extra thermal layers, all his size.

He blinked when he realized she'd packed for his comfort and needs more than her own. She had even packed a new package of underwear for him. And for a reason he couldn't understand right at that moment, tears filled his eyes. He couldn't remember the last time he cried, but laying out their supplies and glancing over at Jade, helpless and pale from her injuries, hit Noah hard. He didn't want to lose Jade and he wasn't fast enough to protect her.

After everything had been laid out, he set about arranging those items they would need immediately, including a med kit that had a bottle of morphine. He would only give her a dose if she showed signs of pain. He put the non-essentials at the bottom of the pack.

Noah debated whether he should treat her wounds or leave them be and let them heal. He'd seen many a gunshot wound over the years and although none of his fellow SEALs knew, he hated the sight of blood. On every tour, he was grateful they had a medic to deal with wounds that ranged from superficial to severe, so all he had to do was press on the wound until they'd gotten back to whatever base they were at that week.

Suck it up, Hale.

He opened the med kit and made sure he had gauze and tape available. With easy movements so he didn't jar her too much, he pulled Jade up to a sitting position, resting her head on his shoulder, before he peeled off her tank top. He lowered her down, grateful that she had foregone a bra, but when he spotted the cluster of wounds on her chest, his heart threatened to beat out of his chest.

The flesh looked angry. The edges of the wounds were jagged. Blood seeped onto her chest and he did his best to mop them up, hoping the bleeding would stop. He risked a glance at the first bullet wound she sustained on her shoulder and breathed a sigh of relief. While the area was jagged, there was no blood, just pink, angry skin where the bullet had exited.

Knowing they would continue to bleed, he pressed two square pieces of gauze together and taped them over the wounds. He would check them every two hours or however long it took for the gauze to become completely absorbed by blood and change them out until she started to regenerate.

After they were covered, he gently rolled her onto her side and peeked at the entrance wounds on her back. Since bullets always entered smaller than they exited, the bullet wounds on her back were already healed.

Noah reached for one of his thermal shirts and pulled it over her head, adjusting it before he laid her back down on the makeshift bed. The thing was huge on her, but he knew it would keep her warm. He covered her with the sleeping bags, making sure that no part of her body was exposed to the elements.

With time ticking by as he waited for any sign of consciousness from Jade, he glanced outside and watched as the snow swirled around the windows. The forecasted blizzard had arrived, and every once in a while, the SUV rocked with the fierce force

of the wind.

Unable to stay away from Jade, he reached for an MRE and grabbed a canteen and settled near Jade's legs. He swung them over her covered ones and placed another sleeping bag over himself, leaning against the side of the SUV. He shivered when his neck brushed against the side window and reached for the heater, bringing it closer.

He watched Jade's chest move up and down steadily. He ripped open the MRE and began eating, but the worry he had for Jade made the hot meal tasteless. She hadn't moved since he'd brought her to the SUV, not even a flutter of her eyelids letting him know that she was dreaming.

Noah finished his meal and drank a bit more water. He straightened up and found an extra bag for trash, and soon, he had nothing to do but wait.

He glanced at his watch and noted it was only seven, but figured he could get some sleep with the storm overhead, and prayed that in the morning when he woke, the snow storm moved on and Jade would be awake.

Jade

What time is it?

What happened?

Noah!

Jade blinked her eyes open and noted she was surrounded by darkness. Her senses went haywire for a minute and she couldn't smell, see, or feel anything. She pushed

down the panic that threatened to overwhelm her and took a deep breath.

There.Noah.

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And a second later, she heard his deep breathing, letting her know that he was asleep. There wasn't anything indicating that he'd been hurt; his even inhales and exhales were what she remembered when they'd slept together in the cave. She blew out a breath.

He was fine.

It took her a moment to realize that they weren't in the cave they'd occupied the first time they made love. The ground she slept on wasn't cold, not like the rocks they had laid their sleeping bags on, but there was a loud wind blowing and rocking whatever she was in.

Her hand shot out and when she felt the door panel of her Land Rover, she knew Noah had made it back to the car with her in tow, but what she didn't understand was why they were sleeping in the car.

As she brought her hand back to her sides, she felt a twinge of pain blooming from the middle of her chest. She moved her hand over her chest and encountered a thermal, long-sleeved shirt that must've belonged to Noah. Unable to feel the damage through the thick material, she slid her hand under her shirt and the first thing she encountered was soft gauze and cool tape holding the pieces to her chest.

With slow, deliberate movements, she peeled one of the gauze patches off and with a gentle touch, brushed her fingers over her wound. It felt itchy and raw, but it didn't actually hurt.

"Jade?"

For a reason she couldn't understand, tears formed in her eyes and flowed down the sides of her face as Noah's voice washed over her.

"Hey, you okay?"

His low chuckle sent shivers of pleasure throughout her body. When she asked the question again, her voice was husky with desire.

"Yeah, I wasn't the one who'd been shot six fucking times and passed out. Not that I blame you for that. You just scared the shit out of me." Noah captured her lips in the softest touch.

"I don't remember much except the pain and wanting to get you to safety. Have we stopped somewhere or are we still stuck where we parked?"

Noah chuckled. "Same place. The blizzard grew fierce right as we got into the SUV and I knew there wasn't going to be a way to drive through it. But the question is, are you okay?"

Jade wondered herself and slowly made her way onto her elbows and then sat up completely. Other than the tape that pulled at her skin, she felt no pain from the bullets that penetrated her skin.

"Yeah, I'm good. Not completely healed, but close enough." Jade started pulling the pieces of gauze and tape off her chest, surprised at the amount of blood on each square. When she was done, Noah handed her a makeshift trash bag and she shoved them inside.

"Who did you shoot at, the first shot you took?"

"He looked like a shifter but he wasn't near the others. When I shot at the tree above

his head, he disappeared and I kept looking around for him, but there was no sign of him after that. From the way you described the man back at Ghost's office, it was the same man. And since you scented him, I'm pretty sure he's the same man."

Jade could feel her brows draw down in confusion. "When I first spotted him, I thought he looked familiar and his scent is now starting to smell familiar. I wonder why he didn't join in the fight. He wasn't the one who shot me?"

"No, that motherfucker got his spine blown off by my .308."

"Thank you for taking care of me. I hope I didn't scare you when I passed out. It's how my body deals with trauma."

Noah blinked a couple of times before he spoke. "Yeah, that was fucked up. I noticed when I patched you up that your shoulder was already healing, so that gave me hope you would be fine. But you bled, a lot."

"Yeah."

"But once your wounds were tended to, I listened to your deep, even breathing and I knew you would be okay. I didn't expect you to be okay this quickly though."

"It's weird that we have regeneration. But what Liv hasn't figured out yet is Ara healed Reaper, twice—the second time she brought him back from the dead. His regeneration comes in minutes instead of hours like the rest of us. She suspects it has something to do with the venom we each carry and venom is what transitioned us in the first place."

"How does that work, exactly?"

Jade glanced at Noah and tried to read his expression, but whatever he was thinking,

he kept to himself.

“With mates, it usually happens during sex, during their orgasm. The immortal bites into the vein in between the shoulder and the neck, injecting some venom into their mate’s bloodstream. The venom latches onto the cells and transforms them. It takes three days to transition and I won’t lie, it’s very painful.

“Ara described it as being scorched from the inside out and the worst ache in your bones that you will ever feel. She says the ache is similar to the worst case of flu you ever had on top of feeling as though your bones are breaking from the pressure. Liv was unconscious when she turned, so she doesn’t remember anything. Frost went through the same pain as Ara, but Reaper gave Xander some tips on how to make it more comfortable and although she remembers the pain, hers didn’t seem as bad as Ara’s transition. Seth was given morphine by Aubrey and he only remembered the pain for a fleeting moment during the end of his transition.”

Noah thought about that for a moment. “I’ve talked to everyone who went through a transition. Aubrey said it was more painful than anything else she’d ever gone through, so did Frost, but all of them told me it was worth it. Not because they are immortal, but because they chose to be with their mate forever.”

Jade nodded.

“So, you don’t mind if I think about what I want?”

Jade gasped. “No, I didn’t tell you so you have to choose. That’s a decision that you have to make and if you didn’t want to transition, I would respect that decision. No one wants to start off their life in pain, so I could totally see why you wouldn’t want to. But just know there’s no pressure and you can decide not to.”

The conversation waned when she yawned, still trying to recover from her

wounds.Noah cuddled against her side and, after a quick press of his lips to hers, said,
“Sleep, Jade.You scared me when you went down, but I’m glad you’re okay.”

“Thanks for taking care of me.”

Jade didn’t hear Noah’s response because exhaustion caught up with her and she drifted into a deep sleep.

Chapter Ten

Jade

Despite the fact Ghost had told them to check in as soon as they arrived back in Snowfall, Jade had more pressing matters to deal with.

They stumbled their way through the door of her cottage. Jade couldn't stop her hands from roaming under Noah's shirt, wanting to rip it off him, but she restrained herself. She managed to turn them so her back pressed the front door closed, their mouths never separating, even for a moment.

"Where are we?" Noah's lips moved against hers, causing a shiver of need to wash over her.

"My place, my cabin. We're about three miles from Kai's and ten or so from Xander's."

Without commenting on their surroundings, Noah kissed her again, sweeping his tongue inside and groaning as she sucked on it.

Her body was vibrating, even more than the first time they'd made love. She knew what it felt like to have Noah inside her, to feel his cock expand as he released, moaning her name. Jade wanted to feel that again.

The kiss broke off when they needed air and Noah took the opportunity to look around. She glanced around and looked at her house through Noah's eyes.

Her walls were painted the same color as the sky on a beautiful Colorado winter day. She had plants in pots in corners and on tables. She had two very comfortable chairs where she loved to read, and a dark-blue couch that complemented the color scheme. Her favorite part of the house was the wraparound, closed-in porch out back from the kitchen. She had it heated and when you sat out there, you could see the clouds move over the Rocky Mountains.

She splurged on her kitchen since she did like to cook, and she would describe the majority of her house as comfortable.

Noah turned back to her and reached for her. Before he pulled her into a hug, he paused and glanced down with a grimace. "Why don't we shower together? I'm sure you want to get the blood off your skin."

Jade smiled a wicked smile. "Oh, shower sex."

Noah threw his head back and laughed. Jade loved to see him so carefree and relaxed. Other than in the few moments they had made love, Noah hadn't expressed many emotions, other than anger and a desire for revenge. Now that they were able to find the other shifters' operating base, Noah showed more emotions.

She thought back to the conversation they'd had where Noah asked her about transitions. Although she would never pressure him, she felt a twinge of hurt at the thought of Noah rejecting her. Even if he chose to be with her but chose not to transition, she would still lose him when he grew old.

But Jade understood his decision to wait and think it through. She'd seen parts of Ara's transition and the anguish on Reaper's face, but after she became a wolf shifter, they couldn't be happier. And Jade knew Ara would have gone through it all again just to be with Reaper.

Earlier that morning, Jade had woken to see Noah balancing his head on his hand as he laid out next to her. His eyes roamed over her face, never moving past her neck, and she wondered what he was thinking about. When she asked the question aloud, he gave her a small smile and let her know the snow had let up sometime in the early morning and melted enough they could get out.

Her thoughts about the drive flitted from her mind when Noah slid his hands around her shoulders to remove her parka. She sucked in a breath when his hands shimmied underneath her shirt and his hot skin touched hers.

“Shower sex sounds wonderful.” Noah kissed her breathless, walking her backward. “Which door?”

Jade, not moving her lips from his, tilted her head to indicate when they reached their destination.

Without a word, Noah picked up Jade and encouraged her to wrap her legs around his waist. He stepped inside and closed the door, pressing her against the solid wood and kissing her breathless. There was a sort of desperation in his kiss, but before she could figure out why, his lips traveled down to her neck and he sucked, hard, as if he intended to leave his mark on her skin.

“Noah, more. I need you.”

With one last suckle on her skin, he pulled away before he made quick work of her clothes. When she stood there, naked and panting at what was to come, Noah curled his hand around the hem of his shirt and started to peel it up his body, exposing inch after inch of beautiful, tanned skin. His washboard abs made her shiver, but when he lifted the cotton above his pectorals, she noticed his nipples were hard. The muscles in his arms flexed as he slipped the shirt over his head and dropped it to the floor.

Her breath held in her chest as he reached for the button of his jeans, flicking it open with ease with two of his fingers.

“When did you start being a tease?” Her voice came out low, almost a growl.

“The moment you started looking at me like that. Your skin’s flushed and your green eyes are so wide that I almost can’t see the emerald ring around them. Your chest is rising and falling with deep breaths and you look like you’re shaking, trying to hold back from touching me.”

Noah paused and captured her gaze in his. “You don’t have to hold back. I’m not breakable and I want to be inside you as much as you want me.”

Moving before he said the last word, Jade reached for his jeans and without thought, shredded them, doing the same with his boxer briefs, leaving him naked and his cock pulsing against his stomach.

Jade reached around and turned on the shower, waiting until steam started pouring out of the glass enclosure, before she walked Noah inside. She reached blindly for the door and once she had it closed, she dropped to her knees and took Noah’s hard cock in her mouth.

“Fuck!”

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Noah's hands clenched in her hair and she liked his reaction. She quickly swallowed him down, relaxing her throat, until her mouth had taken him all in. Without knowing quite what she was doing, having only done this one time, Jade pressed her mouth closed, keeping her teeth out of the way, and slowly moved her mouth up while her tongue licked the underside of his cock like a lollipop.

When she reached the tip, she slicked her tongue back and forth against his slit, tasting Noah and savoring his flavor.

“Jade, baby, I’m not going to last long.”

With reluctance, torn between wanting him to come in her mouth or deep inside her pussy, she stood and wrapped her arms around his shoulders.

“Fuck me. I need you inside me.”

Noah cupped her ass and lifted her up until her hips met his. Unintentional or not, Noah slammed her against the back wall of the shower, causing her to groan and shivers of pleasure to wash over her. With the sight of the water pounding against his shoulders and back, his hair wet, and his chest heaving up and down with effort, she felt a gush of wetness run down her thigh.

Noah groaned when he lined up his cock and felt her slicked wetness leaking from her pussy.

She opened her mouth to beg, but at that moment, Noah pressed his chest to hers and drove inside. The anticipation and the unpredictability of his stroke caused Jade to

clench down on his cock, squeezing him as he clenched his cheeks and pulled back.

“So wet for me, baby. What was it? The anticipation of my cock pounding you until you came?”

“Yes, all of it. You looked sexy standing under the stream of water but I love how rough you are with me.”

Noah leaned forward and bit her lip gently between his teeth. He slanted his head and devoured her mouth. When a fresh wave of her wetness washed over his cock, his tongue explored every inch of her mouth as he lifted her hips up and dropped her down on his cock as he brought his hips forward. He was impaling her on his cock and she couldn't get enough.

He lifted her up until his mouth could reach her nipples. He sucked one into his mouth, tonguing the nipple, and Jade shivered in his arms as he overloaded every one of her nerve endings. He dropped her back down on his cock, before he lifted her again, feasting on the other nipple.

“I love how you grip my cock, as if you never want me to leave your tight—”

Noah threw his head back when Jade squeezed him, her orgasm striking her without warning, and she screamed his name. His hips never stopped moving, fucking her orgasm out of her as she shivered in his arms.

Her head landed on his shoulder when her orgasm passed. His cock twitched inside her, and she groaned, loving the pulse of his heartbeat against her ear.

“Sit on the bench behind you. I want to ride you until you come deep in me.”

Noah moved slowly and lowered himself down until he was seated on the wooden

bench out of the direct line of the shower head. She stepped onto the floor and turned around, Noah facing her back. She straddled his legs and arched her back as she sank back onto his cock, drawing a low groan from deep in his chest.

Going by instinct alone, Jade raised and lowered herself on Noah's cock, loving that this position left his hands free to explore and he took advantage of their position.

Noah's grips started on her hips before traveling up her sides, his destination obvious when he cupped her breasts in his hands and groaned. The rough pads of his thumbs caused her to shudder on his lap, but she didn't stop her movements. Every once in a while she would add a twist to her hips, clenching down on him, as her head tilted back, moaning his name over and over again.

His fingers reached her clit and when he squeezed it between his forefinger and thumb, another orgasm washed over her body and she could hear the splash of her release on the marble tiled floor of the shower.

"That's fucking sexy, when you come all over me."

Noah's grip tightened on her hips and on her next downward movement, he angled his hips up and drove deep inside her. He held her where he wanted her and continued to drive into her, over and over, until she was screaming his name and their skin slapped together in a steady rhythm.

"Noah, holy fuck. Your cock feels so good inside of me. I love when you pound into me."

He wrapped his arms around her torso and continued to drive up until his cock swelled in her pussy, causing her own orgasm to rush out of her. Her release was almost enough to dislodge Noah from inside her, but thankfully he held her tight and drove into her with tiny movements as she milked the release from his cock.

Soon, she fell limply against him as he whispered words into her ear. The roar of her orgasms still hadn't lessened as he continued to hold her.

"That was...brehtaking. I don't think I have any energy to crawl into bed."

Noah chuckled in her ear and lifted her to her feet. He made quick work of washing both of them, taking the time to wash her hair and his, before he toweled them off and carried her to the bedroom. She pulled him onto the bed as soon as he yanked the covers down, and curled her body into his, loving when he wrapped his arms around her, holding her close to his chest.

"Noah, are you okay?"

"Never better, baby. Sleep now and then we'll go fill the team in on what we found."

Jade's mind was thankfully blank when she fell into a deep sleep. She thought she felt Noah take a deep breath and hold her tighter as she drifted, but within seconds, darkness pulled her under.

Chapter Eleven

Noah

Noah had known they were going to have to face the inevitability of what to do about the shifters who killed Sam and threatened Jade's family, but with Jade in his arms, he had no desire to do anything but make love to her or, like they had done for the last four hours, and talk about everything.

He'd told her about his childhood, how Steven, his older brother, looked out for him.

"I introduced him to his wife, Amy. I was stationed in San Diego and one night at a bar during one of my few days of downtime, I ran into her and thought she would be perfect for my brother. I told her so and she laughed, asking if I had a picture. I pulled one up on my phone and she told me he was cute. Before I knew it, I'd called him and put her on the phone with him. They talked all night, thank fuck for unlimited minutes on my cell phone plan, and Steven flew out the next weekend."

Jade looked amazed. "That quickly? How long before he moved to California?"

Noah laughed. "Three months. He sold his house in Denver and got a new job with another tech firm, but this one paid an exorbitant amount of money, and they started 'dating' as Amy called it. For six months, they dated and Amy was the one who asked Steven to marry him. They waited until I got back from a tour to get married, and six years later, they are still one of the greatest couples I know. They remind me of Reaper and Ara—well, all of the immortals with mates, actually. They speak without uttering a word. They seem to know how the other is going to move or what they are

going to say. My parents said they were in tune with each other, but I say they were meant to be.”

“Do they have any kids?” Jade grew concerned when Noah’s smile disappeared.

“Amy’s unable to have any. Steven doesn’t care because he has Amy, but one day, probably soon, I think they will adopt. Those two have too much love only for each other.”

“And your parents?”

Noah sighed. “My father told Steven years after we left the house that having kids made them happy for a while, but their marriage wasn’t strong to begin with. Both of them were selfish, but when we came along, it put a strain on them that ultimately broke them up. My mother moved to east, somewhere, not really contacting us unless she needs something, and my father still lives in Trinidad, surrounded by his books and is content with his life.”

“At least you have your brother.”

“I do.” Noah glanced at Jade and wanted to say more, wanted to tell Jade he was falling for her, but there was a soft knock on her front door before a voice echoed in both their heads.

Noah! Jade! I know you’re in there. You’re home and didn’t come by and say hi. I missed you.

They both laughed before they realized they were still naked, lying in bed. Not wanting to traumatize Silas, they quickly dressed before heading toward the front door.

When Jade opened it, laughing at Xander's harried face, Noah glanced down to see a tiny snow leopard sitting on his haunches by the door, glancing at Noah with his beautiful eyes.

Noah, without thinking about his actions, dropped onto the floor, cross-legged, and watched Silas stalk toward him.

Hey, little man. I didn't mean to neglect you, but Jade was hurt and I wanted her to get rest before we came to see you.

Silas stopped about halfway to where Noah sat and stared at Jade with a curious expression for a leopard. It looked as though his eyes were scrutinizing Jade, searching for any injuries, but Jade smiled down at him.

"It's okay, Silas. I was shot, but Noah got me to safety until I healed. I'm good as new, I promise."

Tears leaked from Silas's eyes and Jade's smile left her face and she immediately sank to her knees and held her arms out. Silas leapt into them and nuzzled against Jade's neck while she squeezed him close, rocking him back and forth.

"What happened?" Xander directed the question at Noah.

"We were on our way back to the car when a shot came out of nowhere." Noah looked questioningly at Xander, wondering if he wanted to know the entire truth or the watered-down version of it.

"All of it."

Noah glanced at Jade nuzzling Silas close, but Silas, while staying close to Jade, turned his gaze to Noah.

“Jade was first shot in the shoulder. It sounded like a 9 mm, a through and through. She barely flinched. We counted five shifters who were trying to surround us, but there was another shifter who Jade scented in Ghost’s office a couple weeks back. When I shot at the tree above his head, he took off and didn’t return to the fight. Of course, Jade took care of four of them and we were searching for the fifth shifter when she took six to the back. I took out that shifter with the .308, severed his spine and he lost his head.” Noah knew his smile wasn’t one of happiness.

“She lost consciousness soon after, and I carried her back to the SUV. By that time, the snowstorm had come in and we were stuck overnight and most of the morning. We couldn’t leave until late this morning after the snow had melted some and got back at one this afternoon.”

Xander nodded. “Yeah, we saw you two drive up the mountain and figured you guys would need time after you texted Ghost last night.”

Jade looked at him and he shrugged. He had been worried she wasn’t going to recover, despite the proof whenever he peeled back the gauze and looked at her rapidly healing wounds. When they had made love, there was no sign of her being shot. Her skin was as smooth as he remembered it, but whenever he closed his eyes, he could see the blood and the pain reflected in her green eyes.

“Well, we were sent over to get you two for dinner at Kai’s. Then tomorrow, we are going to plan an assault.” Xander glanced back and forth between Noah and Jade until they both nodded.

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Silas, still in his snow leopard form, jumped from Jade's arms after he nuzzled her cheek and moved to Noah, who he nuzzled under his chin before he followed his dad out the door. Noah laughed when Silas put his paws against the window of Xander's truck.

Hurry up!

Laughing, they hopped in Xander's pickup truck and headed toward Kai's gigantic mountain house a few miles away. Xander turned on a blues station and soon they both relaxed back into their seats.

Noah reached out to grasp Jade's hand in his and she turned to smile at him. But her smile turned tense and she gazed around.

"What?"

"Someone's following us."

Xander, whose eyes had already been scanning the surrounding area, sighed in defeat when he couldn't find anything out of place.

"Whoever it is, is staying out of sight. What do you think they are after?"

"The scent—there's something familiar in the underlying scent, but something is masking it. I can't remember where I could've smelled it before."

Noah glanced between Jade and Silas. Jade had just recovered from an attack; there

was no way he was going to see her hurt again. Although he couldn't admit it aloud, he cared deeply for Jade and had thought more than once in their time together about being her mate. They could work as assassins and live together in Jade's cozy little cabin. But someone out there was trying to rip them apart.

Yeah, we're coming in now, but I think we're being followed.

By whom? Kai's voice boomed in his head and Noah sat back, startled.

"Did you just hear Kai?" Jade asked.

He nodded.

Are we getting ready for a fight?

For fuck's sake, Ax.

Just asking!

"How can I hear the assassins? I'm not an assassin and other than you and Silas, I couldn't hear anyone before." Noah felt confused and it came across in his voice.

"I don't know."

I backtracked several times on the drive home, but I couldn't see anyone following Jade and I.

Noah?

Yeah, Ghost, it's me.

Be alert. The most dangerous time is from the car to the house. We're ready for you.

Xander pressed his foot on the accelerator and within a minute, Kai's house was in view.

ETA, two minutes.

We really have to figure out what the fuck is going on. These fucking shifters aren't smart enough to come after us, so if it's not them, then who?

Before anyone could answer, Xander pulled into the driveway of Kai's house, about twenty feet from the door. Noah took a quick glance around before he turned to Xander.

"Get Silas safe before we leave the vehicle."

Xander picked up Silas in his arms and dashed for Kai's front door. The vampire opened it in time for Xander to rush through, and then he, Axel, Kane, Thomas, Isaac, Hunter, and Gunnar stepped onto the porch. They walked closer as Noah opened the door.

There was a flash of movement to his right, but before he could slam the door shut, a fist gripped his collar and yanked him out of the SUV and onto the ground. When Noah blinked up at the stranger, he realized he wasn't a stranger after all.

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It was the man who had run away when he'd taken a high shot over his head.

"She will understand now, what it's like to lose what you love." The man's voice was gravelly, like he hadn't used it in many years.

"Who? What are you talking about?"

Before Noah got his answers, the man leaned forward, his canines stretching his lips open, and he bit down on Noah's shoulder. He felt a rush of heat and an explosion of pain, but before he could scream, three of the assassins pulled him off Noah and Jade dropped to her knees at his side, cupping his face gently in her hands.

He wanted to tell her everything was fine, but the searing pain traveled from his neck to his chest and he tilted his head back to find relief. Instead, the pain continued and he finally gave in and screamed.

"I'm sorry."

He couldn't speak but he wondered what Jade was sorry for, but in the next second, he felt her tongue on his skin and the pain subsided a bit. He blinked up at her, trying to meet her eyes, but she was staring at his neck.

"This is the only way you will survive."

Jade's teeth extended and with one more swipe of her tongue against his heated skin, sending shafts of pleasure through his body, she bit him exactly where the other shifter had. This time, when she released her venom in his system, darkness seeped

into his vision until lost consciousness.

Chapter Twelve

Jade

Jade watched with horror as the shifter she had spotted outside Ghost's office, the one who followed them in the forest and had been there when she'd been shot, pulled Noah from the car. He knelt by Noah's body and looked at her with such hatred it made her freeze in place.

Noah. No. No. No. Noah!

She launched herself from the backseat and onto the ground in front of Noah in one swift movement. She reached out to pull him away from the shifter, but instead, Noah was yanked away from her again.

"She will understand now, what it's like to lose what you love."

Her heart froze in her chest as he bit down on Noah's neck. The scream that was wrenched out of the man she loved almost brought her to her knees. She watched as Axel, Gunnar, and Hunter latched on the shifter and pulled him away from Noah before throwing him on the ground and holding him down.

Jade moved toward Noah, not knowing what she could do to save his life, but knowing she would have to do something.

Think. Think, think.

Liv moved in front of her and wrapped her tiny hands around Jade's biceps and squeezed. "You have to introduce your venom into his system. The shifter only pushed a small amount of venom in before he was removed. Bite him and you will know how much he needs in order to survive."

Jade stood still for a second, but Liv's brows drew down and she pushed her toward Noah.

She kneeled in front of him and the pain on his face almost killed her.

"Noah? Noah?" Jade cupped his cheek and turned his gaze toward her. It was already cloudy and he was squinting in pain, biting his lip and trying not to cry out. She needed to save him. Now.

"I'm sorry." Jade could tell her words confused him but she ignored the pang in her chest at the fact she was forcing him to become an immortal.

He hadn't decided. It wasn't fair.

Wanting to numb the area before she bit down, she licked his neck, tasting the sweet tang of his blood on her tongue. Knowing she would have to take his choice away from him, she licked him one more time before she bit down, releasing a rush of venom from her teeth. She had no idea how Liv thought she would be able to tell how much was enough, but soon, the flow of venom slowed to a stutter and after a few more seconds, came to a stop.

Making a sound of surprise, she licked a swath over the wound, once and then again, making sure it was closed. Not knowing if it could work, Jade dropped her head onto Noah's chest.

A sob surprised her when it bubbled from her throat and escaped in a wail. She

wrapped her arms around Noah, holding him close and taking a small amount of comfort that he was warm. She could hear his faint heartbeat, and he was breathing.

“Let’s get him comfortable.” Liv’s words brought Jade back to reality.

Jade nodded and rose to her knees. She scooped Noah up in her arms and stood, cradling his head against her chest as she glanced up to follow Liv into the house and up the stairs. She made the mistake of looking at her family and the devastation on their faces had her drop her gaze down to Noah. She noticed that his puncture wounds had healed, but she knew they had a long way to go.

Silently, Liv led the way into the house, followed by Jade, and then the rest of the assassins. Jade followed Liv quietly, holding Noah gently in her arms, and only glanced up when Liv cleared her throat.

Jade settled Noah onto the bed with gentle movements. She ripped off his shirt and pants, leaving him in his boxer briefs. They would probably have to lose those sooner rather than later, but for now, she helped Noah keep his modesty.

“I’m going to get an IV for a morphine drip. I’ll get you a cooler with ice packs and a pile of towels to keep him comfortable.”

“Thank you.”

Liv squeezed her hand. “It’s not your fault.”

Jade nodded. “Yes, it is. He wasn’t sure about this life. And who can blame him, really. A shifter killed his best friend after lying to them, he was thrown into working with us, and a rogue shifter attacked him for reasons we have yet to understand.”

Jade paused and glanced up, spotting Kai standing in the doorway. “You still have

that fucker, right?”

Kai nodded, his eyes drifting back to Noah, telling her silently that she should concentrate on her mate and not worry about anything else.

Liv squeezed Jade tightly. “No one has the ideal transition and life throws curveballs in your way when you least expect it. Just know, after his transition, he will be fine. His heart is strong and with our help, he will make it through this without much pain.”

Jade nodded, her throat too tight to speak.

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Liv darted out of the room while Jade pulled up a chair close to Noah's bedside and reached for his hand. She hesitated for a split second, before she reached for it. Jade had no idea if he would let her close to him after this.

As if in a daze, she heard Liv moving around her, putting the IV drip into Noah's arm, which made Jade flinch at the thought of him being in more pain, although it was for a moment. The cooler had been placed near her, filled with ice packs and near the end of the bed, towels.

Jade watched Noah for any changes and about an hour after her bite, she noted that a sweat broke out on his forehead. She moved to stand and get a washcloth and basin with water, but Reaper's hand on her shoulder stopped her. He placed those exact items on the bedside table next to her.

"Thank you."

Reaper took her by surprise and hugged her from behind. "Stay strong. And remember, he's in pain, so whatever he might say, he doesn't mean."

Jade felt her body shiver in fear, but when Noah moaned on the bed, she nodded at Reaper before reaching for the washcloth and dipping it in water. She mopped the sweat off his forehead before she placed a cool, fresh one, hoping to help his fever.

The next few hours passed without a word from Noah. She could tell he had a fever; his face and chest was flushed, but the morphine seemed to be doing its job. He hadn't moved or moaned in pain since an hour after the IV was put in, and while that gave her some comfort, Jade found herself checking his pulse every few minutes to make

sure his heart could handle the transition.

And she knew this wasn't the worst part of the transition. That would be day two when the venom would strengthen his bones and muscles, making him ache in ways that were indescribable. Soon after, the venom would make everything hurt as it transformed him from human to shifter.

She would take his place in a heartbeat. Now she understood why Kane was hesitant to put his wife through this. Watching someone you love cry out in pain was soul destroying. And there was no way of knowing if Noah would be accepting of her when he'd gone through his transition.

If he rejected her...

Jade shook her head and concentrated on Noah.

She had no idea how much time had passed. She'd guessed it was early morning on Sunday. But as she watched, Noah's skin steadily turned darker as he practically glowed with a fever. The morphine wasn't enough to hold the pain at bay, so Jade made quick work of laying cold towels, along with strategically placed ice packs, around his body. When the towels touched his skin, he let out a sound halfway between a groan of pleasure and a gasp of pain that brought tears to her eyes.

"We can turn up the morphine now. I purposely started low so by the time the worst of the pain struck, he wouldn't overdose." Liv pressed the arrow twice, the readout changing, before she turned to Jade. "How are you holding up?"

"I want to take it away from him. I would gladly go through it if he didn't have to. I feel so helpless."

“We all did.”Xander pulled Frost close.

“And watching Noah, we wish we could take the pain away too.I have no idea why it’s so painful, but the worst part is watching your mate hurt.”Aubrey moved closer and hugged Jade.

“The pain, to be honest, you can’t remember once it’s done.”Ara bent down and kissed Jade on the forehead before she wrapped her in another hug.“He’ll be fine.He’ll be strong, but right now, you have to be strong for him.”

When Axel walked in the room, he lifted Jade into a crushing hug and Jade froze when she heard Noah growl, low and unlike anything she’d heard from another shifter.

“He’s even possessive in his sleep.”Ax sounded bemused.

“Was that a tiger growl?”Liv asked.

Jade reached for Noah’s hand, and although he was still hot, he squeezed slightly, letting her know he was still there.

Jade had removed the last of the ice packs, completely melted and felt to be around room temperature, when she heard the sweetest sound.

“Jade?Baby?”

She rushed to Noah’s side and when he blinked open his beautiful dark-blue eyes, she smiled a watery smile at him.

“Hey, love. How are you feeling? Do you need anything?”

Instead of answering her, he pulled her into bed and squeezed her close. “Are...you...okay?” His voice sounded raw and scratched.

“I’m okay. But I wasn’t fast enough to prevent him from biting you. The only way I could save you was to push my venom into your bloodstream.”

Noah blinked his eyes closed and was slow to open them, but when he did, Jade spotted something she hoped she never would from Noah. Anger and betrayal.

He thought she betrayed him.

His arms dropped from around her and with pain in her chest that threatened to split her heart in two, she slowly rose from the bed.

“What do you need?” She wasn’t sure she was asking if he wanted her to leave or if he wanted someone else to take care of him.

“Not...you.”

Although she knew it was coming, the pain from hearing it was more excruciating than...anything.

She nodded at him and he watched her move toward the door with narrowed eyes, and when she looked back at him, he closed his eyes and blocked her from his view. She nodded and silently left the room.

Jade couldn’t hear anything as she stumbled her way down the stairs and toward the front door. Silas jumped into her arms and she managed to catch him before she turned and put him in Xander’s arms. She opened the door, walked through it in a daze, and closed it firmly behind her.

Without thinking, she shifted and started a run. Toward where, she had no idea. Everything was numb. Her mind, her body, her heart. But Noah would live, he would be alive, and that was more than Jade could hope for. And as she ate up the miles, she almost convinced herself that she didn’t matter in the long run.

Noah would've died if I didn't...

His hatred and demand that she remove herself from his life was a small price to pay. He would move on, be healthy, never die.

Jade slowed her run and glanced at the full moon. She had no idea how long she ran, but as she took a deep breath, she realized it was far enough away that she couldn't scent anyone she knew. She would build a makeshift bed underneath a tree and in the morning when she woke, she would run farther.

After that, she had no plans.

Chapter Thirteen

Noah

Noah woke with a start and glanced around the strange room, looking for the one person he needed close to him. His brows furrowed when he took a deep breath and he could barely smell Jade's scent anywhere in the room.

Where was she?

He searched his memory and tensed when he remembered the attack. The shifter moved so quickly that he barely took a breath before he found himself pulled from the car and slammed onto his back. Noah still had no idea what his cryptic comment meant, but after that there was pain and Jade's panicked voice by his ear. He didn't remember what she said or what happened after.

What day is it?

He heard footsteps coming up stairs, or identified them as such, before Liv walked into his room, carrying a tray of food.

"Ja...de."

His voice cracked and he had to clear his throat. He tried again, but his throat was dry. Noah gratefully took a glass of orange juice Liv handed him and downed it all in a few gulps.

“Where’s Jade?”

Liv gave him a sad smile. She placed the tray on his lap and backed up a couple of steps.

“Where?”

“Eat first and then I’ll tell you.”

Without looking away from Liv’s expressive face, he ate whatever he reached for, not even looking at or tasting what he was eating. He tossed the empty tray to the other side of the bed and widened his eyes when it skipped off the bed and onto the floor. Noah moved to retrieve it, but Liv waved him away. He knew that she was buying time, but he needed to know and implored her.

Please.

It took several tries, but each time Liv opened her mouth, she closed it and cleared her throat. He could see tears in her eyes and something stilled in his chest.

Is she dead? Did I hurt her?

“You rejected her and she left.”

Noah’s head whipped to where Kai was standing in the doorway, glaring at him. “What are you talking about?”

“When you woke up yesterday morning, you said something to Jade that made her leave. By the look on her face, it seemed as though you rejected her. And knowing Jade, she would never force you to do anything, including accepting her as a mate, if she knew you wanted nothing to do with her. She thought it best to leave. We tracked

her for several miles, but lost her scent.If she doesn't want to be found, you won't find her."

Noah suddenly remembered the fragments of conversation with Jade.His throat was tight and he woke up angry because he felt so helpless and weak.And although he had no say whether he wanted to be immortal or not, he wasn't mad at Jade.He was angry at himself for knowing he wanted to be with Jade and not being able to tell her before the decision was taken from him.Then he remembered his words.

Not you.

Fuck.

"I have to find her.I promise, I didn't reject her, even though it might've seemed that way."

He whipped the covers off himself and wondered why Liv turned her back.It wasn't until he glanced down that he realized he was naked.

"Do you have some clothes I can borrow?"

"You're a shifter, Noah.You're going to shift sooner or later—you might as well try now and use your animal senses to find her."

He could do with less hostility, but Kai was right.

Noah closed his eyes and could feel a strange energy circling around him.He centered his thoughts on the feeling that traveled from his chest to his limbs and felt parts of his body change.Although he'd never had a conversation about what it was like to be a shifter, whether it hurt to shift or not, he found the sensations of stretching and not pain.

Guilt swamped him because out of all their conversations, Noah never asked Jade anything about who she essentially was as a shifter.

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It only took a few minutes, but when he opened his eyes, he felt his solid mass wobble a bit as he stood on the bed and noticed everything in the room was sharper. Noah could detect movement downstairs and the rustling of the wind brushing against the trees outside. But most importantly, he could also detect the faint scent of Jade, his mate.

“Are you fucking kidding me?”

Ara stood glaring at him from the doorway and he moved to shake his head, but found it wasn't that easy to move side to side. Noah glanced down at his paw and found a huge orange, black, and white paw gripping the bed after Ara's outburst.

What...animal am I?

You're a fucking tiger. How did you shift so fast?

Huh, a tiger. He tried to shrug at Ara's question, but realized he couldn't.

I felt a ball of energy in my body and concentrated on it, and when I opened my eyes...tiger. Now, I have to go and find Jade.

Noah paused after his first step. Wait. How the fuck am I a tiger? Jade is a red fox.

“The man who bit you first, he's a tiger. I can only suspect because I haven't tested your blood or his, but since his venom hit your system before Jade's, your shifter form is a tiger,” Liv said.

Okay.

Noah realized how big he was when he hopped down off the bed and the floor shook with the impact of his weight hitting the ground. He winced and made sure that he didn't damage anything as he maneuvered out the door, down the stairs, and past the furniture. It turned out to be a pain in the ass. Liv followed him downstairs, moving things before he could accidentally swish his tail into it.

Holy fuck.

Noah glanced around, looking for Axel.

Dude, a fucking tiger? You're even bigger than I am.

Good. Now keep your hands off my mate or I'll rip your throat out.

There were chuckles around the room, but Noah made it past the front door and nothing was standing in his way of finding Jade. He was about to take off running, but had no idea where Jade headed.

Kai, which direction did she go?

Southwest.

Thank you. I'll bring Jade back, I promise.

Jade

Jade had woken up that morning, determined to run until she was far enough away

from Noah and the assassins before she could find some place to rest. But everything hurt, from her head pounding to the bottom of her feet.

And as she ran, the constant pain made her movements slow.

This was the first time in her existence that she'd truly experienced a constant pain that wouldn't disappear by her regenerative healing. Even being shot hurt less than walking through the pines in the mountains.

Her body temperature had dropped and although she hadn't shifted back from her red fox to human, she shivered as the cold wind blew in from the west.

Maybe I should've gone to the east. Not as cold.

Somehow, Jade knew her pain and listlessness wasn't due to anything other than Noah rejecting her. The pure disgust in his beautiful dark-blue eyes had told her everything she needed and only because she told him the truth behind his transition.

Sam. I forgot about Sam. How the fuck could I have forgotten about Sam?

No wonder Noah hated her. She'd done the one thing that she'd sworn over and over again to never do. She took his choice away from him. And on the nights they were alone in the cave or the tent, she'd heard his futile desperation at wanting to save his friend from his fate whenever he spoke of him. Noah had tortured himself with what-ifs and wondering what more he could've done. The same guilt that plagued her since she followed Liv's instruction and injected her venom into his system.

You had no other choice.

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Despite those exact words running through her head whenever guilt assailed her, she didn't care that it was a reasonable excuse for her to have bitten him. She'd taken his choice away.

She blinked and glanced around her surroundings. She leaned against a tall aspen tree and heard her harsh breathing sawing in and out of her chest. Her bones ached with exhaustion, and with what was left of her energy, she dug a burrow into the ground by the tree. It was deep enough she would be protected from anyone who stumbled upon the desolate area and she covered her tiny red fox body with dirt to keep herself warm. The moment she closed her eyes, sleep overtook her and she felt nothing.

Images flashed behind her closed eyelids. Brilliant colors of orange and red, green and blue, swirled around in her mind and she sucked in a deep breath when happiness flooded her cold form, unable to understand how she'd gone from sleep where she was surrounded by darkness to this amazing dream of nothing but colors.

Slow to come to awareness, she burrowed deeper into her hole, happy the dirt was enough of an insulator it finally warmed her body. She didn't want to stretch in case her bones still ached, but instead, kept her eyes closed and savored the warmth she thought she would never feel.

In that moment, she almost wished she hadn't managed to keep herself so warm. Jade had hoped, because she was unwilling to lie to herself at this point, that she would've perish during the harsh winter night on the mountain.

Knowing she had nowhere to go, she settled back and absorbed the warmth from the ground, hoping the pretty colors would come back as she fell asleep. But her eyes shot open the moment a purr rumbled through her body. She didn't see anything in front of her and since she protected her back by butting it up against the tree, she had no idea where the odd sound had come from.

Jade.

Biting back a curse, she hoped Noah wasn't close. If she kept quiet, he wouldn't be able to find her.

She had been so out of it, her senses and her body failed her. A familiar arm wrapped around her fox form and pulled her close, and she wondered why she hadn't scented him.

"Jade, baby, you're gonna be fine."

Why...did you come?

"Because I was a fucking idiot. I didn't mean what I said after my transition. I was upset at myself for not telling you that I had been thinking about it anyway, about committing to you and being your mate. But whatever I wanted to say, I couldn't get it out. I'm sorry, but I didn't mean what I said."

Jade felt her entire body shaking and Noah pressed her closer.

"It took me over six hours to find you. I was starting to panic when I caught your scent."

I'm...sorry.

“Don’t...it’s not your fault.It’s mine.You are so weak now because you thought I rejected you.I’m not going to reject you, Jade.I want to be your mate and I want you to be mine.”

I want to be yours.

She paused for a moment.

I’m so tired, Noah.Can we go home?

“Of course, baby.Don’t worry, I’ll take care of everything.”

Wait.Are...you’re a red fox, right?

Noah chuckled, the reverberation sending happiness flooding through her body.

“No, I’m a tiger shifter.”

Jade’s mind couldn’t process that fact and so she stayed quiet.

“Are you okay with that?”

Of course.She was quick to reassure Noah that there was nothing, absolutely nothing, wrong with him, whatever animal he shifted into.I’m just...confused.

“I know.We’ll go home and get some sleep so you can recuperate.After, we have a shifter to question.”

Jade growled, low in her throat.

“That’s my girl.Relax and we’ll be home soon.”

Okay, Noah.I love you.

Chapter Fourteen

Noah

For the past two days, Noah had replayed Jade's last words to him.

Despite the fact he'd treated her like shit as they'd had gotten to know each other, he hesitated about the thought of being her mate, and accidentally rejected her, she loved him.

Holy shit.

Jade was a beautiful woman, but she had so many other qualities that he would identify with her before her beauty came into play. She loved her family, took care of others before herself, and had the biggest heart of anyone he'd ever met. And her ultimate sacrifice. She allowed him to decide for himself what he wanted, even at her detriment.

How can I not love her back?

And he realized he did.

Although she had trekked hundreds of miles after she left him at Kai and Liv's, his rejection of her had lessened her life force and she'd stopped because her energy had waned and she couldn't continue.

For long minutes after he'd found her, she was unresponsive. He could hear her heart

beat, although it was weak, and when he nosed at her shoulder, she cried out in pain.Noah noticed then that she was shivering.He maneuvered his huge tiger form against her back and breathed a sigh of relief when she snuggled against his front while he moved his right paw to cover her front.It was almost as large as Jade's entire red fox form.

He waited until he could hear her heartbeat grow stronger and he could feel the heat of her body against his.Noah still didn't move away, but monitored close to two hours before he felt it was safe to wake her.

He was taken by surprise how weak she sounded, but at least before she passed out, he told her the truth.He wasn't rejecting her, and he was sorry, more sorry than she would ever know.

Unable to communicate with the assassins due to the distance and forgetting to bring a cell, Noah carefully picked Jade up by the scruff of her neck and ran with her all the way back to her cabin outside Snowfall.The run had felt freeing, but by the time he shifted back to his human form and carried Jade into her bedroom, Noah was exhausted.

Staying in his human form, he pulled back the covers and got in next to Jade before he covered them both and passed out.

"Noah?"

Although he'd been sound asleep, his eyes opened and he searched for Jade, who he found several feet away from him, hugging the edge of the bed.

"What's wrong?"His voice scratchy with sleep.

"Nothing.I woke up here and it took me awhile to piece together that you found

me. But I don't remember how we got back."

"I carried you."

Without waiting for Jade's mind to catch up with their conversation, he reached over and pulled her close, capturing her mouth in a kiss that seared his veins when she wrapped her arms around his shoulders and kissed him back.

Noah couldn't remember being kissed like this when he was human, and his human memories were crystal-clear. When Jade broke the kiss, her chest rising and falling with deep breaths, the answer came to him.

"You were holding back when I was human?"

Jade threw her head back and laughed. "Yes. I didn't want to hurt you. Can't you tell in your tiger form that you have to be more careful than when you are human?"

"Yeah, I almost destroyed Kai's house when I walked downstairs, trying not to knock anything over. And Ara's pissed at me because it took me a few minutes to shift. Do I wanna know what that's about? And Axel said I'm bigger than he is when I'm in my tiger form."

Jade smiled, wiping the tears of laughter from her eyes. "Yeah, it's not like Kai has anything breakable in his house. He learned when Seth was human and threw open doors and stumbled around, not to have anything nice."

"Ara is upset because ever since she'd woken up a shifter, it takes her a half an hour to shift into her wolf form. We keep telling her she needs practice, but when she doesn't have anger controlling her actions, her shifts are notoriously slow. I can see you being bigger than Axel. You had a lot of muscle and after years of training and honing your body to move the way you want it to, I don't doubt that."

Jade sobered for a moment, searching Noah's gaze for something.

"Are you a tiger because the man who bit you was one?"

He nodded. "Liv figures it was his venom that passed through my body first and I didn't die because your venom left no doubt that we are mates."

Jade nodded. "I felt guilty for taking your choices away from you. But when Liv told me to inject my venom into you or you would die, I couldn't let you die."

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“I know, baby. I don’t blame you. I was upset at myself and took it out on you when I woke up. When I found you, you were so weak. At first, I thought your heart was going to give out, but the more I touched you, the stronger it became.”

Ready to take care of this guy? He won’t talk to anyone but Jade.

Fuck, Kai. I just got her back—can you give her a moment?

Jade chuckled and buried her face against Noah’s neck. We’ll be right there.

“Yeah, let see who this guy is and if he’s a spy sent from the other group. Then I can rip his head off for biting you.”

Noah shivered. “I love it when you get growly.” He moved to kiss her neck, but she pulled back.

“Remember, he can smell everything.”

Noah closed his eyes and nodded. They both rose and threw on some clothes. His attention drifted to Jade when she pulled her black hair back into a bun on the top of her head and took a deep breath.

“Whatever happens, I’ll be right there. I’m not a weak human anymore. If he doesn’t have any information to share, I’ll rip his fucking throat out.”

Jade reached up on her tiptoes and kissed him. “Thank you.”

“Anything for you, baby. And I mean anything.”

Jade, are you okay?

Silas sounded worried as they closed in on Kai’s.

I’m fine, Silas, I promise. I’m sorry I scared you.

Noah, is he okay, too? I heard he was attacked.

I’m fine, little man. I’m a tiger shifter now so we should go running soon.

Okay!

They walked into Kai’s, finding everyone except Liv, Frost, and Silas.

“They are at my place. We don’t know if this shifter had a tracker. But after four days, I highly doubt it, but we’re not taking that chance.”

“What’s the plan?” Jade looked at Ghost.

Ghost sighed. “He won’t talk to anyone but you. We don’t have his name and although he ate a few times, he mainly sits around with his eyes closed.”

“I’m going in with her.”

Ghost nodded and they headed downstairs. The other assassins would be lurking around with Ghost, watching over the interrogation.

Jade didn’t hesitate as she flew down the stairs and entered the code to open the door for the sound-and escape-proof enclosure. As soon as the door opened, Jade clenched

her fists and when the man glanced up and gave her a small smirk, she punched him straight in the face.

“What the fuck?”

Jade punched him again, and before Noah could step in and hold her back, she reached for a chair and moved it across from the spluttering shifter and sat down.

“Talk.” Jade’s command was low and deadly.

“Is that how you greet everyone?”

Jade showed teeth and the man leaned back in his chair and gulped. “Everyone who goes after my mate and tries to kill him. Yes.”

“It’s too bad you don’t feel the same about your family.”

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She glanced around before her gaze settled back on the man. “What do you mean?”

“Why don’t you take off my cap and find out?”

Not in the mood to play games, Jade snatched his cap off his head and sucked in a deep breath. “What...who are you?”

“I am your brother, dear Jade. The one you forgot about when you turned into an immortal.”

Noah squeezed her shoulder and she looked at him imploringly. “She doesn’t remember anything about her human years or her transition. Ghost found her alone in a cabin on the outskirts of Snowfall fifty years ago.”

“That’s not true.”

Ghost and Xander stepped forward.

“I scented her in an abandoned cabin and although she had her birth certificate on her, the only information visible was her first name and birth date. She couldn’t remember anything. She still can’t. Xander is our computer expert and he’s tried every way to track her past, but there’s nothing. There were no Jades who were born on January 21st, 1948 in Colorado or anywhere else in the States.”

Jade’s gaze hadn’t left the man in front of her since she’d taken off the cap. He looked back at her just as intently.

“How...do you know I’m your...sister?”

“I took care of you after you were born.I’m six years older than you.When you were twenty-one, you went to town with friends to go to a movie and you never came back, or that’s the story Dad told me.I searched for you everywhere, asked everyone.I learned you never made it to town, but as good as I was at tracking, I couldn’t find you.You disappeared.

“I was angry at you.It was you and me against the world and you left.”

Noah sensed that he was telling the truth.His shoulders slumped in defeat and he understood what it was like to hold onto a grudge for so long that it tainted everything.With quick movements, he cut the man’s zip ties loose with his claws.

“What’s your name?” Noah knew Jade wanted to ask.

“I’m Drew.Drew Murphy.”

“How long ago were you turned?”Ghost didn’t question Noah’s decision to cut him loose, but he stepped closer to Jade to protect her if he needed to.

“Not too long after Jade went missing.I had been camping in the woods about twenty miles from town.I don’t remember being attacked, just waking up in the snow feeling better than I’d ever had before.When I shifted into a tiger the first time—well, let’s just say it was surprising.”Drew turned to Jade.“I never stopped looking for you.I’m sorry I thought you left by yourself.I knew you wouldn’t do that to me.”

“What took you so long to find me?”

“Your scent was unfamiliar to me as a shifter and I’d never come across it throughout the years.But then I heard there was a group of immortals who were based in

Snowfall, shifters and vampires alike, and I decided to see if you were part of the group. When I passed you outside your boss's office and you didn't recognize me, I was upset." Drew looked down.

"Were you with the shifters after us?"

Drew shook his head. "No. I had been following you when I ran into them. You're right about them being underground. There is a series of old mining tunnels they reinforced and they live down there. I counted fifteen shifters after your run-in with them when you were shot, and they were able to manage to turn about five more. They aren't organized, and they have no idea how to fight. They do want power and the Dark Company, if they could get their hands on it. But they still have no leader."

"Drew?"

Drew turned his familiar green eyes to Jade and even Noah could see that he truly loved his sister, no matter what he thought she might have done. But his eyes held remorse as well.

"Can I..."

Drew held his arms open and Jade flew into his hold. Noah could hear Jade sob against Drew's shoulder as he rubbed her back with soothing circles and murmured in her ear that everything would be okay.

Noah nodded at the rest of them and everyone headed upstairs, giving the newly discovered siblings a chance to get to know each other.

Once they were seated around the living room, the front door opened and Silas barreled inside.

Jade has a brother?

“Yeah, little man. He has the same color hair and eyes, and you can also see it in the shape of their noses and ears. They are definitely related,” Xander said.

Silas smiled and noticed Noah. He flew into his arms and Noah held Silas close to his chest.

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I missed you, Silas.

I missed you and Jade. You were gone so long.

I know, but our next trip won't be that long and we'll be back before you know it.

That's what you said the last time.

Everyone in the room laughed. Silas really did sound put out and included him in with his other family.

I promise.

So...you are going to stay with Jade forever?

Yes, I am.

Again, happiness was pushed out from Silas into everyone in the room.

"Whoa, what was that?" Drew asked.

Silas looked over Noah's shoulder and sucked in a breath at the sight of a man who looked similar to Jade. He stood and without fanfare, ran up to Drew and jumped into his arms. Drew, with fast reflexes, caught Silas with a startled expression on his face.

Hi, you're Jade's brother.

“Y...Yes.I’m Drew.And you?”

I’m Silas.I’m a snow leopard shifter along with my dad, Xander—he’s over there with the white hair like mine.And my mom is Frost.She’s about to open the door, now.

Everyone glanced toward the door as Frost entered, and when she noticed Silas in the arms of the man who was supposed to be their prisoner, she glared at her mate.

“Xander?”Frost growled.

“Don’t worry, sweetheart.He’s Jade’s brother.”

“Really?”Drew sounded confused.

“It’s a long story.Just know he’s the first baby conceived and born by shifters and if Frost decides to, she could have more.”Jade sounded amused and laughed when Frost rolled her eyes at her.

Frost scoffed.“Right now I have a handful with my husband and our Silas.”

“And Silas is the one who pushed the feelings of happiness that you felt just now.He’s special.” Jade nuzzled her face against Silas’s chest as he giggled.

“Well, welcome to the family.”

Silas jumped out of Drew’s arms and went to snuggle with Noah as Jade took Drew around the room and introduced him to her family.Noah smiled at how close the two already were, having just met.

Jade came over and sat on the arm of his chair as Ara took Drew and Silas, who

continued to ask Drew questions about his life and where he'd been all this time, into the kitchen to get Jade's brother something to eat.

“Are you happy, baby?”

She nodded. “I have you and my family, including my brother. Everything's perfect.”

Noah pulled Jade into his lap and held her close. He couldn't agree more.

Chapter Fifteen

Jade

“There are three entrances into the mines, all of them reinforced by steel doors. One on the west, southeast, and north. If you jam two of the doors and blow in the third, they won’t have any way of escaping. I would suggest blocking the doors in a way that a group of shifters with more brute than brains can’t push their way out,” Drew explained.

“How much firepower do you think they have?”

“None. They think too much of themselves to arm themselves with weapons. They want to fight hand-to-hand.”

“Fuck, let’s just send Jade in there to take care of them and we’ll clean up the mess after.”

Noah growled and Jade laughed, wrapping her arm around his waist and pulling him close.

Jade couldn’t help but reflect, again, on how much her life had changed in the past month. She found and thought she’d lost her mate, she discovered her brother, and her assassin family was safe and happy. So it didn’t bother Jade when Ax suggested she go in.

“Shut it, blonde. You’re not sending my mate in there alone.”

Ghost cleared his throat.“Although she could probably handle it, we all go in together.”

Drew elbowed her and turned to her with a smile.“Just how deadly are you, little sister?”

“As much as the others.We’re all highly trained assassins.”

Axel’s laugh boomed around Kai’s living room, where they were planning their raid of the underground shifter lair.

“She can kick Kai’s ass, and there isn’t an immortal assassin alive who can even get close to Kai, much less touch him.Jade can and she beats him every time they spar.”

“Fuck off, blondie.”Kai’s words came out a bit playful and Jade threw her head back and laughed.

“So, one-on-one after the planning meeting?” Drew asked.

Jade sobered and she shook her head.“I don’t want to hurt you.I just found you.”

Noah threw his arm over her brother and glanced at Jade.“He’s a tiger shifter.He can handle it—just take it easy on him like you do Reaper.”

Noah laughed when Reaper’s growl reached his ears.

“Fine.” Drew laughed when Jade agreed.

Ghost cleared his throat.“Here’s the final plan.Hunter and Axel will set small charges on the west and southeast.We will go in the north entrance.Jade and Gunnar—”

“No, I’ll be with Jade.”Noah statement wasn’t questioned.

Ghost nodded.“Jade and Noah, sweep toward the left, taking out anyone you encounter.Kai and Reaper, take the right.The rest of us, we are backup.Xander and Drew, you will be standing guard at the north entrance to make sure no one escapes.This is a ‘kill-only’ mission.The government is tired of the possible threat to Dark Company and wants everyone eliminated.If they manage to escape, we hunt them down until there is no longer a threat.Understood?”

Thirteen voices confirmed Ghost’s orders.

“Dismissed.”

Drew immediately jumped toward Jade, almost wrapping his arms around his sister, when Noah wrapped an arm around Jade’s waist and pulled her out of the way.Noah growled at Drew and Drew smiled at him.Jade was happy Noah and Drew were getting along.

“Not in the house.”Kai’s demand brooked no argument.

They piled out of the house and everyone made a loose circle around the middle, where she stood with her brother and mate.“How do you want to do this?”

“First one to land a strike wins?”

Jade nodded and Drew immediately leapt forward.His hand came close to catching her on the shoulder, but she ducked in time and swept his feet out from under him, sending him sprawling onto his back.

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She surged to her feet as his leg kicked out and with a little push, she jumped and backflipped away from him.

Kai flashed from her left and this time, she was able to reach for his forearm. With a quick twist, she flung him toward Drew, who flinched when he spotted Kai barreling toward him. Kai tucked at the last minute and landed on his feet a few inches from Drew.

Without taking her eyes off him, Jade flipped over Axel, pushing off his head and vaulted into the nearest tree. She made sure Noah was safe before she turned to Ara. She felt more than saw the branch underneath her break off, with her ricocheting from branch to branch as Ara snapped them cleanly from the tree. Jade laughed when Ara danced out of the way as she threw a large stick like a javelin.

Drew, thinking it would be a good idea to go after Noah, learned that going after mates was a big no. Knowing Noah could handle himself didn't prevent the low but deadly growl from escaping her throat.

“Don't...touch...him.”

Drew backed away with his hands up in a placating manner, but it was only when Noah spoke to her did she calm down.

He didn't mean anything by it, baby. I'm okay.

The red haze dissipated as she blinked at Noah's calming words. “Sorry.”

“Since I’ve never had a mate, I didn’t fully understand. It’s okay, I’ll remember from now on.”

She shook her head and cleared the rest of her anger away, but she’d been too distracted and felt the impact of Reaper tackling her from the trees. She managed to push him off and land on her feet, just in time for Hunter to jump on her in panther form and try to lick the skin off her face. She rolled over before he could get a hold on her and pinned him to the ground.

“Ah, ah, watch the claws.”

The panther growled, but Jade laughed and pushed off.

Then Kane managed to sneak up on her, but she spotted him at the last minute and flipped over his head, tagging him along his carotid with her finger, indicating he would be dead.

As she landed, Ghost cleared his throat to get their attention.

“We’re leaving here in a few hours so we can strike during the early morning hours. Meet here at eleven tonight. We’ll take Kai’s two Suburbans and Xander’s SUV.”

“Where should I crash until we leave?” Drew asked.

Xander spoke up before Jade could. “Why don’t you come over and get to know Silas? He wants to ask you what you’ve been doing since you transitioned and probably what you remember about Jade when she was younger.”

“Sounds good. I can’t believe he’s already growing on me.”

Xander laughed, along with the rest of them. “Yeah, he pretty much has us all wrapped around his fingers. He’s a special baby who is getting stronger as he ages. I’m partially excited to see what is to come, but the other half is completely terrified.”

The group separated, some going to get food, and as Jade watched Drew, already deep in conversation with Xander, she felt Noah’s arms wrap around her waist.

“Ready to head home?”

“Yes, I’ve missed you.”

Noah turned her around and kissed her. When he broke the kiss, they were breathless. He pulled away and soon shifted into his tiger form. Jade’s mouth popped open as she gazed over Noah’s beautiful tiger form. His coat was bright orange surrounded by black and white swirls. There were concentric-looking black circles around both eyes, drawing your eyes to his face. She sucked in a breath when his dark-blue eyes glittered as he looked at her.

Jade stepped forward and without thinking about her actions, she reached and threaded her fingers through his fur. He felt downy soft and when he growled and butted his head against her stomach, she felt a shiver a desire wash through her.

Ready to go home?

Fuck, yes.

Jade quickly shifted and led the way home. She needed Noah, more than she could express aloud. But they had hours to spare, and she would spend every moment showing Noah how much she loved him.

Chapter Sixteen

Noah

Noah loved the feeling of the wind blowing through his fur, but he concentrated on Jade running in front of him, needing her in ways he was just starting to understand. When the red fox slid to a stop outside her door and shifted back to her human form, desire pounded through his veins and Noah quickly followed.

He pushed her through the front door and shut it behind them. He pressed his lips to hers, swallowing her moan and feeling her body against his own. Tilting his head a fraction, he devoured her mouth in a kiss that had his cock growing and pulsing almost painfully against his stomach. Not wanting even an inch between them, he bent his knee and slid it between her thighs, moaning into her mouth when he felt her wetness coat his skin.

“Bedroom. Need...you.” He panted when he broke the kiss.

“Yes.”

Noah cupped her ass and moved her legs until they wrapped around his waist and started toward the bedroom. Jade brought her arms around his shoulders and leaned toward his neck, nipping and suckling the sensitive skin where his neck met his shoulder.

He was looking forward to making love to her after his transition.

“Fuck, baby. I don’t know if I’ll be able to wait if you keep that up.”

“Noah. Fuck me fast the first time, and then we can take our time. I need to feel you, deep inside.”

“How can you make the most innocent things sound sexy as hell?”

Jade giggled into his neck, causing him to groan, and when they reached the bedroom, he gently tossed her on the bed. With a quick look at her flushed skin and her half-lidded eyes, he stepped forward and ran his hand along her outer thigh. He lifted one leg with his right hand, while his left thumb flicked over her clit, drawing a low moan from deep in her throat.

“Noah. Please.”

His nerves already stretched taut, but when he traced his finger along her clit and then toward her entrance, he quickly plunged in a finger, loving how she clamped down on his digit. With two deep strokes, he paused a moment before he added another finger. His gaze caught Jade’s and he drove his fingers deep, drawing a gasp and a shiver before she moaned.

“You’re so fucking sexy. And all mine.” He growled the last word.

“Yes, yours. Take what’s yours, Noah.”

He removed his fingers and reached for her other thigh. As he wrapped his forearms around the back of her thighs, he brought her closer to the edge of the bed and drove into her without warning. Giving her no time to catch her breath, he pulled back and drove inside, over and over, loving her moans and gasps as they washed over him.

With her legs draped over his hips, he leaned toward her and suckled her nipple into

his mouth. She screamed his name and clawed at his back, and he hissed at the sensation that traveled straight to his cock.

“Yes, mark me, baby. I am fucking addicted to your pussy. I can’t get enough of you. Come for me, baby. I want to feel you squeezing my cock.”

As Jade clutched the edge of the bed, she moved her hips in rhythm with his thrusts and soon, her body started to shiver with her first orgasm.

“Fuck. Yes, baby, that’s it. Get off on my cock, deep inside you.”

And with his words, she threw her head back and screamed out her orgasm. He continued to drive into her until he felt her relax, but he had other plans for her.

He withdrew from her and flipped her onto her hands and knees. He opened her thighs with his own and knelt on the bed behind her. Without warning, he gripped her hips and drove his cock inside, loving the flutter of her recent orgasm holding onto his cock.

He held inside for a moment, but needed more, needed to come. He slid his hands over her hips and toward her stomach, taking the time to flick her clit, causing her to cry his name. Noah’s thrusts became relentless, as did his fingers, as he fucked into her deep.

“Jade, baby. You feel so good on my cock.”

“Noah...harder.”

He growled at her words and, using the weight of his upper body, he pressed her until she lay down on the bed. He kept one finger on her clit as he knocked her legs open with his knees.

As he drove into her, finding a rhythm that drove them both out of their minds, she bit the pillow, sending feathers around the room. She shivered underneath him and her orgasm struck her so hard, she almost forced his cock from her as wetness gushed over him and the bed.

“Fuck, fuck.” Jade screamed into the pillow.

“I love when your body tells me how much it loves my touch.”

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Jade bucked her hips up to meet his hips angling down. He bent down and licked a swath of skin from just above her rounded ass up her spine until he nibbled her neck. Her moans became louder when he reached the juncture of her neck and shoulder, and his mouth watered, taking him by surprise.

I want to bite you, baby. Can I mark you?

His words caused another orgasm to wash over her and his cock was squeezed with a pressure that almost had him coming deep inside her.

“Yes, mark me. Fuck me. Noah!”

With two deep thrusts, he moved his lips to her pulsing vein and he bit down. He could feel the venom moving from his teeth into Jade and without warning, he thrust one more time and emptied himself deep inside Jade. Her inner muscles clamped onto him, holding him inside as he tried not to pass out from the sensations rushing through him.

A few minutes—or even a few hours—later, Noah still lay there, gasping for breath as Jade’s breathing was the only thing that grounded him to reality.

Are you okay, baby?

I think so. Can’t move, yet.

Noah laughed and kissed her shoulder. He rolled to his side and draped an arm over her waist, pulling her close and nibbling on the spot that clearly indicated his

mark. And with a sudden rush of understanding, he wanted Jade to mark him as well.

They belonged together. She had known it the first moment they met, while he fought it every step of the way. At this moment, with Jade sated in his arms, he couldn't fathom why he would believe he wouldn't need her.

Jade turned and he reached out to brush a dark strand of hair out of her face. She smiled at him and something in his chest swelled.

"I can't live without you, Jade. I don't even want to try."

Jade's smile disappeared and she ran her fingers over his bottom lip, drawing a shiver from him.

"When I thought you rejected me...no, please, let me finish. My only concern was your happiness. If I couldn't make you happy, I wanted you to at least find someone out there who would. Because I love you. I love you enough to accept that you know what you want and would have given up my own life for you to have it."

Noah couldn't bear the thought of losing her. "I love you, too. And I want you to mark me, make me yours. I have no doubts, not after almost losing you. I will be by your side. I will work as your partner. I've already talked to Ghost about it and he says I have a position in Dark Company."

Jade threw her arms around his shoulders and pulled him close. "I want that too. You to be my partner, on and off the job."

Noah's breath stuttered out of his throat when Jade's lithe body slid on top of his, sitting on his stomach. Jade ran her hands up and down his chest, a smile playing on her beautifully swollen lips.

“Ready for round two?”

Noah smiled, cupping her neck and bringing her down for a scorching kiss.

“Yes, baby. Take me.”

He should have known Jade had her own way of doing everything, and this time was no exception.

Jade brought two of her fingers to her mouth and he watched, mesmerized, as she ran her tongue around both. Sitting up on her knees, she first brought her fingers over to her clit and he held his breath as she flicked her little nub with her saliva-coated fingers. She threw her head back and moaned at the sensations, but Noah kept his hands fisted on the sheet next to his hips.

Her fingers flicked her clit once, and then again, causing Jade to shiver, before she ran her finger down her outer lips until she reached her entrance. She opened her eyes and caught Noah’s gaze before she slid one finger inside. He felt her shudder as her finger disappeared deep inside her.

“Fuck!”

She added her second finger, slowly fucking herself on her two digits and it was his turn to sweat as he lay there, trying to hold onto his control. It only took a few minutes of watching Jade pleasure herself before she threw her head back and came with a shout.

He could feel her orgasm dripping onto his stomach and found himself begging, words spewing from his mouth. “Jade, fuck me, baby. Take my cock.”

As if her body were in control, she moved back until his cock was lined up at her

entrance and dropped down, taking him completely. She slid her hips forward and back, rubbing her pussy on his cock, before she moved her hips up and down, taking her pleasure from him. The whole time, she squeezed his cock and each stroke deep inside her had groans and pleas slipping from his mouth.

Even after the impact of his first orgasm, he could feel his second building deep inside.

“Jade, I’m gonna come.”

“Noah, open your eyes. Look at me.”

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With effort, he managed to drag his eyes up to meet hers.

“Can I mark you as mine?”

“You don’t—”

“Yes, I do. I want you...to choose...me.”

Noah surged up and cupped the back of her head, plundering her mouth until she moaned. “I’ve never been more sure of anything else. Please, Jade. Make me yours.”

Jade licked a swath where she’d bitten him the last time, and he shivered as the area throbbed in pleasure. He watched as her sharp teeth elongated in her mouth and when she leaned toward his neck, he breathed out a sigh of relief that finally, after all the ups and downs, she would finally be his.

Her teeth sank into his skin and his cock immediately swelled and emptied inside Jade. It caused her to shiver and again, her orgasm struck with a ferocity that had her clinging to him, taking what pleasure she needed from his body.

Noah could feel when her teeth slid from his skin. It wasn’t painful. He could only describe the feeling as right. The feel of her teeth, marking him, felt right.

Both of them spent, they dropped down onto the bed and Noah had enough energy to pull Jade close and cover them both with a blanket. He kissed her neck and her sigh made him smile.

“I love you, baby.”

“I know.If I had any doubts, the last few hours would have driven them out.I love you, more than my own life.”

Noah smiled into her skin and listened until sleep overtook her, her deep breathing soothing.Soon, his eyes drifted close and he followed her into slumber.

Chapter Seventeen

Jade

The trip down to Crested Butte had been uneventful. Noah had slept with his head on her shoulder and she talked to Drew.

“Our parents were typical of that time. They wanted kids who could work the farm and not much else. You fed the chickens and the horses, and I worked the field with Dad. Harvest was hard, but at least it lasted only two weeks. The rest of the time was fixing the equipment and gathering hay for the winter.”

Jade couldn't believe that she had a brother, but the more she learned about him, she felt as though she already knew him. She understood that was the feeling when she first spotted him outside Ghost's office.

“Are you up for this? I know that you're planning on training to be an assassin, but right now, you're a newbie.”

Drew nodded. “While you were with Noah, Reaper and Kai taught me a few moves. I'm not completely useless. I picked up some information when I searched for you, especially after I learned what you did for a living and thought I wanted to kill you. Sorry about that.”

Drew looked so apologetic that she huffed out a small laugh. “Don't worry about it. I'm used to that reaction.”

“There are a lot of people who want to kill you?”

“Not that many because I kill them first.”

Jade was more curious about their past than her past assignments. “We were close, as kids?”

Drew shook his head. “As kids, no. We both worked too hard on the farm to be close, but when you turned eighteen and you were thinking about going to university, I helped you write your admissions essay that got you accepted into the University of Boulder.”

“What happened?”

“Dad. He had an old-fashioned view on women. He wanted you to marry and you refused. He’d even gone so far as to find you a local boy who took you on a few dates, but you were determined to get your education.

“At first, I thought that Dad might have, you know, killed you for disobeying him. That’s why I doubted his story that you went into town for a movie. But my instincts were telling me you were alive.”

“I wish I could remember.”

Drew reached for her hand and squeezed. “It doesn’t matter. You’re alive and I know you didn’t leave without telling me goodbye on purpose. You’re a good person, Jade. I’m proud to be your brother.”

“I’m glad you found me.”

“Me too.”

ETA five minutes.

“Kai doesn’t mess around, does he?” Drew asked.

“Nope.He’s gotten a lot better since he found Liv, but yeah, he’s usually a by-the-book hard ass.”

I heard that.

I hoped you did, Kai.

Jade quickly piled her hair at the top of her head before she made a tight bun.She slipped on her black tactical gloves and along with the others, smeared black paint over her face and neck.All this before she turned to Noah, who had an amused expression on his face.

What?

I never thought face paint looked sexy, but you manage to pull it off.

She gave him a smacking kiss, leaving some paint transfer on his cheek.Ready for this?

He scoffed and she smiled at him just as the SUV came to a halt.

Jade on point.

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Looking around the abandoned mine, Jade took in her surroundings, even closing her eyes to hear any movement from the surrounding area. Hearing none, she walked toward the north entrance and waited for the explosions and word from Ghost.

The first explosion rocked the ground underneath her and she counted three seconds before the second explosion sounded.

Go.

Jade reached for the steel door and, with a little pressure, ripped it off the hinges. While holding it in front of her, she snuck a glance around it to see if there were any shifters waiting for them. She could hear footsteps coming their way, but no one by the door.

Jade tossed the door away from the structure and proceeded inside. She could feel Noah at her back and when she paused to check the first doorway on the left, he placed his hand on her shoulder.

With a quick movement, she bent forward and took in the two shifter's positions, both in the corner with guns at the ready.

So much for no weapons.

Jade sighed before she relayed the message. Two...with guns. Stay here.

Noah tapped her shoulder once and she burst into the room, going for the shifter on the right first. He shook as he held the gun and when she landed an uppercut to his

throat, collapsing his trachea, he dropped the gun and she turned her attention to his companion. His eyes widened as he took in Noah's huge shape in the doorway, but before he could fire, Jade broke his arm and shoved the gun into his mouth and emptied the magazine.

Noah walked into the room and detached both heads from their torsos and threw them into the hallway.

Two down.

Jade moved first, entering the hall and pressing her back against it as she traveled to the next door. Before she could open it, gunfire rang out and holes exploded through the flimsy plywood door. When the gunfire stopped, Jade broke through the weakened door and grabbed the gun of the first shifter she came across. She could hear Noah shift into his tiger form outside and when she threw the first shifter across the room, Noah burst through the door and immediately went for the throat of another shifter.

The gurgling sound told her Noah was successful. When she had gotten to the two shifters who were struggling to get to their feet, she allowed her claws to grow and with two quick swipes, she decapitated both shifters. When she turned back to track the last one, Noah had his claws in the shifter's chest. His mouth opened over his throat and cleanly removed his head.

Having fun?

If I could smile as a tiger, I would. But that's another thing I can't do to add to the list.

What are the other ones?

Shaking my head and shrugging my shoulders.

Jade smiled at her sexy tiger.

Four more down.

Kai got three; Xander, two. Nine more to go.

She walked toward the door but turned back. Do you want to take point?

Nah, I'm good back here. I'm used to my MP5 if I take point.

She nodded and exited the room. The next two rooms were empty and they met Kai and Reaper at the end of the hallway. They didn't have to go searching for the rest. The group of shifters decided to advance together, and a .50 caliber led the way.

They hit the deck as the automatic gun fired round after round in the enclosed, underground space. It was fucking loud and to the immortals' already enhanced hearing, it was almost deafening. Maybe that was their plan, but they would have been just as affected, if not more, because they were by the fucking monstrosity.

She glanced at Noah, who, as a tiger, made the disgruntled look work.

When the gun cut off, Jade could hear the distinct clicking that told them they were out of ammo. Before they could reload, Jade was on her feet and rushing the shifters. The first three were dispatched with said weapon as she picked it up and bashed their heads in with it.

When the weapon was tugged out of her hand, she quickly flipped onto another shifter's back, ducking when one of his teammates pulled out a .45 and shot him right between the eyes. She pushed the dead shifter onto his friend, and when he became trapped, she cut his head off with one swipe.

The four had made a sudden retreat down the opposite hall. Jade gave chase, Noah right by her side. They split. Two right and two left. Kai, Reaper, and Xander took the right.

I'm gonna fucking kill them when I get my hands on them.

Why are you raging right now?

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Jade scoffed.They fucking shot a .50 cal at my mate.I'm gonna rip them apart.

Noah slid to a halt with Jade taking a few steps past him before she stopped and turned, watching Noah as he quirked his head.She knew he had better hearing in his animal form.They all did.

I hear someone saying your name.

Jade concentrated on listening to what Noah heard, and sure enough, she heard her name in a singsong manner.Taking the lead, she took corridor after corridor, looking for the owner of the taunting voice.

Ghost.One of them knows my name.

There was a long pause and Jade knew Ghost well enough to know he would answer when he could.She glanced at Noah.

Don't worry, he'll answer.

Okay, three down.Only one left of the twenty.We're coming to your position.Wait.

Jade leaned against the wall and she smiled when Noah sat back on his haunches, looking regal and handsome as he cocked his ear and listened to the movement around them.

They are coming.

She nodded at Noah and heard the group coming up fast.

“Can you still hear the voice, Noah?”

Yes. Down the hall, to the right, about fifty meters.

Ghost led the way, glancing at Jade and looking unsure about what was going on. The rest of the assassins absorbed Jade and Noah in the middle of the ranks and soon, they could hear the voice clearly.

“Jade. Jaaaaade. Come out, come out, wherever you are.”

Let's go.

With that, all of the assassins filed into the small space and faced the lone man in the room smiling at them. He scanned the group until he found Jade and then gave her a leering smile.

If she'd ever met this man, she had no recollection of who he was. He was older than most shifters, looking close to forty, while most shifters were in their early twenties. He had gray hair scattered throughout his short blond locks, making him look even older. His two front teeth were missing, but there was nothing wrong with his gaze, which kept sweeping over Jade as if she belonged to him.

“How do you know me?”

The cackle that exploded out of his throat sent a shiver of discomfort down her spine. And while he laughed, his creepy gaze came back to her. She stayed silent as her eyes narrowed.

“I knew you would be special. I knew you would be the best out of all of them. That's

why I changed you, because I knew you could take it.”

Again, it didn't truly matter to her how or who caused her transition. She was happy where she was and the past was just that—the past. When he saw that she couldn't care less, he stopped laughing like a loon and his face showed his true nature as he sneered at her.

“Don't you care?”

She didn't say anything.

No, I truly don't give a fuck. Can we kill him and leave?

She could hear Xander, Hunter, and Gunnar chuckle in her head. Noah leaned into her and she reached her hand through his fur.

“Well, does your mate care that I kept you for six months before I turned you and passed you around to anyone who would pay to fuck you? Sometimes I would indulge as well. You were sweet.”

She could feel Noah leave her side, but she wouldn't look away from her taunter. His sound was hidden when the group around her growled at the man, ready to snap his head off if she gave the signal.

“But then a stupid fucking fox shifter bit you and you almost died. No one wanted you after that. Used goods, but not only that, you were broken. You couldn't even shift and no one wanted a shifter who couldn't shift. Pathetic little thing. So I ordered you killed, but apparently the stupid shifter I assigned fucked that up.”

Jade was surprisingly not affected by his words. What did she care whether he was telling the truth or not? But she couldn't help but think there was a reason they were

lured here. Soon, her silence got to him and he spilled everything.

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“Apparently we don’t care about your past. What you should be worried about is the group of shifters who left about an hour before you arrived. They are going after the white-haired shifter’s mate and their baby. He’s an abomination and must be destroyed. And if you think this is the end, you’re mistaken. We already have our new leader.”

Xander. Go.

Ghost could tell that Xander needed to see if his family was safe. Xander didn’t hesitate.

The man threw his head back and laughed. At that moment, Noah leapt at the man’s throat and ripped it out. As he lay gurgling on the ground, Noah lifted his huge paw and detached his head from his body. And not quite happy, Noah stepped on the detached head, making sure no amount of regeneration could help him.

“Well, I need a shower to wash that filth off. We should have killed him when we spotted him.” Gunnar shivered.

“He was lying. He doesn’t know me at all. He might have found my name somewhere, but he didn’t know me. There was no recognition in his eyes when he saw me. He was ordered to do it. When he told us about a new leader, that was the truth.” Jade sighed.

“Let’s go. And Gunnar...”

“Yeah?”

“Burn this place to the ground.”

Gunnar nodded as they headed back to the SUVs.Noah shifted back and quickly dressed before they piled into the remaining two SUVs and started home.

“Took offense to what he said, huh?”Jade laughed at Noah’s reaction.

“I wish I could have brought him back from the dead and killed him in a more painful way.”

“Well, it looks like there’s more tracking in our future,” Jade said.

Noah nodded.“But first, let’s get married.”

Jade sputtered as she looked at Noah’s growing smile.“It’s a good idea, baby.You know you want to marry me.”

“I do, but can we get married at the courthouse?I don’t want to plan anything or be the center of attention.”

Noah laughed.“Of course.Tomorrow.”

Jade couldn’t help it.She started giggling but nodded her head, agreeing.

“I love you, baby.”

“I’m so glad I met you.I love you, too.”

Chapter Eighteen

Jade

Jade had woken when she could feel the chill of the cold spring morning shiver over her naked skin. She blinked her eyes open and realized Noah was sitting up, cross-legged on the bed with a cupcake in his palm, the candle on top, lit.

“What are you doing, you crazy man? It’s four in the morning and it’s freezing.”

Noah smiled and glanced down at the cupcake. “It’s our three-month anniversary today.”

Jade couldn’t help it. She blinked at him, confused.

“Noah, you know I love you, more than anything in the entire world. I’m just wondering why we’re celebrating our three-month anniversary at four in the morning.”

Instead of answering, he shoved the cupcake close to her lips. “Make a wish and blow it out.”

Jade smiled indulgently at her husband and closed her eyes. She wished for an eternity with Noah and his crazy antics and his loving ways. When she opened them, she blew out the candle and glanced at him.

The fire banked in his eyes told her exactly why he woke her up so early. He tossed

he used the candle over his shoulder and moved to his hands and knees as he stalked closer to her. When he could reach her ankle, he gripped it and pulled her until she was flat on her back, her naked body exposed to his view.

She sucked in a deep breath when Noah turned the cupcake so the frosting was pointing down, and proceeded to smoosh it on her stomach and moved the cake and frosting mix over her breasts, up to her neck, and then scooping a bit onto his finger and displaying it so she could take a bite.

When she sucked his finger into her mouth and swirled her tongue around it, Noah growled, sending vibrations straight to her core.

“And the rest is for me. I’m going to lick and nibble each crumb and smear off you before I sink my cock deep inside you and make you come apart for me.”

Jade arched up, hoping to encourage him to touch her. “Your voice is enough to send me over the edge, but I need you to touch me.”

Noah groaned and buried his face against her neck and licked and nibbled around her sensitive skin. He moved from side to side, making sure not to miss anything, while he drove her completely insane. When he’d licked her neck clean, he moved his tongue and swirled it against her chest, not even near her breasts, and her body throbbed.

“Please, Noah, just take me.”

Instead of answering, he continued with his movements as her hips moved up and down, trying to get some friction to push her over the edge, but there wasn’t anything to rub against.

Over the next hour, he cleaned her breasts, her stomach, her sides, with a focus and

intensity, until she was panting as though she'd run hundreds of miles. Her nails were digging into her palms and his breath against her skin pushed her closer to the edge.

"Jade."

"Oh, God. What are you doing to me?"

"I want to see if you will come at the sound of my voice and my breath against your skin."

The bed shifted and she felt Noah line up his body close to hers on the bed, still without touching any part of her. Until he pressed his lips against her ear.

"Jade. My love, my mate. I want you to come."

And that was all it took. Jade arched and her body pulsed with her orgasm. She felt a rush of wetness against her thigh and shouted his name. Within seconds, he managed to get between her thighs and he pulled her up until her legs draped over his thighs. The moment he had her in the right position, he drove into her, drawing out her orgasm as she clutched his shoulders and moved up to meet his thrusts.

"I love you."

Noah leaned forward and captured her mouth in a scorching kiss. "I know. I love you, too." He panted for a bit before he spoke again. "I'm starting to think that forever isn't long enough."

"As long as I'm with you, I'll go anywhere."

Noah moaned her name, letting her know he was about to come, and it sent her over the edge for a second time. When he dropped her legs and pressed his hips against

hers, jerking inside her as he came, she held him tight and breathed him in.

Jade loved when Noah dropped down on her. She wrapped her arms around him and held him close.

It was funny how life worked. She hated the thought of a mate and truly believed that Noah hated her when they'd met, but Noah was everything she could ever want.

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“What are you thinking about?”

“How lucky I am to have you. How, despite everything that’s happened to the two of us, I couldn’t imagine my life without you in it.”

Noah kissed her and groaned when the sun peeked underneath the blinds.

“Silas will be here soon.”

Jade nodded and pulled Noah up so they could shower together. They made quick work of it, because after Xander had come home and killed two shifters outside his house, trying to get past Silas’s shields, they all stuck close to home. The danger wasn’t over.

As soon as they dressed for the day, there was a loud voice in their heads.

Noah and Jade. I want to see you.

Silas would turn one in less than a month and while they still didn’t want him to grow up too fast, every day Silas amazed them. Weeks after they had taken out part of the shifter group that had been after them, Silas had learned, by accident, that he was a telekinetic like Ara.

They opened the door and found Silas straining toward Jade, a laughing Xander trying not to drop his son as he squirmed in his arms.

Hey, little man. Don’t I get a hug first?

Noah liked to tease him, but Silas ignored him and sent out waves of happiness as Jade pulled him into her arms and cuddled him against her neck. Noah wrapped an arm around Jade's shoulder and nuzzled against Silas's neck, making the little boy laugh.

Any news? she asked Xander.

Xander shook his head. Well, they weren't going to worry about it and they had their eyes and ears open.

"Let's go get breakfast. Ara is showing Frost how to cook, so we'll see."

Jade punched Xander in the arm while keeping an arm around Silas.

"Yes, I'm starved," Noah grumbled.

"You're always hungry."

Noah wiggled his eyebrows and Jade laughed along with Silas.

And although there was a threat hanging above all of their heads, they were a happy group, a happy family, and that's all they could ask from life.

The End