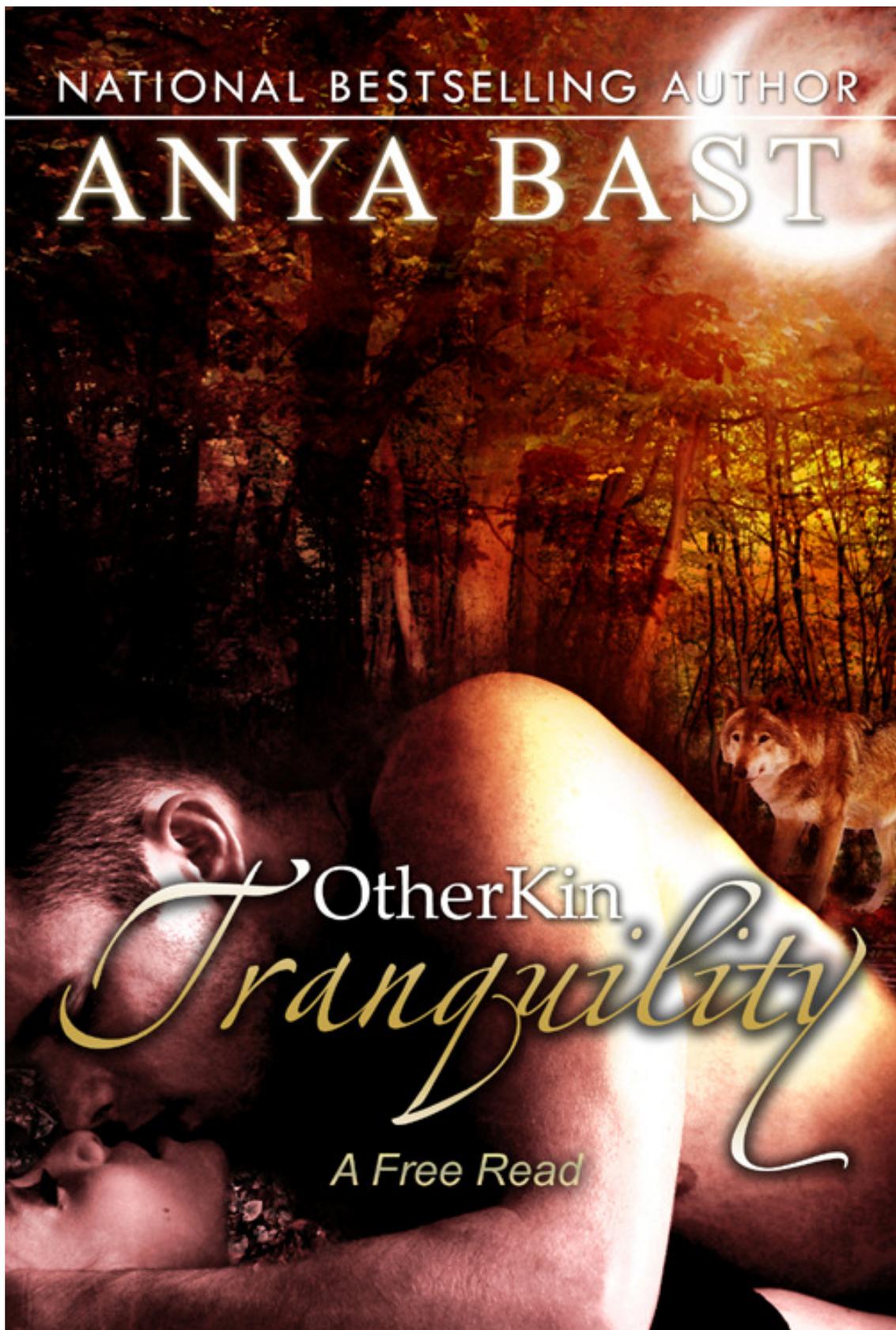


NATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR

ANYA BAST



Other Kin
Tranquility

A Free Read

TRANQUILITY

TRANQUILITY by Anya Bast
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Anya Bast

ANYA BAST

Roane looked out the window of his second story apartment. Below him spread the Main Street of Tranquility Minnesota. Like Fury, it was another small town made up of wolf shifters. Non-shifters might move in – there was no way to stop them – but they didn't stay long. Anyone with a shred of sensitivity could sense on some level that this wasn't a place for normal folk. Anywhere a pack congregated became an area like that. It gave shivers of fear to humans. Made them feel they were trapped in some corner with a bunch of predators closing in on them.

He'd left Fury to make room for his brother, Merrick, and Merrick's new mate Nikki. Fury's elders had named Nikki queen. That meant the pack male who mated with her would be Fury's leader. Since Merrick was also a natural alpha, that meant trouble – competition for Nikki. Roane had known that Merrick and Nikki already had the chemistry, so he'd stepped aside.

So here he was in Tranquility, making all the locals nervous as hell.

He couldn't help who he was. He couldn't help that others sensed who he was. The current pack leader, Marcus, was unhappy Roane had taken up residence here. It was only a question of time before trouble started.

Truth was, he just wanted to be left alone, to live among his kind but not be bothered. Maybe that was impossible, but he had only two other options. He could go live among humans and be forever cut off from his kind, or he could go deep into the woods and live utterly alone.

Neither were attractive options.

He'd hoped to find tranquility in Tranquility, but judging by the look in Marcus' eyes he'd doubted he'd find it.

A blue car pulled up in front of the bar below his apartment. The door opened and long-legged brown haired woman got out. Roane straightened and watched her intently. She glanced up at the window, scowling, and then walked across the street to the bank. He watched her hips with every step and her long hair sway in the slight breeze.

And then there was Scarlet.

Scarlet was Marcus' sister, damn it all to hell. Roane hadn't seen a woman who intrigued him as much as Scarlet in a long, long time.

"Fuck," Roane cursed under his breath as he took a step back from the window. The woman had the capability to set every nerve in his body on high alert with just a glimpse of her.

It was about twenty minutes later when Roane heard someone knock on his door. Scarlet stood on other side when he opened it, her clear blue eyes snapping with undisguised animosity.

TRANQUILITY

"You want to come in, Scarlet?" he asked with a grin. "You looked like you have something you want to say to me."

She eased past him, teasing Roane's nose with her rose scented perfume, then turned. "Why did you come here?" she asked.

Roane closed the door and turned toward her, taking his time answering. "I came here to live," he said evenly. "I didn't come here with any agenda other than that. I wish your brother and his muscle would believe me."

"I don't believe you either."

"Why?"

"You're a born leader, Roane. You're an alpha male. You had to know that wherever you landed, you'd stir things up." She sighed. "Look, if you really believe you only came here to live, you're telling yourself a lie. Eventually your true colors are going to show, whether you want them to or not. It's inevitable. It's simply in your nature."

"Look, Scarlet –"

She held up a hand. "I'm as protective of my brother as he is of me. I won't have you challenging him." Fear flickered in her eyes and Roane wondered for a moment if she was worried he might be able to kill Marcus in a challenge.

"I have no plans to do that."

Scarlet stood staring at him with her pretty lips pursed. He wanted to know what that silky hair felt like against his skin. He wanted to know how she would feel pinned beneath his body while he slid his cock in and out of her eager little –

"Roane?"

He snapped out of his fantasy.

"Keep it that way," Scarlet growled as she pushed past him.

Roane watched the door close behind her and knew he was in very deep shit. He truly didn't have any intention of challenging Marcus, but not trying to seduce Marcus' sister was going to be next to impossible.

Scarlet walked into the house, still all wound up from confronting Roane. The man disturbed her. Just being in the same room with him set her on edge in more ways than she felt comfortable identifying.

From the moment the wolf had entered their territory, he'd start ruffling feathers. He ruffled more than just Scarlet's feathers. They had an electric attraction between them, chemistry. She wanted him out of Tranquility for her brother's sake, but her thoughts, more often than not, were carnal when turned in Roane's direction.

She slammed her purse down on the kitchen counter in frustration, right as her roommate Amy walked in.

ANYA BAST

"Hope you didn't have anything breakable in there," Amy said as she eased past her to get to the refrigerator.

"I just went to see Roane," she huffed.

Amy popped the top on a small container of orange juice and said, "Oh," knowingly before drinking.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Amy shrugged. "Just that, you know, he's Roane. Don't tell me you're blind or that your libido isn't working. Plus, I know how you feel about him entering your brother's area. Roane is an enemy, but a very fuckable one."

"He's only an enemy to me, or least he probably will be an enemy sooner or later."

Amy considered her for a moment before murmuring, "Uh, huh," then wandered away.

Scarlet looked down at the countertop and seriously considered banging her head against it. Instead, she turned and walked into her bedroom. She refused to be like every other female in this town and fall under Roane's spell. That ability to attract female Woven only riled her brother up more, and for good reason.

"Hell," she muttered. What she needed was a nice long soak in the bathtub with a good book, a nice dinner and an early bedtime. She needed to relax a little.

Scarlet pulled out a drawer of her dresser and selected a comfy pair of soft pajamas, then grabbed her current read off the night stand. With a satisfied glance around her small, but neat, bedroom she headed into her private bathroom to draw a bath.

She and Amy had selected this house because the two bedrooms were on opposite sides of the house, complete with private bathrooms. It afforded great privacy. A spacious living room, kitchen and a third bathroom all lay in the middle of the house. This place was roommate heaven.

After she'd run the bath water — filling the tub with her favorite lavender bubble bath — she took off her clothes and sank gratefully into the warm water. After closing her eyes and wallowing for a few delicious moments, she reached down and picked up the romantic suspense novel she'd been reading.

But her thoughts kept drifting back to Roane. She ended up reading one paragraph five times without really comprehending it and finally tossed the book down to the bath mat.

"Hell!" she said aloud to the quiet bathroom.

TRANQUILITY

She soaped her loofah and started scrubbing her skin hard enough to hurt. That damn man! She couldn't even think about him without thinking about sex, and sex was the last thing she needed to be thinking about where he was concerned.

What was it about the man got a woman's panties in such a twist? Yes, he was gorgeous, tall, and broad-shouldered with thick dark hair and blue eyes. The man had a body that made a woman dream. It was just the right amount of muscled. And his lips, there was heaven there. His mouth was full and sensual looking. Made her want to run her fingers over it, made her want those lips on her breasts, maybe trailing down her stomach to her....

She splashed the water in frustration. Just the thought of him made her body respond. Her breasts felt heavier, her clit felt plumped between her thighs. The thought of what Roane would be like in the throes of passion...his fingers fisted in her hair while he spread his big body over hers, taking her from behind in slow, deep strokes.

Before she knew it, she had her hand between her thighs while she petted her clit. Scarlet closed her eyes and imagined the feel of his body against hers, his cock filling her to capacity. She imagined the sound of his breathing in her ear and the feel of his hands on her. Her cunt throbbed at the fantasy.

But, no.

She pulled her hand away from her clit. There was no way in hell she was going to get herself off by thinking of him. How the hell would she be able to face him if she did a thing like that?

"Hell!" she yelled.

"Uh...Scarlet?" came a voice on the other side of the door. It was Amy. "You okay in there?"

"Yes, I'm fine," she answered irritably.

"Your brother's here."

"Oh, crap. I'll be there in a minute."

She got out of her bath. It was clear it wasn't relaxing her anyway. After she dressed in her fuzzy pajamas and wrapped her long hair in a towel, she met her brother.

"Marcus, what are you doing here so late?" she asked when she entered the living room. Her blond-haired, blue-eyed brother had perched himself on the armrest of their gray couch.

He stood. Amy had given him a beer, which he held loosely in one hand. "Scarlet, hey, I heard you quit your job at the law office."

"I did. The hours were too long and the pay too little. I'm looking for something else now."

ANYA BAST

"Something else secretarial?"

"I guess," she answered slowly, wondering where he was going with this.

"Considered the opening down at Morgan's?"

Scarlet frowned. Morgan's was a car repair place in downtown Tranquility. "No, I can't say I considered Morgan's."

"Scarlet, can we sit down a minute?"

Instantly wary, Scarlet sat down on the couch and Marcus sat down next to her. "What do you want, bro?"

He sighed and pushed a hand through his hair. "Roane just got a job at Morgan's. They're looking for someone to run the office and I was thinking—"

Scarlet stiffened, knowing what was coming. "Seems to me you don't think that much, Marcus," she snapped. "Or that well."

He put his hand on her arm. "Sis, please. I need someone to keep an eye on him. You're the only woman I trust not to get into bed with him, both literally and figuratively."

Scarlet groaned.

"Please? Just for a little while."

"I don't think it's a good idea," she grumbled.

Marcus turned her to face him, took her hands in his and stared into her eyes. "You're the only one I trust, Scarlet. If the pay isn't enough, I'll supplement our income."

Oh, god. She sighed and stood. "I'll think about it," she grunted, and then stomped out of the room.

This was all she needed. It was like some conspiracy to see how much her sex drive could take before it melted down.

Scarlet stood in Morgan Auto Shop's front office, invoice forgotten in her hand, and watched Roane lean over the side of a sedan to tinker with the engine. She tipped her head to the side, considering the gorgeous shape of his ass encased in his faded jeans...

"Scarlet?"

Scarlet jerked, startled, and turned to find Morgan, her boss, smiling at her.

"I said your name three times. I thought you slipped into a coma standing there." He glanced at her hand, and she realized she was clutching the invoice like a life preserver. She relaxed her grip. "Are you okay?" he asked.

TRANQUILITY

Terrific. She was just great. Caught between her brother, Marcus, and a man her body seriously wanted – even if her mind knew it was a Bad Idea – and stuck working a job she didn't want, she was juuuust dandy.

She smiled. "I'm fine. What can I do for you?"

He handed her a sheaf of papers and grinned sheepishly. "I, uh, found those in one of my drawers. I think they're tax papers."

Morgan was a really wonderful man, but his powers of organization were sorely lacking. "I'll file them for you."

"Thanks." He started to walk away, but then turned back. "Oh, and can you give Roane a ride out to Mr. Hogan's house? He needs to take a look at Hogan's car."

Alone in the car with Roane? "Uh. We're doing house calls now?"

Morgan glanced to around, making sure there were no humans within earshot. "Hogan was injured during the last Run, Scarlet. He can't even walk right now."

"Oh." A Run was an activity the Tranquility Pack engaged in every month. By the light of the full moon, they shifted to wolf form and ran the northern woods, hunting, fighting and mating. Generally allowing their Wolven sides off the leash, so to speak. "I didn't know. Why can't Roane just drive out there himself?"

Morgan just looked at her.

Scarlet sighed heavily. This was getting ridiculous. "Okay, I'll get Roane and we'll head out."

"Thanks."

She walked over and laid the paperwork on the desk. When she glanced up through the glass that separated the garage from the office, it was to meet Roane's steady gaze. She shivered. He jerked his head toward her black SUV parked just outside the open garage doors.

She nodded, got her light fall coat off the rack near the door and walked outside. After Roane finished washing his hands, he grabbed a large tool kit, popped it into the back of her car and climbed into the passenger side. Scarlet got in and turned the ignition.

"Marcus thinks I need a babysitter, huh?" Roane said.

"Guess so," she muttered as she backed out of the parking space. She didn't have the will to deny it. Roane wasn't stupid. He could figure out easily enough why she'd taken the job at Morgan's.

"Your brother is pretty insecure, but I don't mind so long my keeper looks like you."

ANYA BAST

Scarlet set her jaw and didn't reply. Silence descended on the car as they traveled out of Tranquility and into the country. Roane wasn't exactly the talkative type and Scarlet really didn't have anything to say.

The scent of him filled her sensitive nostrils. He smelled of oil and automobile and, underneath that, of man. She couldn't say why the combination aroused her. By all rights it shouldn't have, but then everything about Roane turned her crank. Maybe it was some strange chemistry thing.

"Ever wonder why your brother trusts you alone with me?" Roane asked quietly when they were nearing the Hogan place. "You know, because I'm supposedly so dangerous and all."

Scarlet pulled down the gravel driveway and parked. Before she opened her door, she looked at him. "Yeah, well, just between you and me, I don't think you're so dangerous. Anyway, I can take care of myself."

Roane was out of the car in a flash and stalking toward her. The sight of him advancing on her raised every hair on her body. She retreated until she was pressed up against the car, caged by his arms on either side of her. Skitters of arousal and alarm ran through her. Scarlet wanted to mask the sudden rush of sexual excitement she felt by having him so close, his mouth near hers, his body nearly touching her, but she couldn't.

"I'm only dangerous to Marcus if he pushes me too far," he growled. "But I am very dangerous to you, Scarlet." Roane dropped his head and inhaled somewhere near her throat. "It's your pheromones, or something. They make me crazy."

"Get off me, Roane," she said shakily. She could feel her body heating and she knew he could scent it on her. Wolven couldn't hide it when they were sexually excited.

He caught her gaze and smiled slowly, predatorily. Scarlet's heart began to beat faster. "Marcus was stupid to put his beloved sister in my way. First because, in his view, I'm dangerous and unpredictable, a threat to his power." He paused and his eyes darkened. "Second, because I want you."

She couldn't say anything in response. He must know she wanted him back. Didn't mean she would succumb to temptation, though.

He leaned in and held his mouth a breath's space from hers. Roane didn't kiss her, he just let her feel the warmth of him, scent of his breath and feel it against her lips. He slid his hand to her waist, making her jump a little at the contact.

Roane stared into her eyes in a silent Wolven challenge. Scarlet averted her eyes and let her head fall to the side in response. Roane dipped his head and ran his full lips slowly down the arch of her throat, to the place where it met her shoulder. There, he softly laid a kiss. Goosebumps erupted all over her body as he lingered there. Her body reacted to him, priming itself for him.

TRANQUILITY

He let his hand slide under the hem of her shirt and he rested his bare palm against the small of her back. The action was intimate and suggestive. It made her shiver in his arms. Never in a million years would she have expected this kind of gentle sensuality from a man like Roane.

A deep groan rumbled up from his throat. It vibrated through her, making her close her eyes. She was putty in his hands, helpless. If they'd been somewhere more private she knew she'd be in big trouble. That not succumbing to temptation thing might be just a dream.

He released her and backed away. Scarlet opened her eyes to see him staring speculatively at her, a satisfied-looking smile curving his sinful lips. "I thought so," he said, then turned and walked toward the house.

"You thought so. What?" She called after him. "What exactly did you think, Roane?"

"Thought the attraction went both ways," he called over his shoulder. "Now I know for sure."

Yep, she was in trouble.

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"Why did you come to Tranquility, anyway?" Scarlet asked, fingering the neck of her bottle of beer.

Roane had fixed Hogan's car and headed here for a drink, since the work day was done. She figured, why not? Roane knew she was supposed to be spying on him for Marcus and he was aware of her undeniable attraction to him.

She'd waited in the car, contemplating all of this, for the hour it took for Roane to work. When he'd returned, she'd suggested they go somewhere to talk, somewhere away from Tranquility, away from Marcus' paranoid eyes. So they've made the ten mile trip to the nearest town, where the Wolven had no need to go. Here, there were only humans.

It was Friday night and the bar was packed. They were sitting closely at the bar ostensibly so they could hear one another, though Scarlet didn't mind the proximity of him, the warmth of his body and the scent of him.

It had been too long since she'd been with a man, and this particular one worked the last of her will to resist with every breath he took.

What she gave him to him, just this one night? What if they slept together, did everything she'd already done with him in her fantasies, in order to simply slake their need? Maybe the desire would fade then, and she could go back to normal.

ANYA BAST

"You've asked me that before."

She nodded. "And you never really gave me much of an answer."

"Because I'm not a lone wolf," Roane replied, taking a swig of his beer. "I need a pack."

"Why'd you leave your old pack?"

"My brother and I were both contenders to rule, dictated by the council of elders. They decided whoever took this woman to mate...her name is Nikki and she's a cat shifter, would attain the highest status in the pack. I left so I wouldn't have to challenge my own brother for her."

Her brow furrowed. "You didn't want Nikki?"

He shook his head, "Merrick, my brother, had a kind of chemistry with Nikki. They were meant to be mates. It was better I left." He paused and glanced at her. "Chemistry like what you and I have."

Scarlet ducked her head and studied the neck of her beer bottle fiercely. "So, as a natural alpha, you came here and caused a ruckus."

"I don't want to be alpha of this pack. I don't know how many times I can say it. This was bound to happen to anywhere I went, but it was cause a ruckus or live alone. I'd rather cause a ruckus."

Yes, he was good at doing that. The man didn't even need to say or do anything to cause a stir. He just had to exist.

She used her thumbnail to peel off the damp beer label. "I believe you," she said sincerely.

"I'm glad." His hand covered hers. She looked up at him. "They say that peeling the labels off bottles that way is a sign of sexual frustration."

His eyes had gone dark, the pupils dilated. Scarlet could scent his arousal roll off him in a wave of heated musk. Suddenly she felt like a deer caught in headlights...or caught the hunting gaze of a predator.

"Yeah, well, they might be right," she responded in a shaky voice.

"Really? How intriguing." He reached out, grabbed her bar stool and yanked her close to him.

Scarlet gasped, feeling a rush of adrenaline through her body at his body practically flush against hers.

He gave her a slow, confident smile that pissed her off a little. That reaction was drowned in the pool of her own need, however. "I want you," he said low. "I want you in my bed tonight, Scarlet."

TRANQUILITY

She glanced away, her breath hitching. "I want you too, Roane. More than I can say." She licked her lips nervously. "But to sleep with you would be like, like –"

"Betraying your brother?"

She nodded. But it was Marcus' fault she was in this position in the first place. And who was her brother to dictate with whom she slept with anyway?

"Scarlet?" he asked in a velvet smooth voice. She looked at him. "Fuck your brother."

He let his face drift closer to hers. She didn't move away, couldn't move away. Their breath mingled, lips brushed, and then he kissed her. Her lips felt wooden beneath his for a moment, and then she melted and kissed him back. Every nerve in her body shot to life with hunger.

She twisted, leaning into him so she could feel her breasts against his rock hard chest, and eased her hands slowly up his arms, over the bulge of biceps, to his broad shoulders. In his arms she felt so fragile, so small...so protected. She'd never pegged herself for the kind of woman who enjoyed that, but she had to admit that she felt safe in Roane's arms, and that she liked it...a lot.

Roane slipped his hands to her waist, then slanted his mouth over hers and flicked his tongue against her lips. Damn it. She wanted to crawl into his lap. She wanted him to undress here right here in this crowded bar and fuck her senseless right on this stool. God, she craved this man on a molecular level, every inch of her body screamed to feel his hot skin on hers, his thick cock sliding deep.

She parted her lips for him and he slipped his tongue inside. She could taste beer faintly on his tongue, and it made her feel pleasantly drunk. They broke the kiss, both breathing heavy.

"Scarlet, there's a hotel not far from here," he murmured hoarsely against her lips. "No one in Tranquility will ever know." He groaned and eased a hand between her knees. "I have to touch you."

She whimpered deep in her throat as he slid his hand between her jean-clad thighs, his actions concealed by the overhang of the bar and the dim light. He found the seam where it covered her swollen, sensitive clit and pressed and rotated, sending little charges of pleasure through her body.

He kissed her again, working the bundle of nerve exquisitely, pushing her toward the fastest climax of her life. She shuddered against him. "Do you think they know I'm going to make you come right here at the bar?" he whispered against her lips. "Does it feel good, little one?"

She sank her white teeth into her lower lip and nodded. "Yes."

"It's frustrating for me. I want you naked and beneath me on a bed right now." He pressed and rotated, pressed and rotated. "I want my tongue here."

ANYA BAST

She gasped against his lips. "I'm coming," she whispered. "Oh, god, don't stop."

"Never." He slanted his mouth over hers as the orgasm hit her full-force. She felt the sweet rush of her juices as she came against his stroking hand. Roane caught all her little moans and pants in his mouth.

When her climax had eased, he took his hand from her skirt and let her sag a little against him. "Let's get out of here," he whispered in her ear. "I want to fuck you till you can't think anymore."

All she could do was nod her agreement.

As they rose and left the bar, neither of them noticed a dark-haired Wolven in the corner by the jukebox, watching them.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Somehow they made it into the hotel room. They sealed their bodies together as soon as they were inside and Roane kicked the door shut behind them and pressed her up against it. He grabbed both her wrists and pinned them on either side of her head as his mouth worked over hers – lips siding, teeth nipping.

Scarlet drowned in it, in the scent of him, the feel of him, the sound of his breathing. This was an itch she'd needed to scratch in a major way. It was wrong, so very, very wrong. At the moment, Scarlet could not have cared less.

"Bed," she whispered between kisses. "Bed. Now."

Roane released her wrists and lifted her around her waist. He stumbled his way the five steps to the bed and threw her down on top of it. She bounced and let out a laugh of surprise that quickly died in her throat as she looked up and watched Roane pull his shirt over his head. Smooth muscle rippled, revealing the lean strength of a Wolven male. This Woven make in particular was beautiful.

Masculine splendor was definitely a quality Roane could claim in spades and the sight of him made every nerve in her body that hadn't already flared to life, come to complete attention. She bit her bottom lip as she took her fill of him, and let the sight wipe every remaining vestige of her brother from her mind.

He tossed his shirt to the floor and slowly bent to take first one foot and then the other and remove her shoes. Roane leaned over her, his hair shadowing his face and his gaze centered on hers. After he'd given her a lingering kiss, he grasped the edge of her shirt and pulled it up and over her head, leaving her clad in just her white lace bra. Then he dropped his hands, unbuttoned her jeans and pulled those off too.

Now she lay in just her bra and panties while Roane stood above her, his gaze running hungrily over her body. Unable to stand it any longer, Scarlet sat up, snagged

TRANQUILITY

her finger in the waistband of his jeans and pulled him forward. He came forward a step, wearing a grin on his face.

She had every intention of wiping that off his face.

Holding his gaze, she unbuttoned his jeans and lowered the zipper. She watched his pupils dilate as she worked his jeans down low enough to get his cock out.

And a beautiful cock it was, like the rest of him. Long, wide, strong...and very aroused.

She traced one of the heavy veins down its length, entranced with it. Roane shivered and groaned. Then she leaned forward and took him into her mouth. He gasped her name and gripped her shoulders, as if trying to hang on while she worked her tongue over him. She loved the way he reacted to her mouth on him, loved the fact that she could make this dominant wolf obey her merely by the kiss of her lips.

Before she could blink, he had her back onto the bed. Perhaps she hadn't quite had him as under her thumb as she'd thought. He crawled over her and kissed the plump of her breasts where they spilled from her bra at the same time he found the waistband of her panties and delved past it. His fingers stroked over her, making a sigh of pure pleasure shudder out of her.

"I've wanted to do this since the first time I saw you," he breathed against her lips.

In response she kissed him and dragged his lower lip slowly between her teeth. He growled low in the back of his throat, a wolf's growl. It raised the hair on the back of her neck. In the next moment her underwear was gone, easily ripped from her and thrown to the floor.

Roane pressed his knee between her legs and forced them open, setting the head of his cock to her entrance. He held her gaze steadily as he pushed inside her. Her mouth opened as the width and length of him breached her, stretched her muscles so deliciously. Neither of them looked away until he was seated all the way inside of her. Then he began to move, thrusting in and out her. Her head fell back and her eyes closed. Her fingers found his shoulders and she held on under the swell of pleasure rising within her. Then it burst and washed over her in rippling, overwhelming waves that stole the very air from her lungs for a moment.

It had been so long....

While the ripples of ecstasy still held her in thrall, Roane pulled out of her and pushed her to her knees on the mattress. He came down over her, thrusting his cock within her once more. Her fingers curled into the blankets at the delicious roughness of it.

His hard body cupped hers, rocking against it as he took her harder and faster this time, her sex having adjusted to his size to make movement easier. Pleasure built once more, swiftly, driving all rational and coherent thought from her brain. As it

ANYA BAST

crested and set to explode once more, Roane leaned over her and took the back of her throat in a firm hold between his teeth.

Scarlet went again, hard enough to steal the gasp from her throat. Roane rode her through it, and when her climax had nearly passed, he matched her. His cock jumped and he released her throat with a low groan.

After a moment they collapsed onto the bed, both breathing heavy. Before she catch her breath, he pulled her against him, rolled her beneath him and tangled his fingers through her hair. Right before his mouth descended on hers, he breathed her name.

She wound her arms around him and kissed him back, overwhelmed by the intensity of him. Scarlet had not expected this...tenderness from him. It seemed so at odds with his personality.

He broke the kiss and pushed her hair away from her face. "When will you be missed?"

With the question, the outside world came crashing back in. She felt irritated too. Her brother would be checking up on her and it pissed her off to no end that she had to answer to him this way. Apparently she wasn't as submissive a wolverine as everyone supposed. She blinked. "I supposed I'd be missed after around seven pm."

He glanced at the clock and hung his head. After a moment, he raised his head and fixed her with his dark, hooded eyes. His voice felt like warm honey when he spoke. "I want the whole night with you, but I don't want you to catch a bunch of bullshit from your brother either."

He wanted to spend the whole night? With her? She wasn't exactly sure how she felt about that. Well, okay, she was sure how she felt about that; it made her kind of tingly...in a good way. Tingly and Roane weren't a good mix. She was getting in way over her head here. Even worse was how the idea of spending the night with him made her salivate just a little.

She swallowed hard and glanced away. "Yeah, I need to take a shower to get the smell of you off me." That was a decidedly unromantic comment and she welcomed the way it fell with a thud between them, distancing them. It was true too. Her brother and other Wolverines would scent him on her in a heartbeat and know every last lovely erotic thing they'd just done together.

Roane waited a heartbeat and then rolled to the side. Scarlet willfully squashed the sense of loss of him—his scent and body heat. She rose, gathered her clothes and walked into the bathroom to take a shower. She felt his gaze on her every step.

Scarlet turned the water on and stepped under the spray, groaning in pleasure at the sluice of warm water down her body. A recalcitrant part of her hoped Roane would find his way into the shower, but he never did.

TRANQUILITY

As she dried herself, sounds came from the main part of the hotel room. A door being kicked in, yelling...and growling.

She dressed quickly and opened the door. There in the middle of the room stood Roane in full wolf form – a huge black male with molten silver eyes.

And there, standing just in the doorway was a huge white wolf with its hackles raised – her brother. She stood watching them circle each other, her blood cold.

Scarlet backed up against the wall, watching the two animals circle each other, hair raising growls curling from their throats. It made her own Wolven respond with a primal kick in the center of her stomach.

She gritted her teeth against the change to shadow, but the urge was irresistible in the face of her alpha's anger. Marcus's emotions slipped into her and forced it. The change didn't slip over her the way it normally did. It exploded. Pain shot through her as her limbs shifted and her form altered. A moment later she stood there as the medium sized red-furred Wolven female she was.

Roane's great head swung around and he fixed her with a look of unmistakable warning. *Stay back. Stay out of this* sounded his voice in her mind.

Marcus took that moment to lunge. It was a dirty move to do it while Roane had been distracted. The two Wolven came together in a ball of fur, teeth, and claws. Sounds of snarling, growling and snapping filled the room. The two huge wolves careened backward, crashing into the bed and moving it to the side five feet. They hit the night table and smashed it, then rolled to the center of the room and leapt apart.

Growling low, they circled each other. Blood matted both their fur. Marcus had an injury on his rear haunch and another gaping tear in his shoulder. Blood trickled from Roane's haunch as well, where Marcus had sunk his fangs in and worried the flesh.

Stop this! Both of you!

Marcus turned to look at her. *Get out of here, Scarlet. This is between me and Roane. Change from Shadow and get into my car.*

No, Marcus. I will not be treated like a child. I made a choice to come here with Roane. I won't let you punish him for it.

As your alpha, I command you to leave.

She straightened her stance, lowered her head a little and showed fang. *As your sister, I refuse.*

Marcus swung his head to look at Roane. *You bring this side out in her. You're nothing but trouble for this pack.*

Roane laughed, a low, harsh sound in his head. *That only shows how little you know Scarlet.*

ANYA BAST

An odd comment coming from someone she'd only just met, but Roane was right. She wasn't acting out of the ordinary. It was just that her brother only saw what he wanted to see in her. Marcus had never seen the real her. Perhaps Roane did.

Marcus lunged again, this time taking Roane by the throat. Marcus slammed him to the floor and held him there. Alarmed, Scarlet stepped forward. As alpha, Marcus could rip Roane's throat out right now and still be within pack law since Roane had challenged his authority.

No! Marcus, don't kill him. Please!

Why? So you can continue to sleep with him and make a laughing stock of me? Pause. His voice in her mind lowered. *I want to kill him, Scarlet.* His grip tightened. Blood trickled.

Scarlet's heart inched upward into her throat.

In the blink of an eye, Roane flipped Marcus. He did it so fast Scarlet couldn't even see how. Now Roane held Marcus pinned to the floor by the throat.

Fear exploded through her. She bounded to Roane and growled low. *Don't hurt him, Roane. Please, he's my brother.*

By pack law, if Roane ripped out Marcus's throat, he would ascend to the rank of alpha. Only the strongest of the Wolven could hold the title. If the alpha was challenged and killed, the challenger ascended.

I don't want to be alpha, Scarlet. I'll prove that to you both right now. Roane released Marcus and backed away.

Marcus flipped to his feet in one powerful move, lowered his head and laid his ears back. The fact that he'd been bested and his alpha title challenged by Roane—and could have been won—had to sting his ego.

Her brother glowered. *This means nothing, Roane. I want you gone from Tranquility.*

Yes, probably now more than ever. Roane had just shown how easily he could take Marcus's title from him.

Marcus changed, eyes and body posture still as threatening as when he'd been in shadow. Blood marked him head to toe, mostly coming from the thigh and shoulder wounds he'd sustained.

Scarlet also shifted, the cool air biting into her naked human flesh. She stepped toward Marcus to help him.

"Don't touch me," Marcus snarled. Limping and moving slowly, he gathered his clothing, dressed, and dragged himself to the door. "You have disobeyed pack, Scarlet. Disobeyed me." He didn't look at her. Breathing heavily and grimacing in pain, he only put a hand to the door jamb and stared out into the hallway. "You'll be punished."

TRANQUILITY

She stared at the open door for a moment while Roane shifted. He groaned and she raced to the door, closed it, and went to his side. Blood coated his thigh from a vicious wound.

"Your brother has a good set of teeth." He winced and pushed to his feet.

"Yeah, well, so do you."

She helped him to the bed, where he laid down. "I'll clean up your wound."

After she'd gathered what she needed to wipe the blood away and bandage the gash, she sat down on the bed beside him and began to work. He yelped as she wiped the area to the left of the gash.

She shot him a look of exasperation. "Oh, come on, you just kicked the alpha's ass. You're not going to cry at a wet wash cloth, are you?"

He grinned at her. "I was hoping I might get a sympathy kiss or something."

She ducked her head. "I'm sorry about my brother."

Roane stroked her hair. "Not your fault. Part of that was probably related to the fact that I'm falling for his sister, but most of it was because he feels threatened by me and has nothing to do with you at all."

He was falling for her....? Those words made something in her belly and chest feel warm. It was nice. She hid a smile and glanced at him. "Apparently he has good reason to feel threatened by you."

"He doesn't. Look, I don't want his job. I left Fury because I didn't want the job. I'm not a loner, but I don't want to be the top dog either. Thing is, I can't help how other Wolven perceive me. I can't help that they don't believe me. I just want a community and to be left alone." He paused. "And you." Roane reached out and cupped her cheek. "I think I want you too."

Scarlet's hand stilled in the air over his thigh, shock rippling through her.

Roane leaned in and kissed her.

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Roane pulled reluctantly away from Scarlet. He licked his lips, trying to hold on to the taste of her kiss. Her eyes were wide as she stared at him, undoubtedly as surprised by his words as he was.

Man, he'd really dug himself a hole this time. Not only was he doomed to leave Tranquility, he'd fallen in love with Scarlet. That wasn't even the worst of it, since the only way he could stay here, stay with her, was to kill her brother. Roane figured Scarlet would probably frown on that. It was no way to start a relationship.

ANYA BAST

He had no wish and no intention of killing Marcus anyway. Wolven nature was usually contrary, but not in this case. The wolf within him didn't want to do away with Marcus, didn't want to be alpha. Roane only wanted to be left alone to live within the pack. The human part of him wanted the same. Where Scarlet and Tranquility were concerned, both his shadow half and his human half were in perfect accord.

He simply couldn't have what he wanted.

Roane turned away. "I shouldn't have said that."

She caught his hand and forced him to look at her. "Really? Because I'm glad you did." She smiled a little and her eyes were wet with tears.

He reached up and cupped her cheek. Her skin was warm and smooth against his palm. "This can't work, Scarlet. There was little chance of your brother letting me exist here before today. Now that I've shown him I can beat if I choose, he'll either set the pack on me or run me out of town. I either have to kill him or leave Tranquility. I showed you both that I don't want to kill him, so that leaves one option."

He wouldn't ask her to leave with him. It wouldn't be fair to ask her to give up her family for a man she'd just met.

Even if his wolf had claimed her as his mate within moments of meeting her.

"I don't want you to leave," she said quietly.

"I don't either."

She stared at him for a long moment, her eyes going wider and fear flicking through them. Suddenly she stood and walked away, pacing toward the other end of the room and back again with her hand pressed tightly to her mouth.

Roane frowned, watching her. "Scarlet? What's wrong?"

"This is crazy," she muttered with a shake of her head. "Totally nuts." She glanced at him and said loudly, "I barely know you."

"Scarlet, what are you talking about?" He tried to stand, winced with pain and collapsed back onto the bed.

"How badly do you want to stay here, Roane? Are you really sure you want to make this place your home?"

"I'm sure I want to stay here for you, Scarlet." He struggled to his feet and walked to her, limping. "The moment my wolf caught scent of you, I knew. "

"Kn-knew what?"

He hooked her hair behind her ear. "That you were mine."

She bit her lower lip. "I think I knew too...and it made me angry. Why do I have to be so attracted to a man my brother would most definitely never approve of?"

"Yeah, sucks, doesn't it? Attraction doesn't obey any set of rules."

TRANQUILITY

She gave a little laugh, leaned up and kissed him. "No. It is what it is. Roane, if you want to stay here, there's another way."

"What's that?"

A sliver of doubt passed through her eyes. "Mate me."

Those two words made the wolf in him swell with a sense of triumph. His Scarlet was his. His wolf wanted to prance around and howl. His jaw locked and he tried his best not to jump on her again despite his injuries.

Scarlet continued, "Tranquility pack law says that the mate of a sibling is under protection. The alpha can't kill him or her. They have immunity of sorts. It's an old law, one they've tried to have overturned many times, but it would provide you protection."

Pack law and organization varied from pack to pack. Back in Fury, Minnesota, his old pack, the laws were made by the council of elders. There was an alpha who ultimately ruled absolutely, but in all the history of the Fury pack, there had never been alpha who hadn't listened carefully to the elders and treated their advice and guidance like gold.

Roane shook his head and turned away. "As much I as I love the idea of mating you, Scarlet, I won't let it happen this way. You're not ready. I can see it in your eyes. I won't let you sacrifice your future that way for me. It's fast, too soon, and it's for the wrong reason."

Wolven mated for life. If Scarlet wasn't sure she wanted to accept Roane as her mate, she would be miserable in a short time. The last thing Roane ever wanted to see on Scarlet's beautiful face was misery.

Scarlet took him by the upper arm and turned him to face her. "I want you, Roane," she said angrily. "I've wanted you from the first moment I saw you. My *wolf* wants your wolf." She paused. "My heart wants your heart."

"Scarlet, I want to court you the right way. If we're meant to mate, we will...but not like this. I'll find a different way to deal with your brother."

She stared up at him for a long moment, fear for him lighting her eyes. "He'll kill you, Roane. Don't you understand—"

The door burst open and Wolven streamed into the room. Roane pulled Scarlet flush up against him as the men circled them. Roane recognized a couple of them as Tranquility cops. Marcus came in last, strolling in as confidently as he could with a bad limp and some significant injuries. He'd wasted no time. Dried blood still marked his clothes.

Marcus stood in the middle of the room, surveying the scene before him with a sneer on his face. "Scarlet, you sure know how to pick them."

"Don't hurt him, Marcus. Don't do it. I'll never forgive you!"

ANYA BAST

Marcus flicked a glance a couple of his men. "Restrain her and take the male."

Two men grabbed Scarlet and yanked her away from Roane, kicking and screaming. Roane snarled and tried to fight them, but several huge Wolven males were on him in a moment. They pulled his arms back and wrestled him to the ground. They pinned him there and snicked a pair of cuffs around his wrists.

The men hauled him to his feet and Marcus gave him another once over. "Take him to the jail until I decide what to do with him." The men yanked him toward the door.

Marcus turned to his sister. "I couldn't risk a mating, sweet sister. I know your mind better than you do."

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Roane came to and groaned. Pushing up on the gritty floor of his cell, he gazed bleary eyed past the bars to a man's back. One of Tranquility's Wolven cops, no doubt. The cop had the paper spread out on the desk in front of him.

He touched the back of his head and winced, his fingers coming away bloody. They'd pistol-butted him; he remembered now.

Scarlet. Where was she?

He forced himself to his feet and lurched to the cell door. The cop stilled at the sound Roane made, but didn't turn. Roane curled his fingers around the bars. "Hey." No response. "HEY!"

The cop, a skinny brown-haired man, turned and regarded him with wariness in his eyes. The hair on the back of Roane's neck stood on end and a growl trickled from his lips. He could dominate this one with his gaze alone, even from inside his cell. The cop proved his assertion, casting his gaze to the floor. Roane guessed Marcus had left this submissive pup to guard him because Marcus figured he was secure in his cell and couldn't break free. Unfortunately, he was right.

"Where's Marcus?" Roane growled.

"He-he's with his sister," the cop stammered.

He trusted that Marcus wouldn't hurt Scarlet. Marcus hated Roane, but he loved his sister.

"Tell Marcus I want to see him."

"He won't be summoned by anyone below him in terms of pack rank."

Roane's fingers tightened on the bars. "Just tell him." He melted back into the shadows of the cell.

TRANQUILITY

"I will." The cop turned away with obvious relief.

Roane sat down on the cot that ran along one wall and closed his eyes. He wanted two things—Scarlet, and to be able to exist in a pack without being the alpha.

He wanted Scarlet more.

Since he wasn't giving up Scarlet no matter what, that presented a hell of a problem. Because of his innate alphaness, Marcus would always consider him a threat and would never believe Roane didn't want to challenge him for rule. That meant either he and Scarlet had to leave Tranquility and suffer the hardship of being loner Wolven, or he had to challenge Marcus for control of Tranquility and kill Scarlet's brother to take it.

Doom Scarlet to a life of lonely banishment or kill her only sibling and make her hate him. Decisions, decisions.

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Marcus's hand caught her cheek and Scarlet stumbled back, pain blossoming across her face. She fell against the wall and put a hand to her face, staring up at her brother through her tangled hair.

He'd never hit her before. Numb shock made her gawp at him. This was a side of her brother she'd seen before, but it had never been directed at her. Roane terrified Marcus and he was taking it out on her.

"You have disgraced me," Marcus yelled. "You have disrespected me and my rule!" He turned away and paced to the opposite end of the room. "I really don't know what to do with you," he said in a low, growling voice.

The tone of his voice made a chill run down her spine and distracted her from the pain of her cheek for a moment. But if he thought she was going to beg, he was wrong. He wasn't the only Wolven in the family with the backbone of an alpha.

Scarlet pulled her hand away from her face and saw that blood marked her fingers. He'd split the skin on her cheekbone. "Nice, Marcus, Mother would be so proud." She spat the words at him.

He stiffened and started to turn, but someone knocked on the door. He jerked it open and spoke low and violently to someone on the other side. Right before he slammed it in the person's face, Scarlet had a glimpse of Amy, her roommate. Amy stared at her for a moment, her eyes wide.

Marcus turned toward her, rage giving his face a brutal set. "You were going to mate him, weren't you?" He took two menacing steps toward and bellowed, "Weren't you?"

ANYA BAST

"Yes," she hissed. "Yes, I was going to mate him, but he wouldn't agree to it. He thinks I need more time to make that kind of commitment. But I don't need more time, Marcus, because I know he's my mate! I can feel it to the center of me. I've known it since the first day I saw him here in Tranquility, I was just fighting it out of loyalty to you."

Marcus made a scoffing sound. "Clearly that loyalty was weak."

"No, the love was just strong."

That earned her another scoff. "Love—"

"Yes, love!" she screamed at him. "Something you know less about than I thought." She cradled her cheek in her hand and glared at him.

"You deserved that," he spat at her. "You deserve worse." He spun on his heel and walked toward the door. "You'll stay in here until I've decided how to deal with Roane. Understand, *sweet sister*, you'll never see him again."

She ran toward him, panic filling her chest with an unpleasant fluttery sensation and coursing cold through her veins. "Don't hurt him, Marcus! Please, I'm begging you! Don't hurt—"

The door slammed and the lock slid home.

Scarlet stopped short and stared at the door for a second, then ran to it and began to pound. She knew it wouldn't do any good. She could yell herself hoarse in here and no one would open the door if Marcus hadn't given leave, but she couldn't just sit and wait while her brother did God knew what to the man she'd come to understand she loved.

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"Hey, Bradley."

A woman's voice filtered through Roane's consciousness, making him raise his head from where he cradled it in his hands. A tall blonde had sauntered into the station.

The pup was giving her his full attention. "Hi, Amy."

"Thought I'd come by and see if you needed anything, maybe some lunch or something." She'd come to sit on the edge of his desk, her eyes all for Bradley. "And...to..." She flicked a glance at Roane right before she leaned down and whispered something in the pup's ear.

The pup sputtered, then let out a burst of surprised laughter that eased into a nervous giggle.

TRANQUILITY

Oh, god, no. Please, no. He might be stuck in this cell, but did they have to torture him too?

Roane let his head droop again and closed his eyes.

The sound of kissing met his ear and then more murmurings he couldn't—and didn't want—to hear. Then silence.

"Hey, big guy."

Roane lifted his head to see the blonde standing at the cell door. She showed him the key she held. What the hell?

The woman slid the key into the door's lock. The door slid open with a resounding clank. "We don't have much time before Bradley comes back. You can kick his ass easily enough, but he'll raise an alarm. Marcus has Scarlet and he's acting weird. I think he hit her. He's holding her in the basement of City Hall, right across the street. Go get her."

A dull roar had started in his head right after the words *I think he hit her*. Roane rose and stalked out of the cell. "Thank you."

"Just go get my roommate, Roane." She rolled her eyes. "I'm throwing myself under the bus here for you."

It didn't take long for Roane to high tail it across the street, making sure he avoided all the Wolven in his path. As soon as the pup got back and noticed he was gone—Amy could only distract him for so long—Marcus would be alerted to his escape and would know right where he'd gone. He needed to get to Scarlet before that happened.

Slipping into City Hall, he made his way down to the basement via the stairwell. It let out into a public administration area of the building—a long white corridor with lots of closed doors and bad florescent lighting.

But where was Scarlet?

He hesitated at the beginning of the corridor and strained his hearing for any noises. In the distance, in a room far from the stairwell, he heard pounding and a hoarse voice calling. He went for it.

When he got closer, he recognized Scarlet's voice, heavy with stress and emotion. "Scarlet?" he asked when he reached her.

"Roane! Oh, thank God you're all right! Get me out of here!"

"Stand back." With a kick, he splintered the door, letting it swing wide on its hinges. Scarlet stood in the center of the room, blood caked on her cheek.

He went to her, cupping her face in his hands and tipping her face to the light. A bruise had already begun to form on her pretty skin and her cheek was cut. "I'll kill him," he growled.

ANYA BAST

Scarlet covered his hands with hers and shook her head. "Marcus doesn't deserve to die for hitting me one time, Roane."

"Yes. Yes, he does, Scarlet." Every protective instinct within him roared to life. He was serious about making her brother pay for hurting her. His wolf rippled under the surface of his human consciousness at the mere thought, wanting blood and flesh.

She searched his face, her lips parted a little. When she understood he meant it, her face tightened. "No, Roane."

He pushed the hair away from her face, inspecting the damage. "Good alphas don't hit. They don't have to."

"He's my brother." Her eyes pleaded with him to show Marcus mercy.

Footsteps sounded behind them. "Oh, look, the lovers have found each other."

Marcus.

Roane didn't think, he just acted. Releasing Scarlet, he turned and leapt at Marcus with a savage growl ripping from his throat. As he went, shadow engulfed his form and he landed on four paws.

Marcus took up the challenge and, lip curling even while in human form, met him in the center of the room – his Wolven self engulfing his body as he moved.

Roane hit Marcus hard and they rolled, tangled together across the floor. Marcus snapped at Roane's throat, missing trapping it in his huge white teeth by a breath's space.

They hit the wall and leapt apart, circling each other with their teeth bared. An audience had gathered inside the room by now. They were going watch their alpha be defeated and Roane was going to have stand in his stead – even if he didn't want to.

Marcus had brought this on himself. By hurting Scarlet, Marcus had made his own nightmare come true.

Marcus lunged at him, sinking his teeth deep into Roane's side. Scarlet screamed. Pain exploded through Roane's body, but he fought through it, twisting until he grabbed a hold of Marcus's haunch. He sank his teeth in and worried, causing Marcus to release him and yelp.

They circled each other again, Marcus limping and blood pouring from his side. Both wolves were weakened from the earlier fight that day, both still suffering injuries, but each of them had powerful emotions running through their bodies to sustain them. Both of them had strong goals.

Marcus wanted to protect his territory. Roane wanted to protect the woman he loved – *his mate*. This battle was about whose will was stronger.

Roane growled low at the thought, the sound trickling from his peeled back lips. He lowered his head, staring Marcus down. Then he leapt. Roane hit Marcus in the side

TRANQUILITY

and went for his throat. Using his weight to push Tranquility's alpha to the floor, Roane sealed his mouth around Marcus's throat and tightened until Marcus was forced to go limp.

The crowd in the room let out a collective gasp. Roane had forced Marcus into submission. Their alpha lay on his back, stomach exposed and his tender, vulnerable throat between another Wolven's teeth. It was clear that if Roane closed his jaw right now, Marcus would die.

The temptation to do just that made Roane salivate.

I'll kill you if you move, Marcus said Roane telepathically. *I want to kill you for hitting Scarlet. She wants you to remain living, so I will allow it, but you will go far from here and never come back. Understand me? You've lost Tranquility. If I ever see you again, I'll have to disappoint your sister.*

Marcus lay motionless, unresponsive. He had to know it was over. His pack had seen him defeated. They wouldn't accept his rule now.

Roane gave him a little shake. *Don't make me kill you.*

I'll go. Marcus answered finally.

It didn't have to be like this. Roane gave Marcus one final shake and then released the hold he had on his throat.

Marcus rolled to the side and shifted back to human form. He lay naked in the center of the room, blood coating his thigh. After a few moments, gaze averted, he rose and limped out of the room.

Everyone remained silent as he left.

Still in shadow form, Roane surveyed the people in the room. All of them looked to him as though expecting he would protect them, care for them, create a safe place for them to exist. That's what an alpha did. That was an alpha's job. Roane didn't want it, but it looked like he had it anyway. His basic, innate nature had won out over everything else.

Looking at the hopeful faces in the room, Roane realized that maybe somewhere deep inside he wanted it too.

Scarlet ran to him and threw her arms around his neck, burying her face in his fur. Roane changed back to human form and crushed her to him, kissing over the non-bruised side of her face. Warmth filled him at the feel of her in his arms and he closed his eyes, letting out a breath of pure relief.

Most importantly, he had Scarlet. No doubt one day they would mate, but now they could take their time.

As he and Scarlet clung to each other, the pack members all filed out of the room, giving them privacy.

ANYA BAST

"I love you," Scarlet whispered, right before she kissed him.

Roane smiled against her lips, finally filled with the sensation of *being home*. "I love you too, baby."

THE END

TRANQUILITY

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anya Bast writes erotic fantasy & paranormal romance. Primarily, she writes happily-ever-afters with lots of steamy sex. After all, happily-ever-afters with lots of sex are the very best kind.

She lives in the country with her husband of ten years. They share their lives with eight cats and one perplexed dog. A native of one of the colder states, she loves to ice skate and watch hockey. She has fascination for crows, ravens and birds of prey, (especially owls). She enjoys the study of Eastern philosophy, Celtic myth, dreaming, and shamanism and incorporates what she learns into her paranormal stories.

Anya got her start writing fantasy romance. Since writing a little hotter seemed to come naturally to her, she had no trouble making the move to erotic romance. She loves writing books that are heavy on plot, emotion and character development, and also have spicy, no-holds-barred sex scenes. Exploring the elements of dark sexual fantasy in her writing is what Anya does best.

<http://www.anyabast.com>