

Wolf Tales 5: Chanku
Kate Douglas

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Chapter One

One moment, she was a tall, elegantly dressed African American woman with long, darkly waving hair and eyes of brilliant amber. In less than a heartbeat, her dress lay on the redwood deck in a tumbled shimmer of blue satin. The woman had become the wolf, amber eyes glinting angrily in the last dying rays of the sun, canines glimmering like ivory blades. With a single low growl and a flick of her tail she leapt over the deck railing and raced through the damp meadow.

Anton Cheval threw back his head and laughed. Keisha hated to lose an argument, any argument.

“You gonna let her get away with this?” Anton turned to the couple sitting behind him.

Grinning broadly, Stefan Aragat lifted his wine glass. “She’s your mate. You better chase her down.

Xandi and I plan to enjoy the sunset before we run.”

Anton’s abrupt shift from human to wolf left his clothing in a messy pile on the deck. So unlike him, he thought, not to fold everything neatly. He glanced once more at the dark pants and black cashmere sweater lying in an untidy heap, then cleared the deck railing and the garden beyond in a single bound.

Maybe laughter hadn’t been his best response.

Only Keisha could leave him so flustered.

Or so turned on.

Anton’s powerful forelegs stretched out and he gathered speed with each thrust of his haunches, but his mind was not entirely the wolf. No, he was reacting like a very protective male, no matter the species, and he knew it irritated the hell out of his Alpha mate.

No matter. He was not, under any circumstances, going to allow her to return to San Francisco by herself. It went against all he stood for, all the *Chanku* were. Their strength lay in the pack, not in the individual.

The memorial garden Keisha had designed was moving forward according to schedule. She’d made enough trips, accompanied by either Anton or Stefan, to ensure everything would be perfect for the dedication. There was no reason she needed to go back early.

Not with that damned Carl Burns once more on her trail.

Anton had hoped the mind-job he’d done on the tabloid reporter would erase the smut-peddler’s memories of Keisha for a longer time than they had, but the bastard had suddenly reappeared in their lives on Keisha’s last trip to the city.

Why hadn’t she let him file harassment charges? Carl Burns was a menace.

No matter. Anton’s meetings would be over in less than a week and they could make the trip together. He had a lot of money riding on this latest investment. Stefan was learning the business, but he wasn’t up to handling an entire board of directors for a multi-national company.

Following the trail with his wolverine mind, working through the problems with Keisha with his human side, Anton loped along the familiar trail. He still wasn’t certain what he could say to make her wait, but somehow he would convince her of the danger.

He had to.

Danger!

Keisha’s warning hit him like a solid object. Another scent assaulted his sensitive nostrils. Anton ducked low, twisted and slipped off the trail.

Male. Not *Chanku*. Human male. More than one, very close. Anton raised his nose and sniffed the air. He scented excitement, fear and the sour sweat of unwashed human.

Keisha’s scent was strongest to the right.

Pain. Anger. Fear.

Her emotions washed over him, impossible to understand, beyond speech, beyond coherent thought. Anton veered off the main trail and, keeping his body low to the ground, raced down a narrow, bramble-filled ditch. Tufts of dark hair clung to some of the thorns. He scented blood and his hackles rose. Either she was so pissed she was ignoring the thorns, or something -- someone -- had hurt her.

All thought of meetings, investments, humanity, evaporated. Pure wolveren rage filled his heart, seared his mind. His lips curled back in a dark snarl, exposing sharp canines.

Anton!

Keisha's mental cry, clear now, ringing true as a bell in his mind, sent ice running through his veins.

Anton! Take care! Poachers. Armed with crossbows.

He paused, one foot raised, his sensitive nose finding Keisha's scent, scenting blood along with her unique, feminine fragrance, pinpointing her location. At the same time, he reached out with his thoughts to touch Stefan and Xandi.

The connection was instantaneous, their response immediate. Satisfied, Anton raced toward his mate. *I'm coming. Are you hurt?*

Just grazed. Stay low. Can you reach Stefan? I can't find him.

I've already contacted him. He's on his way. He'll bring the four-wheeler and he's armed. Xandi's called the ranger. Where are the poachers?

Near the pond. They've built a blind at the far end, above the beaver dam.

Anton passed the information on to Stefan. Scanned the thick underbrush along the near edge of the pond. Keisha's scent and the scent of fresh blood were strong, her fear and anger a palpable thing. *Where are you?*

Near the birch stand. Low, in the bramble patch.

He found her there, curled into a tight ball, her blood dripping steadily into the remnants of one last patch of crusty snow. She'd packed the shallow wound in her shoulder with ice, at least as well as she could in wolveren form.

Anton inspected the wound, licked the matted fur around it, grabbed a mouthful of ice and pushed it tightly against the seeping gash. Thank goodness it didn't appear life threatening.

I should kill them. They need to die. His thought ended on a snarl of pure rage.

No, you should have them arrested. They're idiots. Let the law deal with them.

Her calm statement helped slow his racing heart.

I will, but I don't have to like it. I'd rather kill them.

Keisha raised her head and glowered at him. Sighing, Anton nuzzled her once more and waited impatiently for Stefan and the ranger to arrive.

This made the third set of poachers on their land this season -- all of them hunting wolves.

Chapter Two

“I don’t like it one bit. What’s a few more days?” Anton practically growled at her. If he’d been in wolf form, Keisha knew his hackles would be up.

“The difference between doing my job right and not. You of all people should understand that.” Standing face to face with her lover in the large bedroom, Keisha held her ground and glared at Anton. Her shoulder hurt and she had one hell of a headache, but she was not giving in on this.

“I do. I don’t have to like it, though.” Anton sighed and pulled her gently into his arms.

She went willingly, her anger evaporating as quickly as his. “You said your meetings in New York will be over by Friday. You can join me this weekend. It’ll give me time to get my work done without a lot of, um, distractions, okay?”

“But I love distracting you. I’ll worry. It’s dangerous for you. Stefan suspects Burns might be behind the poachers.”

“Then it’s probably safer in San Francisco than here.” She leaned back from his embrace and smirked. “I’ve never been shot at in San Francisco. Kidnapped, assaulted maybe, but never shot.” Keisha rubbed her bandaged shoulder, then closed the gap between them and brushed her lips over his. “The dedication’s scheduled for the first Sunday in June. With travel, that gives me less than a week... not a lot of time for me to make sure everything is ready. This is important to me, Anton. I have to go. I promise I’ll be careful.”

“I know.” He leaned close, his lips softly brushing hers.

She tilted her hips forward, pressing her pubic bone against his growing erection, at the same time sending out a silent call to Xandi and Stefan.

This would be the last night for all of them to spend together for over a week. If nothing else, she knew sex with her pack mates was a sure cure for the headache that lingered.

Anton smiled against her mouth. He’d caught her signal to the others. She knew nothing pleased him more than when she initiated a night of pleasure for the four of them.

Last night, after her attack, after the rangers had hauled off their three captives and Keisha’s injured

shoulder had been properly cleaned and bandaged, they'd all shared the same bed. There'd been no sex, merely loving, supportive bodies holding her close, helping her heal.

Tonight, Keisha wanted more.

Anton's hands were roughly kneading her taut buttocks when Stefan slipped into the room and wrapped his arms around both Keisha and Anton. "Xandi's on a grocery run. She'll join us later."

Keisha turned to Stefan and kissed him. "Hmmm. Poor girl doesn't know what she's missing." Stefan's tongue found the seam between her full lips. Practically purring with the sensual promise in his kiss, she welcomed him inside. Her mouth moved with his as Anton's lips found the sensitive spot below her ear. Stefan's hands worked the buttons on her blouse, Anton's released the snap and zipper on her jeans.

As if they'd rehearsed each move, the men stripped her clothes from her body, following each item of clothing with wet, open-mouthed kisses and sharp little nips of their teeth.

At the same time, they shed their own clothing, helping one another until all of them were nude. Sandwiched between two hot, male bodies, Keisha gave herself up to pleasure.

Not so long ago, the very fact two men touched her, tasted her, loved her, would have sent her over the edge into mindless panic. Now, she reveled in not only the sensual touch, but her own healing. There was nothing she feared from the men she trusted.

Nothing she wasn't willing, even anxious to try.

Stefan swung her up into his arms and carried her to the bed. Anton took her from Stefan and settled her on the cool sheets, on her back with her legs spread wide, bent at the knees. Both men knelt beside her. Keisha closed her eyes and, moving her injured shoulder carefully, reached over her head to grab the headboard railing. She knew her silent acquiescence would set them free to take her however they wished.

Mouths, hot and greedy, found her breasts, suckled her nipples hard and deep, tongued the sensitive peaks, nipped at the turgid flesh.

She cried out, aware of each man, how different, how similar their touch, their scent. Fingers stroked her hips, her thighs, teasing close to her center, then moving away. Finally, after what seemed an eternity, both men's fingers came together in the nest of curls between her legs.

The suction on her breasts grew stronger, the long fingers trailing between her legs crept deeper. Moaning, Keisha arched her back, begging silently for penetration. One hand circled her left buttock and she recognized Stefan's touch. The other slipped between her greedy labia as Anton teased the creamy opening to her pussy.

Together, both hands moved between her legs, two fingers slipped into her wet heat, twisting and turning deep inside her. Then only one remained, stroking very slowly, in and out. She felt the rough pad of Anton's thumb against her clitoris, the damp tip of Stefan's forefinger pressing gently against her anus.

Anton slipped two more fingers inside her just as Stefan breached her ass and pressed deep. His finger slipped easily in and out, easing the taut ring of muscle. She felt him insert a second finger, then a third. Still, there was no pain, nothing other than a sense of pressure, of building excitement.

She knew the men could feel each other through the thin wall of flesh, wondered if they would carry this further, something they'd never done without Xandi present.

Anton's thumb made wet circles around her clit, his fingers penetrated her dripping pussy, and his mouth suckled her nipple so hard he narrowly skirted the barrier between pleasure and pain. Stefan tightened his lips around her just as hard, then let her sensitive nipple slip loose, tugging it gently with his teeth before releasing her.

His fingers, however, continued their relentless, rhythmic penetration, stretching her sphincter muscle, preparing her. Keisha arched her back, lifting her buttocks off the bed. Her stomach muscles rippled with the steady thrusts from both her lovers, with the hot suction from Anton's mouth.

Caught up in Anton's touch, she was barely aware of Stefan, thought she heard the sound of foil tearing, was only truly certain he'd donned a condom when she felt him settle between her knees. Once more his fingers sought her, slick now with some sort of lubricant, something warm and soothing. He shifted and she felt the solid pressure of his erect cock against her ass as he sought entry where his fingers had been mere moments ago.

She knew Stefan wanted this, had prepared her so that she might take Anton without fear or pain. Because of his love, she could enjoy the act that had terrified her since her attack. After a moment of gentle teasing, Stefan's cock speared her deep, filling her ass, a smooth, painless entry that left him supported tightly between her legs with his balls pressed against her buttocks.

Her fingers tightened on the headboard. She moaned, then practically whimpered as Stefan carefully adjusted her legs, settling her even closer, filling her deeper.

Keisha let the sensations flow over and through her. She actually felt Stefan's cock expand even more, now he was inside her. Felt each ridge, even the thick vein throbbing with blood against her sensitive tissues. His balls were warm, the soft fur covering them tickling her ass.

Filled with Stefan, she jumped when Anton twisted his fingers deep inside her, turned them to touch the back wall of her vagina. He was stroking Stefan! Anton's fingers, buried in her pussy, traced the contours of Stefan's huge cock through the fleshy barrier.

Anton opened his thoughts to her, allowed Keisha to share the sensation, the hot, wet sheath a nerve-laden boundary between Anton's supple fingers and Stefan's pulsing cock.

Stefan groaned, leaned over and bit down on her nipple then suckled it against the roof of his mouth. He thrust harder, then slowly withdrew, as if loath to give up either Keisha's heat or Anton's touch. At the same time, Anton pulled his fingers slowly out of Keisha and released her nipple with a wet sounding *pop*.

Stefan licked the very tip of Keisha's breast then released it. He lifted her hips and sat back on his heels, at the same time pulling her away from the headboard so they were centered in the middle of the bed. His big hands grasped her buttocks while her legs dangled over his forearms, his cock filled her ass, slowly entering and then withdrawing. She felt Anton shift over her body and smiled when his cock brushed her lips.

A not so gentle hint, my love? She drew the hot crown between her lips and sucked hard, tonguing the sensitive tip before drawing him deep into her mouth.

I'll make it worth your while...

His thought had barely entered her mind when Anton's tongue circled her clitoris. His silky hair tickled her belly and thighs and she wondered how it felt for Stefan, wondered at the sensation of his cock buried deep in her channel with Anton's mouth locked on her pussy. Did Stefan feel Anton's hair brushing his groin? Did the silken strands drift across Stefan's hard thighs with the same soft sweep as Keisha felt?

The image of the two men she loved, each loving her in his own way, took Keisha higher, sent her blood running hotter with each lick and thrust. Stefan continued his slow, deep penetrations, but it was Anton, his tongue and teeth, his warm lips and hot breath, taking her faster, farther into oblivion.

Her breasts ached, the nipples felt cold without the warm mouths sucking and biting them, but the rest of her body was hot, so hot she imagined steam rising from her flesh.

Keisha grabbed Anton's firm buttocks, holding his hips in place while she sucked and licked his cock, seeking and finding the same rhythm the men had with her.

Lord, how she loved the smells and tastes of her lover! Stefan was dear and his technique beyond reproach, but Anton stole her soul, owned her heart, invaded every cell of her body. It scared her, sometimes, to realize how much she loved him, how very much she needed him.

She twirled her tongue around the crowned tip of his beautiful cock, licked the tiny eye and tasted the first drops of his seed. Some day, hopefully not too far away, he would take her as the wolf, make love to her in the deep, dark woods, and with this seed plant a new life, a child within her womb.

The image consumed her, the thought of binding herself irrevocably to this man, the knowledge that a child would link them for all time, would be the constant reminder of their love.

Love. Dear God, the emotion was more frightening than she'd ever imagined. It made her vulnerable, made her afraid.

Made her whole.

Complete.

Reality replaced thought. Keisha's orgasm slammed into her without prelude, hot and fast, a raging storm overwhelming her senses. Fueled by love, by need, by emotions so intense she feared to understand them, her climax took control of conscious thought, of the blood in her veins, the beat of her heart, the air rushing into her straining lungs.

Stefan thrust hard, his body tightened, and he took her even higher. Gasping for air, Keisha released Anton's hard cock and screamed, back arching, hips tilting forward, thrusting her pussy against Anton's mouth, tightening her muscles around Stefan's cock.

Anton continued lapping and sucking her streaming pussy, even as Stefan collapsed over both of them. Grasping Anton's thighs firmly, drawing a great shuddering breath, Keisha silenced her moans with his cock, filling her mouth once more with him, drawing him deep and running her fingers over his testicles, milking Anton's seed as he joined their climax. She felt Stefan move deep once more, pause, finally withdraw. Vaguely sensed him easing her legs down to the bed and moving away from her quivering,

clenching body.

Heard his murmured words of love, both to her and to Anton.

Still she tongued and suckled Anton, swallowing each drop he shared with her, licking him, then merely holding his flaccid cock within her mouth until he rolled to one side, away from her. She lay there, gasping for air. His mouth remained fixed to her spasming, clenching pussy, his body shuddering against hers in the aftermath of passion.

She lifted her hand, touched his shoulder, caressed the firm skin, absorbed his heat. Her eyes drifted closed and her breathing slowed.

Anton rested his tongue against her clit, sensed the final spasms of her climax, tasted the flavors unique to Keisha. She was so beautiful, so welcoming of their lifestyle, their *Chanku* heritage. Anton knew he would never get enough of her taste, her scent, her body... her wonderful, independent mind.

Damned if she wasn't going to drive him nuts! He ran his hands along her relaxed and pliable body, spread her legs wide, shifted position and knelt between her knees, taking the place Stefan had just vacated. Now, though, Anton pressed the head of his recovering cock against her waiting vagina and entered in a single, smooth thrust.

She arched and cried out, coming apart before he'd fully penetrated her. He felt her muscles tightening, rippling along the length of his cock, felt the fresh release of lubricating moisture and thrust even deeper. His cock found the hard mouth of her womb and pressed close before he slowly withdrew.

What would it be like, to know his child grew there? The image of Keisha, round and full with their baby brought tears to his eyes. She would be a wonderful mother, strong, protective, fierce. One day she would carry his child, the truest evidence of her love, of his love for her.

Now, though, she arched her hips and took all of him, took his heat and strength, his very essence deep inside. He tried to lose himself fully in her welcoming warmth, but fear still fluttered silently in the back of his mind.

The coming separation scared the crap out of him. Frightened him beyond measure, but he would help her pack and take her to the airport without further argument.

What was that old saying... if you love something, set it free?

Stupid saying.

Anton didn't want to let go of Keisha, not for a moment. He'd do it because she asked, because he loved her... because to hold her too tight would be to lose her.

With that thought in mind, his soul filled with the fear, the love, the frightening vulnerability of having given his heart to this woman, Anton took her once more over the edge.

Crying out, thrusting hard and deep, he followed her into oblivion.

Chapter Three

Keisha shoved the last of her clothes into the bag and zipped it shut. She turned around just as Xandi knocked lightly on the doorframe.

“You okay? Should you be carrying that much weight? You’ve barely had a day and a half to heal.” She touched Keisha’s shoulder, near the bandage. “How’s it feel?”

“Hurts, but it’s shallow. The arrow just grazed me. It didn’t penetrate. No permanent damage. I have to admit, besides shifting, one of the nicest things about being *Chanku* is that we seem to heal really fast.”

“You scared Anton half to death.” Xandi slipped into the room and closed the door behind her. “I’m sure he’s told you he and Stefan are worried the poachers may somehow be connected to Carl Burns. We’ve had so many of them this year. They’re all focused on wolves, not deer or elk, and not one of them seems like a real hunter. They’re just thugs.”

“We can’t continue to live our lives in fear, Xandi.” Keisha plopped down on the bed. “I’ve lived that way far too long. Being *Chanku* is giving me a strength I never knew before. I will not be a victim again. Anton has to understand that.”

“He does. He’s also very much in love with you so he worries.”

Xandi sat down on the bed next to Keisha and took both her hands in hers. “Do you have any family in San Francisco? Someone you can stay with? You’ve never mentioned parents, siblings or...”

Keisha shook her head. “No. My mother was killed by a hit and run driver when I was just a kid. My father died of a heart attack a couple of years ago. I was an only child, so there’s just me.”

Xandi squeezed her hands tightly. “Never just you, sweetie. Not anymore. We -- Anton, Stefan and me -- we’re your family. I didn’t know that about your mom. How awful!” She reached up and brushed Keisha’s hair back from her face. “Let me come with you. That way you won’t be alone and Anton won’t worry so much. It’ll give me a chance to get back to the city and shop and do girl stuff. Would you mind?”

Keisha turned and looked deeply into Xandi’s gray eyes. “You’d do that for me? Leave Stefan here so you can baby-sit me in San Francisco?”

Xandi’s laughter was free and totally uninhibited. “Baby-sit? You? The Alpha bitch? You’ve got to be kidding! You want the honest truth? I want to go to a play, eat out in really expensive restaurants and go back to your place for some totally kinky sex. We haven’t gotten together, just the two of us, for weeks. The guys keep barging in.”

Keisha snorted. “So true. I never realized how much it turned a guy on to see two women having fun. It’s like shooting them with a sex gun. KaPow! One look and they’re both naked and panting.”

“So true. Deal?”

Keisha smiled at Xandi. “Even though I know Anton put you up to it, yes, it’s a deal. I’d love to have you come with me.” She grabbed Xandi’s hand in hers. “Don’t tell Anton, but I was scared to death when the poacher shot me. It hurt so much, at first I didn’t realize how badly I was injured. When I left the house, I was mad at Anton and didn’t pay attention to my surroundings. I’m lucky they didn’t kill me because I stumbled over their hiding place before I ever saw it.”

Xandi laughed. “Well,” she drawled, “I think he’s figured it out, but you know I’d never betray a confidence. I’ll pack some things and be ready as fast as I can. Shouldn’t be too hard for me to get a ticket once we arrive at the airport.” She stood up and headed for the door, then turned and struck a pose against the frame. “Oh, I need to thank you. Whatever you and the guys did yesterday certainly put Stefan in the mood! I’m almost glad I got home too late to join you.” She brushed her hand over her heart. “Talk about hot! Wow... he wore me out last night!”

Laughing, she turned and headed down the hallway. Keisha just shook her head and grinned. Suddenly, this trip was beginning to look a lot more interesting. She’d be doing the work she loved, seasoned with a girls’ night out... or two.

She’d have four days with Xandi before Anton showed up... four days to play with her best girlfriend ever.

* * *

They unpacked after the taxi dropped them off at Keisha’s townhouse late Tuesday afternoon. The place seemed so empty and cold. Keisha had found peace here before the assault, but it hadn’t truly felt like sanctuary to her since. No, that peace was strongest in the deep forests of Montana when she ran with her pack mates.

Feeling a gentle sense of loss over her once beloved home, Keisha reached for the thermostat and turned the heat up a notch. She sensed Xandi’s concern.

“You okay?”

“Yeah.” Keisha turned and leaned back against the wall. “It just feels really weird, coming back here. It’s not home anymore.” She swept her fingers slowly across the textured wallpaper. “I decorated every inch of this place, made it into exactly the space I wanted. Now I realize it’s not what I want at all.”

Xandi nodded as if she understood completely. “Maybe it’s time to sell. Move on. It was a positive step for me when I resigned my job, gave up the apartment... gave myself to Stefan without any ties holding me anywhere else.”

Keisha stared at her friend for a long moment. Xandi had never seemed happier, more content than she was now that she’d permanently moved with Stefan to Anton’s Montana home.

Keisha wanted that same feeling -- the solid foundation of Anton’s love -- but what of her hard-won independence? Her need to control the direction of her own future? Would Xandi understand?

Would she have any answers?

“Xandi, do you ever feel as if Alexandria Olanet has become lost in Stefan Aragat? Do you worry about losing *you in him* ? Losing your identity?” She held her hand up, giggled and shook her head. “Now I sound like my shrink!”

“No you don’t. You sound like a very serious-minded woman who is still a bit unsure of this whole life-changing set of events.” Xandi drew Keisha into a brief but loving hug. “I finally decided, just like Popeye, *I yam what I yam* . I’m not merely human. I am *Chanku* . I’ve had to reevaluate my feelings about a lot of things. Being mated to a hard-headed shapeshifter is only one of many adjustments.” She laughed. “Try not to worry. You will always be Keisha Rialto, even though you are Anton Cheval’s mate. It works. Trust me.”

Trust. That’s really what it’s all about, isn’t it?

Xandi nodded, smiling. *Exactly. C’mon. Let’s go eat. I’m starving .*

They went out just after dusk and found a popular restaurant and bar combo in the Castro district. It was near a small restaurant just like this one where Keisha had been kidnapped so many months ago. Would she ever totally get beyond that random act of violence that had changed her life in so many ways -- both good and bad?

A shiver ran along her spine, following the memory. She grabbed Xandi’s hand at the crowded entrance and held on tight.

A massive bouncer blocked their way. His arms were folded across his broad chest and he looked the women slowly up and down, as if assessing their attributes. His gaze lingered a bit too long on Xandi’s full breasts and there was a curl to his lip as he took in the women’s tightly linked hands.

Xandi returned his insolent gaze. “Hello, big boy. Seen enough, or do I need to strip for permission to enter?”

Blinking in surprise, the man jerked his head in a quick nod for them to go inside. Xandi still held tightly to Keisha’s hand but she burst into giggles once they got past him.

Keisha jabbed her in the ribs. “You’re not supposed to taunt the help.”

Xandi laughed. “Have you ever been tempted to just say to hell with it and shift, right in front of everyone? I bet that big jerk would have peed his pants.”

Still grinning, Keisha glanced over her shoulder as Xandi found them seats at a table near the back. The bouncer watched them.

A waitress brought menus. Xandi studied hers, but Keisha couldn’t concentrate. She felt the hair on the back of her neck standing on end. A shiver ran over her arms. She shuddered.

Xandi looked up, obviously sensing Keisha’s discomfort. *Is something wrong ?*

“I don’t. . .” Keisha turned slowly and looked across the crowded restaurant toward the bouncer. He was leaning over, obviously in deep discussion with a small, dark-haired man. Suddenly he looked directly at Keisha and Xandi and pointed. The man looked up, hesitating as if giving his eyes a chance to

adjust to the dark.

Keisha felt her heart skip a beat.

“C’mon. Act like we’re going to the restroom.” Keisha grabbed her purse in one hand and Xandi’s wrist in the other and dragged her to her feet. “Get your bag.”

Walking quickly, fighting the urge to run, she found the narrow hallway to the restroom and from there a door that led through the kitchen. Ignoring the cook’s orders to go back the other way and Xandi’s questioning looks, Keisha dragged her friend through the small kitchen and out a door that led to a dark alley.

What’s going on?

Carl Burns. I’m positive that was him talking to the bouncer, and the big oaf pointed directly at us. “Hurry.” Keisha hiked up her calf-length skirt and took off at a run down the alley. She heard Xandi’s footsteps just behind her.

She heard her thoughts as if Xandi had spoken aloud.

We’d move a lot faster if we shifted.

Without slowing her pace, Keisha shook her head. *That’s the last thing we want to do with a tabloid reporter on our tails .*

Within minutes, the two of them rounded a corner across from Keisha’s home. Breathing hard, they ducked behind some shrubbery. Keisha studied the street in front of her house. “Looks clear. Let’s make a run for the porch and get inside. I do not want to talk to that man!”

They raced across the street and up the stairs. Gasping for breath Keisha fumbled with her keys.

Hurry, hurry, hurry... Xandi’s frantic mantra echoed in Keisha’s mind.

Keisha jammed the key in the lock and twisted, then ripped the door open. Stumbling over the threshold, Xandi slammed the door behind them. Keisha twisted the deadbolt and both women leaned back against the door, gasping for breath.

Xandi turned to Keisha and burst into nervous sounding giggles. “You sure know how to show a girl a good time.”

Keisha slumped against the door and sighed. “That wasn’t exactly what I had in mind. Why does he keep following me? At least he’s so familiar to me now, I can sense when he’s near.” She shoved herself upright. “C’mon. I’ve got some stuff in the freezer we can heat up for dinner. Hanging out in town has suddenly lost its appeal.”

Chapter Four

“You need to call Anton and let him know what’s going on.” Xandi sipped her glass of wine and tried to look relaxed. She couldn’t pull it off. Her actions felt jerky and her veins practically sizzled. She’d been running on adrenaline ever since they’d fled the restaurant and the slimy reporter. If she didn’t find an outlet soon for all her pent up energy, she knew she’d explode.

“I know. I’ll wait and call him in the morning, before his meeting.” Elbows resting on her knees, the wineglass clasped in both hands, Keisha turned her head to look at Xandi. She sighed and her shoulders slumped. “At this point, I think we can charge Burns with harassment. Anton wanted to call the newspaper and complain last time he followed me, but I wouldn’t let him. My mistake, I guess. Anton worries so much about me. He’d want to fly out here immediately, and he can’t do that. Let the man at least get a good night’s sleep. There’s nothing he can do tonight, anyway.”

She set her wineglass down and rubbed her hands up and down her arms, as if warding off a chill.

“Agreed.” Xandi gave Keisha a sideways glance. “You look as wound up as I feel. Obviously, with Burns following you we can’t shift and run, but there’re other ways to burn off excess energy. Might take our minds off of things.”

Keisha’s smile was her answer. She took a final sip of her wine, then both women set their glasses down and headed for the bedroom. At the last moment, Keisha leaned over and whispered softly into Xandi’s ear, “I’m the Alpha bitch, sweetie. Remember?”

“Like hell you are.” Laughing, Xandi swatted Keisha on the butt and chased her through the door.

They kissed, briefly. Xandi could kiss Stefan for hours and never grow tired of the feel of his lips on hers, but for some reason, when she was with Keisha, Xandi wanted more direct, more physical contact than mere kisses. She slipped her sweater over her head as Keisha removed hers. Their bras landed on the floor and Xandi moved into Keisha’s embrace.

There was something immensely erotic about rubbing their taut nipples together, standing breast to breast, hips thrust forward, their hands grasping one another’s buttocks and kneading firm flesh through fabric.

Keisha was the first to pull away and slip out of her skirt and underpants. Xandi didn’t waste a minute. Naked, trembling with need as much as the adrenaline rush still coursing through her body, she pulled Keisha back into her arms, this time bending down to take one of Keisha’s firm nipples in her mouth.

Xandi rolled the turgid flesh between her lips, drew it in and pressed the nipple tightly against the roof of her mouth with her tongue. She sucked hard, drawing a soft moan from Keisha and a hard thrust of the other woman’s hips against her own.

Xandi arched her back, releasing Keisha’s nipple with a satisfying *pop*. She felt the scratchy brush of Keisha’s pubic hair tickle her recently shaved mons and moaned. Breath rasping in her throat, Xandi caught Keisha’s rhythm and tilted her hips even closer, rubbing her sensitive pubes back and forth across Keisha’s coarse thatch of hair.

Keisha palmed both of Xandi’s breasts, then quickly slipped her hands lower to grab Xandi’s buttocks

once again. With her hips rotating slowly against Keisha's, Xandi scattered wet, open-mouthed kisses across her friend's throat, along the line of her jaw before covering Keisha's mouth and breathing in her soft, moaning breaths.

Xandi held Keisha close with one hand tightly clenching her taut buttock in a bruising grasp. She kissed her deeply, nipping at lips and tongue, then slipped her fingers between their bodies and found the crisp nest of curls covering Keisha's pussy.

So much heat, so slick and ready. Xandi felt the first trickles of moisture along her own inner thigh and knew Keisha hovered on the brink of orgasm, just as she did. She let her fingers creep slowly through the tangle of wet hair, probed slowly, carefully at the swollen, weeping mouth of Keisha's pussy, then gently circled her protruding clit with the tip of one finger.

Keisha's legs buckled and she cried out. Xandi forced her fingers deep inside, deep, where firm muscles danced, clenching, releasing, clenching once again. Together, the women tumbled onto the wide bed. At the last moment, Xandi shifted, twisting her body so that she landed on top, her lips now firmly compressed once more about Keisha's nipple.

Xandi quickly rediscovered Keisha's pussy with her free hand. Her fingers slipped easily into the slick, hot channel, first one, then two, finally four fingers buried deeply, with her thumb resting firmly against Keisha's clitoris.

She felt Keisha's hands frantically rubbing, touching, grasping, sliding across her breast, then slipping down between her legs to skim lightly over her sensitive clit.

Xandi wanted to laugh but didn't dare release Keisha's nipple. Their sex play had become a battle of Alpha bitches, with each of them trying to bring the other to orgasm first.

Keisha's fingers clenched tightly around Xandi's buttocks, pulling her cheeks apart, finding the sensitive sphincter muscle, probing none too gently until she gained entrance with her middle finger.

She pressed hard, sliding her finger in and out, then adding a second and going deep.

Moaning, panting with rising excitement, Xandi released her tight suction on Keisha's nipple. She shoved her fingers deeper inside Keisha, now using her palm to rub back and forth across her friend's clit, finding her rhythm, thrusting in counterpoint to each of Keisha's deep strokes.

Keisha twisted, leaned forward and caught Xandi's nipple between her tongue and teeth and sucked hard. At the same time, she speared Xandi with two fingers deep inside her anus and pressed down on her clit with the pad of her thumb.

Xandi threw her head back and howled. Wave after wave of pulsing heat, shimmering sensation and pleasure verging on pain swept through her. She tried to bring Keisha with her but her hands wouldn't obey. Gasping, giggling, her mouth opening and closing like a fish on dry land, she collapsed beside her friend.

"Okay. Alpha bitch. You win that round. Just let me get my breath..."

"And then?" Keisha leered at her.

"And then you..." Xandi took a couple of deep breaths and rolled over on top of Keisha, slipped her

hand down between her friend's legs and found her hot, wet center. Suckling her nipple tightly between her lips, she tongued the sensitive tip while her fingers tangled in the nest of curls between Keisha's legs. She slipped between the pouting lips, dipped into Keisha's moist heat and stroked slowly, deeply, in and out.

She felt the slight rise and fall of Keisha's hips as she tried to hold back and slowly lost the battle. Heard her soft moan, felt the fluttering muscles deep inside as they tightened imperceptibly around her fingers.

"Then it's your turn."

Xandi found Keisha's clit, ran her thumb over the hard little bud, faster, harder, her fingers thrusting deeper. She sucked hard on the nipple still caught between her lips, tightened her lips about the tip and pressed them together hard.

Keisha arched her back and screamed, her hips pumping against Xandi's thrusting fingers, her hands clutching at the rumpled blankets beneath her.

Xandi brought her down slowly, stroking Keisha's quivering flesh, finally just rubbing her slick, engorged labia with the palm of her hand. Keisha's body shuddered, she sighed and lay still.

"Damn. I think I'll sleep well tonight." She giggled. "Wow... we haven't done that for ages."

Xandi lay down next to her. "I know. I'm still not sure if it's better sex or just different, but I like it."

"It's all sensation and sharing. Touching someone and knowing exactly what parts to touch, where to taste, how hard to apply pressure."

"Sensation without the emotional intensity." Xandi laughed. "Sometimes when Stefan and I make love and I realize just how *much* I love him, it scares me." She turned and touched Keisha's shoulder, running her fingers over the bandage. "I love you, too, but it's not so intense, not as frightening."

"I know." Keisha looked soberly at Xandi. "I've felt exactly the same way." She leaned closer and they kissed. "G'night, hon. Sweet dreams."

Chapter Five

Xandi found Keisha at the kitchen table in the morning. She stared blankly out the window, but turned when Xandi entered the room. Her lips were trembling, and her hand holding the half empty coffee cup shook.

"I heard the phone ring. What's wrong?"

Keisha sighed. "I just talked to Anton. I called him first thing, told him about Carl Burns. He contacted

Burns's publisher to complain. Anton just now called me back to say the paper fired Burns over a month ago. It looks as if he's not working on a story. He's stalking me."

"Have you called the police?" Xandi poured herself a cup of coffee and sat across from Keisha. "Is Anton coming out?"

"Anton's stuck in meetings until Friday... he may even have one Saturday morning. I told him not to come."

Xandi snorted. "You mean he listened?"

"I don't think he's got a choice. This deal involves millions of dollars. It's a huge investment for him. I've got a call in to the detective who worked my assault case. I'm hoping he can tell me how to keep Burns away from us."

"In the meantime?" Xandi took a sip of her coffee.

"In the meantime, I need to check on my project, make sure we're still on schedule. The next couple days are going to be really busy." She smiled sadly at Xandi. Her amber eyes filled with tears. "Why won't he stop following me? Why won't he leave me alone? It doesn't make any sense."

"When was the first time you were aware of him?"

Keisha frowned. "Not until the article came out in the paper, the story about my assault."

"How did he get there so soon? He was at the crime scene really fast. I saw the pictures. There were still bodies in the room."

"I don't know. I was so out of it. I never saw Burns, at least that night. At first I thought the photos were from the police files, but I learned later they weren't."

"Did the police let him in?" Xandi recalled the lurid black and white photo, the torn and mutilated bodies of three men, the superimposed photo of a rabid, snarling wolf covering the picture. "Could he have been there before the police arrived?"

Keisha slowly raised her head. "I don't know. I can't imagine the police letting him take pictures. It was a crime scene, but he had to have been there right after it happened to get those shots. How could he have known?"

Xandi reached behind her and grabbed the phone. "Call the detective. Now."

* * *

Early Friday morning, Keisha surveyed the stark stone monument, its sharp edges softened by the gently swaying grasses she'd carefully selected for the design. They were the same grasses that gave her *Chanku* abilities life. She leaned over and plucked a single golden stem and slipped it between her lips, then straightened up, chewing thoughtfully, to study the finished project.

The sun chose that moment to break through the morning fog and cast shadows exactly as she'd planned, reflecting a jagged silhouette reminiscent of the Himalayas. She nibbled on the stem of grass and studied the dark line of stone.

Xandi slipped her arm around Keisha's waist. "It's a fitting tribute. Absolutely gorgeous. I can see why your design won the competition."

Xandi's praise should have filled her with pride. All Keisha could think of was her brief and unproductive conversation with the detective. She'd finally reached him after two days of calls, only to learn there wasn't anything they could do to stop Carl Burns from following her. Not until the reporter broke the law.

She sighed, pushing Burns and the San Francisco Police Department from her mind. "At least the project's done, under budget and on time. I just wish I could feel more excited about it."

"You will. Once everyone shows up for the dedication. Now let's clean up around here so it's perfect for Sunday. Your rake, m'dear?"

Sighing, Keisha took the rake from Xandi and began clearing away the accumulation of branches and leaves left by the workmen. She missed Anton. She missed Stefan.

She missed the sense of peace she'd lost the moment Carl Burns came after her again.

Hours later, standing in the neatly cleared garden, Keisha still couldn't find the sense of achievement she'd hoped to feel.

She'd won a national landscape design contest, created something lasting and beautiful, yet all she wanted was to get as far away from San Francisco and Carl Burns as possible.

"Xandi, I think we should go home." She slanted a look at her friend. "Back to Montana. Let's skip the dedication and just leave. I have a really bad feeling about..."

"No. You've worked hard. You deserve recognition for this. Besides, I'm staying alert. I've been watching. I don't think Burns is nearby. One of us would sense him."

Keisha shook her head. "What if we don't? They can't arrest him because he hasn't done anything. There's no record of his stalking me. How do I make him leave me alone? I'm not even certain why he's following me." Keisha wrapped her arms around herself and shivered. She'd been feeling so strong, so in control. Feeling like her old self, for the first time since her attack.

Not now. Now the old fears were seeping into her bones, the insecurities, the lack of confidence... it was all coming back.

"If he's been fired from his paper, he probably wants film to prove you exist, that you shift. He wants his job back and figures you're the key. We just won't give him the opportunity."

Keisha sighed, staring blankly at the memorial garden she'd worked so hard to create. "Do you miss it as much as I do? Shifting? Last night I practically lost it. I stood at the window in the middle of the night, tired from working out here all day, yet wanting so badly to shift and run... but I didn't dare."

Xandi gave her a tight hug. "Two more days. You can make it. Anton and Stefan will be here tomorrow, the dedication is Sunday morning, and our flight leaves Sunday night."

Keisha nodded, then turned to Xandi and grinned. "Okay. Two more days. You realize, of course, I'm

gonna be real tense.”

Laughing, Xandi grabbed Keisha’s hand. Together, they walked back to the car. Keisha paused by the driver’s side and brushed one hand across the back of her neck. She turned her head slowly and scanned the lush park behind her. There was no one there, but a subtle sense of contact, of being watched, lingered.

* * *

Anton tossed his briefcase on the wide bed, thoughts of Keisha filling his mind, teasing his body. Over three thousand miles away with that blasted tabloid reporter on her tail and not a damned thing he could do about it. Thank goodness Xandi was with her.

One more meeting early in the morning and they’d head west. He ached for her, needed her sweet body as much as he needed to breathe, needed to feel her beneath him, crying his name, wrapping her gorgeous legs around his hips.

Needed...

To run. To feel the wind against his muzzle, the grass beneath his feet, the sensory input that kept his *Chanku* soul alive. The need to shift was almost overpowering, but it wasn’t worth the risk. Not here, not in the heart of the city.

Which brought him back to a toss-up between what he could have and what he needed. He’d have to find another way to burn off the energy.

A good fuck? Anton glanced at the door separating his room from Stefan’s and wondered if his pack mate was as exhausted as he was, as wound up from their day?

He tossed his coat on a chair and tugged at his necktie, then stretched and grimaced at the crackling in his joints. Damn. As tired as he felt, he was still high. He’d never worked with a partner before, much less one who read his mind. It had been an amazing experience, communicating telepathically while pulling off a huge business deal.

Before long, Stefan would be as adept at handling their investments as he was, though he couldn’t imagine anything more effective than the two of them working together.

Which brought him full circle to how the hell he was going to burn off all his excess energy. Anton glanced back at the connecting door and grinned. The available options had an immediate effect on his libido. Remembering Stefan, his amazing mouth and aggressive tongue, had Anton’s cock surging against his zipper. He loosened his belt, appreciating the fullness, the heat of his erection.

Imagining what Keisha and Xandi might be doing together even now sent a fresh surge of heat to his cock. He cupped himself through his slacks, recalling other business trips, other lonely hotel rooms. Evenings had been the worst. Occasionally, there’d been a woman to share a meal and more, but even feminine companionship hadn’t eased the aching loneliness, the soul-deep yearning he’d felt for a true mate.

His thoughts turned once more to Stefan.

With Keisha on the other side of the country, a pack mate would do in a pinch. Stefan had already

proved that. He wasn't Keisha, but he wasn't bad. Anton's grin broadened. No, Stefan wasn't bad at all.

The door between their rooms swung open. Stefan stood there, barefoot and shirtless, a big smile on his face. "I keep hoping to sense Xandi. Instead all I pick up is your sad but horny refrain."

Anton laughed. "Damn right I'm horny. The women are too far away. I can't reach Keisha, either."

Stefan sauntered into the room, all Alpha male swagger and sex appeal, a man fully aware of his effect. "So... you think I'm not bad, eh? That's all I get? A 'not bad'?"

"It's a start, don't you think?"

"Barely. You can do better."

"I intend to." Anton began unbuttoning his shirt, taking each button in slow motion. He sensed Stefan's growing excitement.

"I... uhm." Stefan cleared his throat.

Anton bit back a smile. Stefan still had trouble initiating sex with another man, no matter how often the two of them had made love. Not a problem Anton shared.

Stefan cracked his knuckles and cleared his throat once more, before the words tumbled out of him. "I ordered in tonight. A couple of rare steaks, some potatoes... the basics. You looked tired and I know I really don't want to go out. Hope that's okay."

Maybe things were changing. Anton ducked his head to hide his smile. "Sounds good. Have you heard anything at all from the girls? I checked my phone -- no messages."

"No, but it's early in California." Stefan glanced at his wristwatch. "Just a little after three for them. They'll call later. This was Keisha's last day to work on the project before the dedication, so I imagine they've been busy."

"I've been worried about her... about both of them. I wish they weren't so far away."

"They'll be fine. She and Xandi can take care of themselves for one more night. I have to admit, though, I'll feel a lot better when we're all together again."

"Me, too." Anton threw his shirt in his laundry bag. He straightened up slowly when he felt Stefan's hand brush lightly over his bare shoulder. "Isn't dinner on the way?"

"Not for an hour. I suggested they deliver it around seven. That gives us a little time to unwind. Why don't you sit and let me rub some of the knots out of your back? It'll help take your mind off Keisha."

Anton laughed. "You must really want something if you're offering a massage."

"Oh, I do." Stefan laughed but didn't say anything more enlightening. He did, however, slowly remove his slacks and briefs.

Anton turned away. The need to fall on his knees in front of that perfect body, to grab Stefan's cock and

roll his tongue around its blood-filled head, to suck him deep into his mouth... damn. It would probably shock the hell out of Stefan. Generally he was the one kneeling in front of Anton.

He bit back a grin. This was Stefan's show. He decided to let the younger man call the shots, at least this once. Anton took a shaky breath and willed his cock under control. His legs felt like rubber.

Sighing, he practically fell onto the desk chair. He turned it backwards, straddled the seat and leaned his forehead on his crossed wrists. Stefan stood close behind, straddling his back, his big hands working magic on Anton's sore muscles.

Stefan's solid cock brushed against Anton's spine. The feel of that hard length burning across his bare back sent a shiver through Anton, a charge that grounded itself deep in his gut.

His own cock pressed against his zipper. His balls drew up tight and hard between his legs. He shifted on the wood seat, managed to lean closer to Stefan. He opened his mind to Stefan's thoughts and found them blocked.

Wondering, not knowing what his pack mate was thinking, turned Anton on even more. That and the hard length of cock riding back and forth across his backbone.

"I could do a better job if you took off your clothes and stretched out on the bed."

"I'll bet you could." Laughing, Anton stood up and reached for his zipper, but Stefan beat him to it. It was the first time another man had ever unzipped his pants. Anton grabbed the desk behind him as Stefan's fingers slowly peeled the fly back and released the snap, then moving even slower, touching only the tab, Stefan dragged the zipper open, one metal tooth at a time.

Anton gritted his teeth. This teasing, confident male was a new side of Stefan, one Anton hadn't experienced. He put his hands at the waistband, intending to slide his pants down, but Stefan shook his head.

"I'll do it."

He slipped his hands inside the waistband and slowly lowered both Anton's slacks and briefs. The elastic of his briefs caught against the root of his erection. Stefan shoved the loose slacks to the floor, but left the briefs in place.

The band pressed against Anton's cock, holding it down between his legs unnaturally close against his body. The elastic cut lightly into his ass. Stefan led him to the bed and he lay down, still partially clad in the white briefs.

The sensation, though not uncomfortable, drew Anton's attention to both his cock and his ass as Stefan straddled his hips and began to rub his back. Stefan's huge cock rode against his cotton briefs, prevented from sliding up and down the crease between his buttocks by the thin layer of soft cotton.

Anton's frustration grew. Generally, he penetrated Stefan, took him in the ass while either Xandi or Keisha sucked hard on Stefan's cock, but this was totally different.

Just the two of them, Stefan on top and Anton squirming beneath him, trying to find relief from the growing pressure in his cock, the hard ache to his balls.

Stefan continued to massage his shoulders and back, but the touch of his hands was secondary. Anton shuddered under the weight of his pack mate straddling his hips, the tantalizing sweep of Stefan's cock over his ass, the rough abrasion of coarse hair on Stefan's legs riding across his thighs.

After long minutes of rubbing and teasing, Stefan rose up on his knees and slipped Anton's briefs down over his legs, then tugged them past his feet.

He spread Anton's legs apart and lay on top of him. Anton shifted, better to wedge Stefan's long cock tightly between his cheeks, then he grabbed the top edge of the mattress, wishing for his bed at home with the iron railings.

He waited, breath caught in his throat, heart practically stuttering in his chest, for Stefan to fuck him. Instead, he felt fingers reaching under his belly, finding his cock, stroking it in long, slow, teasing sweeps.

Groaning, twisting beneath Stefan's weight and heat, Anton thrust his hips down, pressed himself into Stefan's grasp, practically wept when Stefan slipped his hands away.

"It's been awhile, hasn't it? I figured it was your turn for the bottom." Stefan chuckled, then slipped away from Anton. "Don't move."

Anton lay there, remembering. The first time they fucked, the first time either of them had ever had a sexual encounter with another man. Stefan had come to him, caught halfway between man and wolf, angry, needy.

Stefan had been afraid and belligerent at the same time and he'd burned with a sensuality that was almost intimidating. Anton's breath caught as the full memory blasted through his mind. He'd shifted and wrestled Stefan to the ground, had speared him with his wolvern cock without care, had taken him in what would have been an act of rape if only Stefan hadn't wanted it so badly.

Not merely taken him... he'd screwed Stefan in front of Alexandria. Fucked him hard and long, shifting from wolf to human, filling Stefan's firm ass with his sperm and bringing the young magician to an incredible climax.

Then he'd walked away and let Stefan and his future mate sort it all out themselves, something they'd done admirably.

Later, the tables had reversed. With youth and anger, passion and lust on his side, Stefan eventually bested his mentor, but there'd been no losers, only winners... pack mates.

A new beginning.

The bed dipped. Still lying on his stomach, Anton spread his legs wider, giving Stefan access. He felt the gentle touch of Stefan's fingers, rubbing some sort of lubricant between his legs, around his sensitive ass. Anton groaned when Stefan slipped one finger inside his tight sphincter muscle, then shuddered when Stefan slowly guided him up on his knees and rubbed his balls and cock.

Stefan's hands stroked and teased, fingers circling Anton's balls, then tracing the sensitive length of his cock, slipping back between his legs to lightly squeeze and massage his balls once more.

Trembling now, Anton buried his head on his crossed arms and braced himself. His breath rushed in and out in short puffs. Stefan's hands were everywhere, rubbing his cock, circling the hard crown, massaging

the pulsing vein back to his balls.

He felt the solid head of Stefan's cock pressing tightly against his ass. Grunting, forcing himself to relax, he sighed as the huge crown pressed hard, harder then slipped past the tight sphincter. Anton shuddered as Stefan filled him in one long, slow thrust.

Both of Stefan's hands wrapped around Anton's cock. Covered in lube, they slipped to the very end as Stefan withdrew, then slid back against his belly as Stefan thrust forward.

Anton felt Stefan's balls pressing against his for the briefest of moments, then once more he was sliding out, moving his hands in the opposite direction.

In, out, faster, harder, Stefan's fingers tightened around Anton's cock with each thrust... pressure building in balls and gut, breath rasping, muscles clenching, Anton's mind open and screaming on the edge of orgasm.

Suddenly Stefan was there, deep in Anton's thoughts, sharing the sensations of heat and pressure, of cock stuffed deep in his lover's hot bowels, of the slick slide of fingers over straining cock, a link that went full circle, growing, building sensation upon sensation, peaking as one, coming as one, both of them crying out, hanging there in a sensual high for what seemed like forever.

Yet lasted only seconds. Mere seconds before Anton's cock was shooting his seed all over Stefan's hands, mere seconds before Stefan's cock was spasming, pumping his ejaculate into Anton's welcoming body.

Minds open, hearts open, both of them linked as tightly as two people can be. Open to each other.

Together they heard Keisha's mental scream.

Chapter Six

"Quit that!" Laughing, Keisha slapped Xandi's hands away from her crotch and climbed out of the car. "It's not easy to drive when some little bitch has her hands between your legs. Now cut it out!"

"Like you want me to stop? Admit it. You love it." Grinning like the very devil, Xandi followed her up the stairs to the front door.

"You're a traffic hazard, woman. I probably left a wet spot on the leather upholstery. Explain that to the car rental agency!" Keisha opened the door and stepped inside.

"Oh, damn." Xandi paused at the threshold. "I left the bag of groceries in the trunk. Let me have the keys."

Keisha tossed her the keys as she leaned down to unlace her boots. Xandi closed the door and ran back down the steps.

Keisha hoped she'd hurry. She was hot and wet, her pussy so ready for more of Xandi's talented fingers, it wasn't even funny.

Xandi, make sure you lock the doors. I can't remember if I did or not.

Hell, she'd barely been able to remember where her condo was, as turned on as she'd been while they drove along the crowded streets with Xandi's fingers beneath her skirt, slowly stroking her very receptive clit.

Xandi? Did you hear me?

Xandi?

Dread curled, dark and potent in her gut. Keisha raced back to the front door and yanked it open.

Groceries lay scattered on the sidewalk in front of the condo. The rental car was gone.

So was Xandi.

* * *

"Ms. Rialto, you don't know for certain it was Carl Burns who took your friend."

"Who else would it be? The man's been following me for weeks. You've got to find her!"

"We've got people working on it. If you hear anything, call me." The burly detective handed his card to Keisha. "My cell phone's the best way to get hold of me."

The detective had been gone less than a minute when the phone rang. Keisha burst into tears when she heard Anton's voice. She needed him with an almost paralyzing desperation. Needed both of them -- Anton's steady strength, Stefan's quick humor and compassion.

After a short conversation, Keisha slowly set the phone back on the table. Anton and Stefan were already at the airport. Somehow, they'd heard her, somehow, in spite of the distance, they'd known something terrible had happened.

Her pack mates were due to arrive in San Francisco shortly after midnight. They'd cancelled their morning meetings, left their luggage to be shipped later by the hotel.

They'd dropped everything to protect their women.

There was nothing she could do now but wait. Once more Keisha sent out a quick mental search for Xandi. *Nothing* .

Wrapping a faded afghan around her shoulders, she curled up on the end of the long couch. Fog settled over the city, muting the sounds outside, sending the afternoon into an early dusk. Keisha opened her mind, searching blindly for Xandi.

It was frightening, after so many months of sharing thoughts, to have no one answer when she called, but she kept her mind open, the plea to Xandi running in a steady litany, time meaningless, the silence oppressive.

She glanced at the clock over the fireplace. Almost seven. She'd been huddled here for almost three hours. The men would be in the air by now, completely out of touch. Sighing, she settled deeper into the soft couch, closed her eyes. Once more she silently called out.

Xandi? Why can't you talk to me? What has he done to you?

Keisha? What...?

Stunned, blinking in surprise, Keisha leapt to her feet. Finally! Contact!

Where are you? You can't be too far or we couldn't connect! What happened?

I'm not sure. Someone must have hit me on the head. I'm just now waking up... How long have I been gone?

About three hours. But where...?

Smells like fish... Near the ocean, I think. I'm handcuffed, tied and blindfolded. Other than a headache from where they conked me, I'm okay. I don't sense anyone else around. If I shift, the bindings might come off and...

Don't shift! If it's Burns, he's watching you. I know he is. Anton and Stefan are on their way. They should be here after midnight... it's just after seven. Keep your mind open to me. I'm coming to find you.

There was no time to consider, no time to worry if this was the right course of action or not. The fog was growing thicker, the night darker. She called the detective's cell phone. Left a message that she'd heard from Xandi, though she obviously couldn't tell him how. Tucked her own cell phone into a fanny pack.

Keisha took a deep breath. Damn, if only Anton were here! He'd know if she were doing the right thing. It was risky, but her senses were sharper as a wolf, her legs faster, endurance and strength multiplied. The fog would help hide her, but the risk of discovery was great.

Xandi's life depended on Keisha. She had no other choice. Keisha could do things as a wolf she could never accomplish in human form.

She stripped her clothes from her body. Naked, pack slung about her neck, Keisha slipped out the back door, checked to make sure no one was watching and shifted.

Within seconds, a wolf leapt the back fence, raised her head to sniff the smells of the city and, with the small black pack hanging loosely around her neck, raced in the direction of the mental touch she'd felt just moments ago.

Chapter Seven

Xandi blinked against the darkness, praying her blindfold would slip, wishing she could see something, anything that would lead Keisha to her. She'd lost track of the time. Every moment Keisha searched as *Chanku* put the entire pack at risk of discovery.

She rubbed her face against her shoulder but couldn't reach the blindfold, tugged at what felt like handcuffs holding her wrists but only succeeded in making her wrists bleed. If she could be sure she was alone, Xandi knew she'd risk shifting. It would be so easy to free herself.

No luck. I can't move the blindfold. Keisha? What if you link, the way we used to do during sex? Then you'll see what I see... if I ever see anything!

You're too far away for a complete link. I'm on Nineteenth, heading toward the Golden Gate... I'm planning to cut through the park. Your mental signal is growing stronger. Keep feeding me anything you sense.

Xandi opened her mind, absorbed the sounds and scents around her. She drew on her *Chanku* heritage without shifting, delving deeper into her basic wolveren instincts.

Fear hovered just beyond. She refused to acknowledge its presence.

The scents grew stronger, the sound of water lapping nearby, the roar of cars overhead.

Overhead?

Keisha? Is there any place under a bridge or overpass where he might have me? I smell fish and hear water, but I also hear lots of cars going overhead.

Fort Point!

What?

Fort Point. It's just at the foot of the bridge, an old military base. I'm not that far away and the signal is stronger in that direction. Hang on.

Xandi sensed his presence even before she heard the door squeal on its hinges. Her body tensed. *He's here. In the room.*

So am I. Not physically, not yet. But I'm getting closer.

Xandi almost sagged with relief when she felt Keisha enter her mind. Instead, she sat straighter in the hard-backed chair and took a deep, calming breath.

"Who are you? Why are you keeping me here?"

She sensed movement, felt the brush of fingertips along her cheek and immediately recoiled. Her heart

pounded beneath her ribs.

“Who are you?” It was all she could do not to scream. Heart pounding in her chest, breath rasping in her throat, Xandi forced herself to find a calm she didn’t feel.

It’s Burns. I can feel him. But what the hell is he trying to prove? Keisha’s soft mental voice tinged with her usual steel helped calm Xandi’s racing heart.

She felt the man’s presence, stronger, closer. His lips brushed against her ear and he whispered softly, “Why haven’t you shifted? I know you’re one of them. Shift. That’s all you have to do. Turn into a wolf for me and I’ll let you go.”

“You’re crazy.” Xandi practically spat the words.

Quiet laughter echoed in the room. “Ah, no crazier than your friend. That little black girl’s hiding a secret that’s going to make me rich. No, I’m no crazier than your friend... or her mother. The bitch!”

Did you hear him? Keisha, could your mother shift? Xandi turned and faced the direction of the man’s voice. “What’s her mother got to do with this? I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh, yes you do. You know what your friend is like. She’s a tease, just like her mother. A monster. A wolf in human form. I think you are, too.”

I don’t know if my mother could shift or not. She died when I was little. Keep him talking. Get him to take the blindfold off if you can. The more I can see, the better my chance to get you out of there.

“I don’t know anything about her mother. Keisha does not turn into a wolf. Are you nuts?” She shook her head and laughed. “Well, I guess that’s a given. Take this blindfold off of me. I know who you are, Mr. Burns.”

Her head jerked back with the force of his backhanded slap. “Ah!” Xandi tasted blood, but at least he ripped the blindfold away.

“You’re playing a dangerous game, bitch.” Burns stared down at her, his sallow face illuminated by the glow from a small flashlight clutched in his hand. “How come your friend hasn’t come to save you? I know you communicate. Is it telepathy? Do you read minds? Are you aliens? What the fuck are you?”

Xandi ignored his question. She took in all she could of her dark surroundings, hoping Keisha would grasp the images.

Burns set the flashlight down on a small table and walked around Xandi, trailing one finger along her collarbone, over her shoulder, across her back. The narrow beam of light sent a crazed pattern against the wall, over his fleshy hand. Xandi shuddered, aware even as she struggled to hold still that Keisha fought the same battle within her mind.

Xandi stiffened her spine as Burns slipped his fingers beneath the neckline of her sweater. *Where the hell are the police?*

I left a message and I have my cell phone with me. Maybe the detective isn’t taking my calls.

Not the time for humor, m'dear. Xandi turned to follow Burns as he circled her, his hands now trailing over her arm. "Why did you kidnap me?"

"You really want to know? Might as well tell you, since it looks like your friend is taking longer than I expected."

He squatted down in front of Xandi. His eyes were surprisingly clear, not the crazed look of a madman. Xandi found his calm demeanor unsettling.

"Her mother was a wolf. Yeah, you look at me like I'm nuts, but I saw her shift. We went to high school together. I worked on the school paper. It was late, the school was almost empty, and I imagine she thought she was alone. I was in the journalism room, putting the paper to bed when I saw her in the quad outside. Just standing there, sort of staring at the woods beyond the campus. I watched her..."

He looked off in the distance, as if remembering. Xandi felt a shiver run down her spine.

"She sort of shimmered, this cute little black girl. Damn, she was such a hot babe. She just... shimmered. Then there was a pile of clothes on the ground and a huge wolf standing over them. She turned and saw me. She snarled. Man, did that bitch have a mouthful of teeth! I slammed the window closed and locked the doors. When I looked back, she was gone, but I know she saw me."

Keisha? Did you hear him?

Yeah. I've got a bad feeling about this.

"I watched her after that. Followed her for a long time without her knowing it. She got married. What a mistake. The guy was a gardener, a real loser, but she had a baby. I kept waiting and watching, but I never saw her shift again... not until years later."

Did Keisha know any of this? Xandi watched Burns as he rocked back on his heels. Though he looked directly at Xandi, she sensed his mind was somewhere else. Somewhere in the past. Keisha's presence was a rolling tension in her mind.

"One night, in Golden Gate Park, I spotted a wolf." He laughed. The sound scraped across Xandi's already raw nerves. "Like wolves were a regular occurrence in the park? I don't think so. I followed it. It loped along without a care in the world, but right at the edge of the park, near Nineteenth Avenue, the wolf disappeared into the bushes. I went back and got my car. Figured I'd look farther down the road. A few minutes later, a woman dressed in dark clothes stepped out into the crosswalk. I hit her. Didn't see her in time and I ran right over her."

Xandi felt Keisha's gasp in her mind. Burns shook his head, rubbed his hand across his eyes. "Of course, I recognized her immediately. I was driving an old, beat up car already covered with dings, so one more didn't make a difference. No one ever found out who killed her. I parked a block away and went back. I was already a reporter, so I had my camera. I waited in the bushes. I thought she might shift when she died, but she didn't. She just lay there in the center divider, caught up in the landscaping. She might have looked like a woman, but I knew better. I knew she was just an animal. Made me think of road kill. That's all she was. Road kill. A dead wolf on the side of the road."

Burns stood up and walked away, disappearing into the shadows. His voice echoed out of the darkness. "I knew she had a kid. Figured, like mother, like daughter, but I never could catch the little brat shifting. All those years... the story could have made my career."

Oh my God.

Keisha's agonized cry echoed in Xandi's head. *Keisha, it's okay. He's nuts. Totally nuts. Where are the police?*

I don't know. He killed her. He killed my mother!

Honey, hang in there. We'll get him. Just hang in there.

You're the one tied up. I need to get you out of there, need to...

No! Just wait. Please. Just wait. Frantic, Xandi tried to follow Burns' movements in the shadows while she begged Keisha to stay out of sight.

"But I finally figured it out. Decided that she could shift, she just didn't know it." Burns wandered back into the narrow beam of light. "I waited for years, waited and watched."

He squatted down in front of Xandi once more. "I hired two of them. Not sure where the third guy came in. They were only supposed to scare the crap out of her, not rape her. Scare her good enough that she'd shift. I figured there might be sort of a 'fight or flight' reaction, ya know? I was there. I watched it all. It was pretty ugly, but it worked. I took a lot of pictures, but then when the little bitch shifted and killed them, I panicked."

He stood up, brushed his hand across his face. "God. I was so damned stupid. Would you believe I actually burned the film? I was so afraid someone would connect me with the murders... with her rape. That film could have made my fortune and I panicked."

Burns whirled around, his eyes wide. "Where the fuck are you? I know you're here somewhere. Show yourself, damn it. Shift!"

No! Keisha, no!

Xandi sensed Keisha's outrage, her uncontrollable anger. She ripped at the handcuffs binding her wrists, tugged at the cords holding her to the chair, but it wasn't enough. There was a loud crunch against the door. The sound of scratching and panting. Another loud cracking noise.

Burns yanked a knife out of his pocket and slashed the rope holding Xandi to the chair. With her hands still cuffed behind her back, it was all she could do to rise without stumbling. Burns looped another rope around her neck and dragged her to a door at the opposite end of the room.

The door behind them creaked, wood splintered. The hinges groaned.

Keisha? Don't let him see you!

Sensing only blind, animalistic rage, Xandi tripped over her own feet. Burns twisted her around, holding tightly to her cuffed wrists and tugging on the rope cutting into her throat. Even if she wanted to shift now, she couldn't risk it. He literally had her leashed.

Burns grabbed a camera bag in his free hand and slung it over his shoulder, then shoved the door open.

With a final curse, he pushed Xandi out into the darkness and slammed the door behind him. Pushing and pulling, he forced her across the parking lot to the spot where he'd left the stolen rental car.

A loud crash echoed from the far side of the building. Burns shoved Xandi into the front passenger seat. She landed on her side, one leg caught beneath her, the noose around her neck cutting off her air. Gasping for breath, twisting around, she raised her head just in time to see a large wolf leap over the retaining wall at the back of the building.

Burns snapped one quick shot with his camera before throwing his equipment in the back seat and speeding away.

Chapter Eight

Panting, paws torn and bleeding, muzzle covered in froth and saliva, Keisha watched the car fishtail out of the parking lot. Her tail hung low, her body quivered with barely suppressed rage and sorrow.

Everything awful, every terrible thing that had happened... all of it caused by this man. Her mother's death. Her own rape and assault. All of it because Carl Burns wanted proof.

Well, he had his proof now, only he didn't know it.

Xandi?

No answer. Keisha glanced at the sky and wondered if Anton and Stefan were on the ground yet. She'd never needed her mate more, never felt this vulnerable, this bereft.

It had to be well after midnight.

Xandi? Where is he taking you? Where are you?

The cell phone rang. Keisha nuzzled at the small pack lying on the ground in front of her and caught it in her teeth. She trotted into the shadows and shifted.

Naked and shivering in the foggy night, she answered her phone.

* * *

Unwilling to wait for a rental car, Anton hailed the first cab he saw at the airport. He stuffed a hundred dollar bill into the cabbie's hand. "Four more of those if you can get us to the Golden Gate Bridge in twenty minutes."

The cab was moving before either Stefan or Anton had their seatbelts buckled. Immediately, Anton felt Keisha's mental touch. He sighed his relief, but the feeling was short lived. Their minds linked and he

sensed her fear, her disgust with herself, her overwhelming anger.

While her thoughts poured into him, the cab raced down the freeway. Anton almost prayed for a highway patrolman, but traffic was light at this hour. Keisha broke the link to return to her search for Alexandria. Anton reached out for Stefan but kept his gaze on the road ahead.

Stefan, have you been able to reach Alexandria?

No, Anton. Keisha?

Yes. Just now. She's waiting for us just below the bridge, near a place called Fort Point. The detective called her a few minutes ago. Said he'd gone back over evidence from her assault. Found Carl Burns's prints. They'd been taken from a closet door in the apartment. Hadn't matched them before now. Didn't think they were pertinent.

Shit. How's Keisha?

A wreck. Worried about Alexandria. Afraid people will find out about us.

That's the least of our worries. Stefan swung his head around to glare at Anton.

Anton turned and held Stefan's gaze for a brief moment. "I know." He touched Stefan's arm. Felt the tension coiling within his pack mate, his lover. "We'll get to her in time. Hang in there."

Suddenly Stefan jerked. "Xandi!" Anton linked immediately, felt the familiar mental touch of Stefan's mate. He pulled Keisha into the link.

You're all here! Alexandria's relief was obvious. I'm not sure what he's up to. We're parked near the north end of the Golden Gate Bridge. I think he's setting up some camera gear, but I'm not sure .

We'll pick up Keisha and cross over. Keisha, are you coming as woman or wolf?

Her relieved laughter bubbled through all of their minds. *Hairy wolf or naked woman. Take your pick .*

If I had my choice, you know what I'd choose. Stefan's silly comment seemed to melt away fear. Even Alexandria laughed.

Keisha's voice sounded clear and calm. *I don't want to shock the cabby. He's probably seen a naked woman before... the wolf would scare him to death. Are you wearing a coat? I can put that on .*

At Anton's request, the cabby pulled over to the side of the road near the tollbooth. Stefan opened the rear door. Keisha raced out of the shadows and crawled into the back seat of the cab, climbing right over Stefan's lap.

Anton quickly slipped his coat over her shoulders, then leaned forward. He handed the cab driver four one hundred dollar bills. "Drop us off at the far end of the bridge, and thanks."

Shoving the bills into his back pocket, the cabby pulled back onto the road. Anton thought he spent much too long looking in his rearview mirror.

Poor guy is gonna wonder about this odd group forever! Keisha snuggled close to Anton.

He didn't answer. He couldn't. She felt too damned good in his arms, so warm and alive. So safe. Anton glanced over the top of her head and smiled grimly at Stefan. "We'll get Alexandria back."

Stefan merely nodded. Obviously he was still linked with his mate.

Wrapped in Stefan's loving thoughts, Xandi felt her racing heart calm and her panic subside as she sensed her pack mates growing closer. She still wasn't certain what Burns was planning. He'd left her in the car, hands cuffed to the steering wheel, rope tied tightly around her neck. The car was just outside the regular parking lot, close up against the side of a hill.

Car lights flashed nearby on the freeway.

Xandi pressed on the horn and Stefan's laughter echoed in her mind. His mind immediately touched hers. *Where the hell is the jerk?*

Xandi took a deep, steadying breath. *I don't know, but I imagine I'm bait and he's nearby with a camera.*

All he's gonna get is a shot of a really pissed off human adult male hauling your sweet ass out of his car. The police should be right behind us. Hang on, sweetheart!

Whatever you do, don't shift. I mean it, Stefan! He's already got a shot of Keisha in wolf form. We have to get his camera.

Suddenly Stefan was beside her, tall and strong and so beautiful he took her breath. He kissed her hard and removed the noose from around her neck. Then he threw his jacket over her body. *Shift, pull your hands free of the cuffs, then shift back.*

It was all so simple. Xandi's paws slipped out of the cuffs beneath the coat and she immediately regained her human form. She was free, wrapped in Stefan's arms, and he was pulling her out of the car, taking her to safety.

Where are Anton and Keisha?

Taking care of the camera.

A scream nearby filled the night. Snarls and yelps. Something heavy raced ahead of them through the thick brush. Moments later, Xandi spotted a man running along the pedestrian access to the bridge.

A howl, long and low, then another.

"Sounds like they got it."

"What are they doing to him?"

"Making sure he doesn't take any more pictures or plan any more assaults."

Flashing lights suddenly appeared near the southern end of the bridge. Xandi and Stefan watched from an outcropping at the opposite end.

What could have been two large dogs chased a man along the narrow walkway, then quickly stopped when he crawled up on top of the railing to escape them. One leapt for his camera bag, barely missing the strap.

The man balanced for a moment on the edge of the railing, his body outlined by the harsh bridge lighting, arms flailing, the camera bag swinging from one hand. Suddenly the heavy bag seemed to pull him off center and he tumbled, almost in slow motion, falling end over end from the center of the span.

The animals watched briefly then turned and raced back along the walkway. They disappeared into a small construction area just beneath the bridge abutment.

Moments later, Anton ran across the road with Keisha's hand tightly clasped in his. He wore his slacks and a white dress shirt. Keisha had on his suit coat, but her legs and feet were bare and bleeding.

Xandi was caught in a full-body hug when the police finally pulled into the parking area.

Chapter Nine

The sun had barely breached the horizon by the time Stefan finished his shower and crawled into Keisha's big bed to join his pack mates. He wrapped Xandi in his arms and held her tightly, much too aware how close he'd come to losing her.

"Interrogations aren't all that bad when you can link."

Anton's wry comment made Stefan smile. "I think the police bought the idea the man was nuts, that he was fixated on Keisha and his weird idea she was a werewolf."

Keisha sighed. "Thank goodness Anton found the video camera. I can't believe Burns actually filmed me shifting right here on my back porch."

There'd been one small camera hidden inside a hanging plant, another near the greenhouse. Stefan had discovered and destroyed them. Luckily, they were unable to transmit images, merely store them.

"Not anymore." Anton leaned over and kissed Keisha full on the mouth. "No more Burns. No more cameras. No record. Period. Police are happy, the case is closed, and we're going home in the morning."

Xandi groaned. "No, we're not. It's almost morning and we've got a dedication to attend. We've got time for about an hour's nap before we leave. I am not missing this, not after all we've been through."

She snuggled closer to Stefan, her round bottom fitting perfectly against the cradle of his hips. His cock wedged comfortably in the crease of her behind.

“Napping is the last thing on my mind, woman. It’s been a week and that’s too damned long to go without sex.”

“Excuse me? What was that we were doing last night?” Anton lifted himself up on one elbow, looking properly outraged.

Keisha laughed. “Yeah. What *were* you doing last night? How the hell did you hear me? We can’t link that far.”

Anton lay back down and tucked Keisha close under his chin. “I don’t know what happened. Stefan and I reached climax at the same time, and that’s when we heard you scream. Somehow, the orgasm must have heightened our senses, allowed us to pick up your thoughts. I don’t ever want that to happen again.”

Stefan snorted. “What, a mutual climax? It’s not nearly as much fun alone.” His fingers trailed between Xandi’s legs where he found her wet and ready. It was such a simple, marvelous thing to slide his cock slowly inside her welcoming pussy.

From the look of pleasure on Keisha’s face, Anton was doing the same thing to his mate. Both women sighed. Xandi wriggled her butt, giving Stefan better access. He thrust inside, slow and smooth, withdrawing just as slowly. His mind opened, his thoughts spilled out over all of them.

He sensed Xandi’s pleasure, her need, at the same time felt Keisha’s response to Anton, experienced Keisha’s heat and the full, even slide of Anton’s huge erection filling her, touching the mouth of her womb, pausing a moment and then slipping back along the rippling muscles.

Xandi and Keisha closed the narrow gap between them. Keisha leaned forward and sucked at Xandi’s nipple. Stefan felt the pull between his legs, between Xandi’s legs.

The four of them moved as one, their bodies together in a slow and graceful ballet, sensation building on sensation as the link grew stronger. They shared the common coil of pending orgasm, the heat building, the gut tightening, their bodies so perfectly in sync it was difficult to tell where one began and the other ended.

Thrusting harder, faster, finding a perfect rhythm, filling Xandi, filling Keisha, *being* Anton, Keisha and his beloved mate, Stefan tipped over the edge between light and dark, felt his body take flight, his mind and soul in perfect communion with the three he loved.

Gasping, crying out Xandi’s name, he came in a rush of heat and life, his seed filling her, his body wrapping around hers and holding her close, holding Keisha and Anton as they arched and cried out together.

Suddenly, a gate seemed to open in Stefan’s heart, a blossoming in his soul that was as fierce as it was unexpected. The memories of pain and misery, of his years caught between worlds both human and wolf were so totally overwhelmed by love and light that the harsh sob raging out of his chest caught Stefan unaware.

He held Xandi in his arms, his tears falling into her thick mass of hair, remembering how alone he’d been,

how much the outcast, half wolf, half human, unaware of his true heritage, unaware of the gift that was *Chanku* .

The gift made whole by these three who loved him, who so completely loved one another.

He opened his thoughts, halting their worry, their loving concern, showing them what was in his heart. Sharing his memories.

Anton's hand reached across the two women, his fingers tightened around Stefan's shoulder.

"I know."

Two simple words of understanding. Male to male, their women between them, basking in the strength of the pack.

Epilogue

Keisha's speech at the dedication was short, simple and filled with her wry sense of humor. As she turned to step down from the podium, San Francisco's handsome young mayor held out his hand to assist her. Anton quickly stepped between them.

"We have a plane to catch."

The mayor nodded, grinned at Anton and stepped aside. It was obvious he was reluctant to let go of Keisha's hand.

Keisha burst into laughter once they were away from the crowd. "Could you have been any ruder to the poor man? He's the mayor, Anton!"

"I didn't bite him."

"Yeah. He didn't pee on the monument, either." Stefan laughed when Xandi punched him in the shoulder.

"And I thought men were bad. Wolves are worse."

"Thank goodness." Keisha stopped next to the car. "And thank you. All of you, for talking me into staying for this."

"Your mom and dad would have been so proud of you." Xandi drew her into a quick hug. "Just as we are."

Keisha looked back across the green expanse of park, at the memorial garden she'd designed, at the

city that had been her home. No longer. It was time to head back to Montana, back to the place she belonged.

It was time to run through the forest, to hunt with her beloved pack mates, to prowl and race the moon.

It was time to make love on the mossy forest floor, and maybe, just maybe, time for babies.

She turned and smiled at Anton.

It was time for *Chanku* .

Kate Douglas

Kate Douglas has been writing professionally for over thirty years, but she's never enjoyed the job as much as she does now. For her, a day at the office consists of long, pleasurable hours at her computer in the company of strong, gutsy, smart, sexy men and women, fictional characters who want their sex hot and their mates hotter. Making sure they -- and her readers -- get what they want is this author's prime responsibility. It's a tough job, but somebody's gotta do it.