



Styx's Storm (Breed Book 22)

By Lora Leigh

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Lora Leigh is known for her deliciously intense and satisfying erotic romance. Her characters come to her in her dreams, inspiring her with the possibilities of *What If...* Most days, Lora can be found in front of her computer weaving daydreams while sipping the ambrosia of the gods, also known as coffee. When not writing, thinking about writing, or plotting what to write, Lora, a Kentucky native, enjoys gardening, fishing, and hiking with her husband and children.

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chapter 1

The bar was hopping, music pounding, drinks flowing smoothly and customers packing the bar area and dance floor. It was one of those country hole-in-the-walls that attracted both criminal elements as well as the upper class and everything in between. It was one of those places Storme could slide into, and her scent became masked by the dozens of sweating, lusty, alcohol-infused bodies that filled it.

It was one of the few ways to hide from paranormal senses and extrasensory capabilities. It was one of the few places Storme had a hope of resting before she had to run again.

And God knew, she was tired. Exhaustion was beginning to swamp her, desperation was clawing at her back, and fear was a companion she hadn't separated from in far too long.

She wanted to rest.

Was there a saying about no rest for the wicked? There was. She must have been wicked in a former life though, because this life had just been spent running.

"Whiskey shot and a beer," she said wearily as the waitress came to the table.

Pulling a few of the precious bills from her pocket, she slid the money to the waitress when she returned.

She tossed back the whiskey, then chased the burn with the icy bitterness of the beer and blew out a slow, deep breath before looking around.

The band was actually pretty good here, the lead singers sultry when they needed to be, hard and filled with desperation when the song called for it.

The smell of cigarette smoke, booze, sweat and lust was so strong it didn't take Breed senses to detect it, Storme Montague decided as she sat in the corner of the room and watched the customers milling through the large area. A human with any sense of smell could detect it.

Moving to the corner of the booth, she hunched into the shadows and watched the crowd, knowing that even here there was danger. She had glimpsed it as she rushed inside and skirted the edge of the room to get as far away from it as possible.

From where she sat she could see the Breeds in the far corner as the crowds shifted and moved between them. There were four, and she knew all of them. Not personally, of course, but Storme knew a lot of Breeds; she'd made it her business to learn who they were, especially when she caught them trailing her.

Navarro Blaine, and this one, she knew well from Omega. He was a Wolf Breed with Asian heritage. He was tall, dusky skinned with the exotic slant of eyes and high, flat cheekbones. Black, brown and a hint of gray filled his hair, though the gray wasn't from age, it was from the gray Wolf genetics he carried. He was dressed a bit more sophisticated than the three he was with. Black silk slacks, leather shoes and a white silk shirt matched with an expensive black leather jacket.

That hair was long, falling nearly to the middle of his back as his black eyes, narrowed and intense, surveyed the room.

This Breed she knew, unfortunately. He had been in Omega while she had been there with her father. If she wasn't mistaken, he had been one of her father's favorite creations.

Several times she had heard her brother refer to Navarro with worry and fondness, and several times her father had actually stated that he could have considered the Breed a son.

Her father had a daughter, but this Breed had concerned him far more than his daughter's safety had, and for that, Storme had once hated him with a passion.

Lawe Justice and Rule Breaker were Lion Breeds. Both men were extremely handsome, as all Breeds were, and rumored to be full brothers, perhaps even twins. Shoulder-length black hair was pulled to the napes of both men's necks, while powerful bodies were attired in jeans, boots, T-shirts and denim jackets.

It was the fourth one that seemed the odd Breed out. He sat back casually in his chair, one hand lying on the table, his fingers tapping to the music as he glanced at the dance floor and the women that sauntered by the table to draw the men's attention.

Blue eyes. Ocean blue. She could see those eyes each time she caught a glimpse of his face through the crowd. Long red hair flowed past his shoulders, coarse rather than soft, tied back at his nape as the others' was, though it had the appearance of having been tamed only under protest.

Squared, strong features drew instant female attention, as did the exotic eyes that appeared to be lined with the faintest edge of kohl. High cheekbones, well-molded male lips, broad shoulders, a strong chest and impressive biceps. He was larger and broader than the other men, and looked exactly like what he had been created to be. A Scots warrior. He would have looked at home in a kilt with a sword strapped to his waist.

Leather pants, heavy boots, a white long-sleeved shirt and leather riding jacket were the perfect covering for him. They made him look harder, broader, more dangerous.

He was Styx Mackenzie, the one Breed she was seriously growing tired of playing games with. He had been on her ass for more than a year now, off and on, determined to track her down and force her to listen to the proposition the Breed community had for her.

She already knew the details. Protection in exchange for information.

She wanted to laugh at the thought. As though a Breed could ever protect her. They would be more inclined to tear her throat out if she displeased one of them.

A flash of memory, buried so deep that she rarely let herself remember it, had her eyes closing briefly as she fought it back.

Her brother's death. The Breed ripping out his throat, the sounds of James's last gurgled breath and her father's cry of fear and pain.

They should have gone with her. They should have escaped as well rather than staying behind to destroy the last of the files they had on whatever secret project they had been involved in. That information had been more important than their lives. More important than her life, because her father entrusted her with the care of it, despite the fact that he should have realized that the Council would know exactly who he had given it to.

The Council scientists knew, and the Breeds knew, and she had been running from both for the past ten years.

She was tired of running, but there was a part of her that still refused to give up the information she had.

Glancing down at her hands, she watched as she twisted her mother's antique ring on her finger. The wedding band her father had given her mother had been in the Montague family for generations upon generations. The diamonds, sapphires and emeralds were family jewels, the blues and greens family colors. And Storme was now the last of the Montague line. There were no sons left to carry on the name, and there would be no daughters left to wear the ring.

The ring had been intended for James's wife, a wife he had never had because the danger of the job he had undertaken with his father had been too great.

Creating Breeds.

She glared across the room at the four Breeds. Monsters. Animals. She hated every damned one of them. As far as she was concerned, there was no crime greater than that of creating such farcical replications of humans and trying to convince the world they deserved to move freely among them.

Hatred swirled inside her for the loss of her father, her brother, the loss of her childhood and the dreams she had had of freedom. Dreams that had never come to fruition because each time she thought she had found peace, Breeds had managed to find her.

It didn't matter if they were the few Breeds still aligned with the Council or those who proclaimed to desire nothing but peace and freedom. They were all killers. They all wanted her for a reason, for the information they thought she had.

As she glared across the room, his head turned. Blue eyes, radiating amusement and warmth, met hers and locked. For the space of no more than a second, Storme felt mesmerized, locked in a circle of hatred, anger, laughter and hunger.

She had rarely looked into a Breed's eyes. They were too intuitive, their senses too sharp to hide from if they managed to look into your eyes. But this time, for that second as the crowd parted, his gaze held her.

Then, like an erratic school of fish, dancing bodies separated them, flowed between them, breaking the contact but leaving Storme assured that she was hidden no longer.

She came out of the booth instantly, moving along the edge of the crowd at a near run as she headed to the rest-rooms at the back of the bar.

She would hide there a few minutes then see about slipping out the back entrance of the bar.

She had to get out of there. She had rushed inside to hide, only to find the four bastards that had obviously been tailing her. She had thought, this close to Haven, the Wolf Breed sanctuary, that maybe she could rest for a few days, stay hidden, and figure out what to do next.

They were getting too close. Her hotel room had been ransacked the night before; the only reason she hadn't been there was that she had slipped out for fast food and walked to a nearby restaurant rather than driving. Her car had been parked in the parking lot of the hotel, and in addition to the belongings in her room being destroyed, the car had been broken into also.

There was no escape there. Until she acquired another vehicle, she was fucked. If she didn't get the damned Breeds off her ass, then she was fucked anyway.

As she rushed through the crowd, several couples parted at once; a path was created, then suddenly blocked as she slammed against a hard, wide chest.

Her gaze jerked up, locked. Her lips parted in shock, a shudder racing through her as warm hands gripped her shoulders lightly and canines flashed in a smile.

"Weel now, I was goin' for a drink, but I could be convinced to settle for a wee dance," he laughed.

She noticed it then. The music as it moved into a slow, dark strain of desperate love and passion unquenched.

Her hands pressed to his chest as his moved to her hips and he pulled her easily the rest of the way to the dance floor she had been moving by.

She'd taken a scent neutralizer earlier, one of the precious last few she possessed. She prayed it worked.

She was too shocked to fight. In all her life she had never found herself this close to a Breed, in a situation so shockingly dangerous that it could destroy her world in an instant.

"Do ye need the ladies' room so desperately that a dance will interfere?" he asked as she continued to stare up at him. "Ye look as though the hounds of hell chase ye, lass. I can wait a moment or two if I must."

He didn't know who she was? Didn't know her scent?

She shook her head. "I didn't expect to see Breeds here." The lightness of the response was desperate, and she was certain it fell far short of the casual comment she'd intended.

"Don't be frightened, please." Sincerity suddenly marked his expression as they moved slowly to the music, more because he was leading than from her own conscious thought.

"My friends and myself are just takin' a break from a wee bit of business is all."

"Business?" She swallowed tightly. "This close to Haven, that's not unusual, I guess."

He chuckled at that, and she was shocked at the husky warmth of the sound.

"It should be unusual. Alas, I find myself at the end of this particular job though, and I'm lookin' forward to the downtime."

"A job? I thought Breeds were taken care of by the government?" She knew they were. The bastards didn't have to do anything. The only jobs they seemed to have were those of tracking down scientists and murdering them.

He grimaced at her comment as she felt his fingertips stroke down the back of her jacket, as though caressing her spine. "Lass, no mon or government takes care of me. I've a mind to pay my own way."

“What sort of work do you do then?” Keeping conversation going was imperative. Keeping her mind away from the fact that she was in a Breed’s arms would be the only way to stay sane.

“I’ve been aiding a friend in a small investigation the past year or so.” He shrugged as though it didn’t matter. “Too little information and too many false leads have brought me home though. Finally.”

He sounded tired, not as tired as she knew she was, but at least weary of whatever game he had been playing with her.

“Your friend didn’t have all the information you needed then?” She didn’t have to pretend interest.

“Too little information and too little cash,” he chuckled. “Perhaps when he can pay my fee, we’ll be talkin’ again.”

Too little information. Too little pay. Navarro might know what she looked like, but it seemed she had stayed far enough ahead of them that the other Breed hadn’t been able to point her out to his friend.

She never took pictures. The driver’s license she carried was under an assumed name, just as the credit cards she carried were.

“You’re going back to Haven then?” she asked, wishing he would hurry and go. Wishing he had left before he managed to run into her.

“Only if ye make me, lass. I could spend the night in much more interesting pursuits than those to be found at Haven if you’re willing.”

Styx Mackenzie was a flirt, a true Breed man-whore, she had often thought. He wasn’t as newsworthy as other Breeds, but he had a following of female groupies who congregated on the Internet, and who posted every sighting of him possible. Whose home he was seen entering, what time the next morning he left. His current lovers, past lovers and possible potential lovers.

He made no secret of his approval of their posts each time he joined them online, and despite his attempts to remain camera shy, he was caught often in both video as well as photo.

He was becoming the poster guy for the flirtatious, unthreatening Breed. Which never failed to shock her, because the potential for killing was there in his eyes.

Wasn’t it?

“No answer? Is that a stern and forbiddin’ no then?” That smile flashed, and those blue eyes filled with warmth and a latent lust that had her thighs tensing.

God, she was wet!

She felt the sharp inhalation of surprise that she couldn’t hide. She was aroused. That easily, that quickly. As though her body was suddenly refusing to cooperate with her mind in hating every Breed she met.

She couldn’t hate and want at the same time, could she?

“I don’t like Breeds,” she whispered.

She couldn’t lie to him. She wanted to. She wanted to play the game, she wanted to tease and lure him until

she escaped his clutches as easily as she had other Breeds.

He almost paused. A frown touched his brow, touched those incredible blue eyes.

“I’m a mon, lass, not just a Breed. It’s a wee like sayin’ ye dislike all Chineses, ye dislike all Italians or all people in general, wouldn’t ye think?”

His voice was gentle, almost understanding.

His hand stroked up her back, his fingers pressed against her spine, and she found herself wishing she was stupid enough to sink into him.

“Perhaps I just dislike all Breeds,” she stated. And she was lying, because she knew a part of her hated all Breeds.

“I’ll tell ye what.” That smile was back. “Try me on, lass, see if ye dislike all Breeds, or just dislike all Breeds but me.”

Try him on.

The thought of it was enough to cause her juices to gather and saturate the folds of her sex.

“No.” She stepped back, the temptation, the sudden aching need that wrapped around her, had the power to send her heart racing with what she knew had to be fear.

It was fear. It couldn’t be anything else.

“Lass . . .”

“I have to go. Friends.” She looked around as though she were actually with someone else. “I’m sorry. I have to go.”

She left him on the dance floor, assuring herself it wasn’t a mistake. That there was no way she could have felt the warmth, the security that she had imagined she felt in his arms.

Entering the crowd, she brushed against the bodies, fought to diffuse her scent and headed straight for the back door, and for safety.

A quick check behind her had her sighing in relief as she pushed through the back entrance into the dimly lit back alley behind the bar.

Aldon, Colorado, had grown over the past ten years, after the Wolf Breeds had been granted the nearly three hundred thousand acres of land the government had once set aside as a wildlife preservation area. The grant had given the Wolf Breeds the land in reparation for the American government’s part in their creation and torture for so many decades.

Storme didn’t advocate torturing any creature, but she didn’t advocate allowing them to run wild outside confined areas either, or so she had always stated. Then she imagined Styx Mackenzie in those labs, that smile, the warmth and humor in his gaze replaced by rage and violent hunger, and it made her feel sick.

Wishing she had the weapon she usually carried beneath her jacket, Storme closed the door behind her and began moving quickly for the end of the alley.

Head down, she pulled her cap from beneath her jacket and yanked the bill down to shade her face, praying the small amount of scent neutralizer she'd applied to her body and the smells from the crowd in the bar had hid her scent enough to assure Styx Mackenzie remained off her ass for a while longer.

She was running out of the formula used to hide from the Breeds, which she tried to keep on hand for emergencies. The spray-on camouflage had saved her life more than once in the past years, but lately she'd been forced to rely on it more and more. It was almost as though it wasn't even working.

"Well it's about time."

Storme drew up short, her head jerking up at the malicious tone as a dark figure stepped from the shadowed indent of a closed doorway at the edge of the building.

Coyote.

Stepping back, she stared into the cruel dark eyes as the Coyote Breed was joined by a partner from the building on the other side of the alley.

She knew this Coyote. He'd been chasing her for the past four months. He seemed to be a bit more tenacious than most, or else just more scared of whoever controlled him. It did surprise her that he'd brought company though. He normally worked alone.

"Two against one. You boys like to hedge your bets, now, don't you, Farce? So, are you Council or Haven Breeds?"

They had been doing that for a while, sending teams out rather than a lone Breed to capture her. Farce, a Breed with no last name that she knew of, had shed more than his fair share of blood over the past six months as he followed her.

But the Breeds chasing her for the past ten years were known for that.

"Does it matter who sent us?" the first Breed asked, his tone rasping, rough with a cruel edge of intent.

Hell, she would have thought she could have figured out who his handlers were by now, but Farce was a bit more mysterious than most Breeds. There were no records of him, period, in the Breed or Council databases she had managed to hack. Even her sources within the Council didn't seem to know who he was or who he worked for. Not that she trusted those sources, but it was the best she had to work with.

"Well, a girl likes to know the origins of the Breed courting her," she said mockingly. "It does make all the difference."

Between life and death in some cases.

She hadn't managed to truly upset Haven's Breeds yet. Of course, she hadn't been forced to kill one either. The Council bitches on the other hand were another story.

She slid her hand beneath her jacket, fingers curling over the butt of the precise, illegal laser blaster she carried there.

"Come on, bitch, let's not get into a firefight here," Farce suggested, though his tone was anything but conciliatory as he noticed the movement. "I don't think our bosses would like it near as much if we brought you in dead."

Which still didn't tell her which faction had sent them.

"Ten years, and you still haven't given up." She shook her head in disbelief. "What will it take to make you understand that whatever you want, I simply don't have it."

"You have something," the other Breed growled. "Or you'd already be dead."

That she didn't doubt in the slightest. Neither the Council nor the Bureau of Breed Affairs were known for their patience in acquiring whatever they wanted.

Storme shuddered. She recognized that voice now. As he came farther from the shadows, she recognized the Breed as well.

Dog. Just Dog—she'd never heard if he had chosen a last name as other Breeds had after their rescues, or if he was one of those Coyotes that continued the Council tradition of no last names for their pets.

Dog was no longer a Council pet though, according to him. He was a freelancer. A freelancer that could strike fear into the hearts of Breeds as well as humans.

He ranked up there with Cavalier, Brim Stone, and the rarely mentioned Loki, a known assassin rumored to hunt rescued Breeds.

"Well, I guess we're just going to have to quarrel over this." She could feel the panic beginning to edge inside her now, the fear she had fought since the night her father and brother were killed.

She gripped the hilt of the only weapon left to her, a small sheathed dagger she had pushed into her right front pocket, beneath her jacket, as her gaze moved quickly behind the Coyotes. She didn't want the Coyotes to hurt innocent bystanders if they wandered by, but she wasn't letting them take her. She didn't dare. At least, not alive.

Life meant a lot to her, and freedom, as dangerous as it could be at times, was still a hell of a lot better than what was waiting for her in either Breed or Council control.

They both wanted something from her. The same thing. Information they believed she held. Information her father had given her before he was killed.

She had sworn she would only give it to the person her father had promised would come for it. It was the only task he had ever trusted her with, the only vow he had asked her to make. He and her brother had died for her safety; she wouldn't betray them.

But she was so tired.

She was tired of having to fight to live, so tired of running, of never being warm, never being safe.

Farce stepped closer.

"Please, let's not play this game," she whispered. "Tonight, one of us will end up dead, Farce. That's not what I want."

A hard, sardonic chuckle rasped from his throat as Storme felt resignation begin to fill her.

"The only weapon you have, bitch, is a blade," he sneered. "What do you think you're going to prick with

that?"

She felt the weariness, the acceptance. If they came too close, she would prick herself. She would kill herself before allowing this Breed to take her.

"Hell, lads, what ye doin' cornerin' a pretty lass like this in the dark?" Mocking, smooth and sexy, the Scots brogue had the Coyotes facing her stilling, even as Storme restrained the curse rising to her lips.

How had he managed to find her so quickly?

Storme turned, careful to keep both the Coyotes and the newcomer coming from behind her in the corner of her eye, and watched as Styx Mackenzie moved from the back entrance of the bar into the alley.

"Well isn't this my lucky night?" she drawled.

"I was rather thinkin' the same thing, lass," he chuckled. "See now, wouldn't ye have done better to have continued the dance we were havin' inside?"

Her brows lifted. "I was definitely doing much better."

He chuckled patiently at the admission, and the sound, deep and filled with warmth, had her stomach clenching.

The weapon he carried loosely in the crook of his arm was big, heavy and lethal. The fully automatic laser rifle would put holes in a Breed that would leave nothing left to identify, let alone survive.

She let her gaze flick to it slowly before returning to the blue, amused gaze. "Hell of a weapon," she drawled. "Where were you hiding it?"

"The jacket at the table." He grinned as he shrugged his shoulders to indicate the leather jacket he hadn't been wearing on the dance floor. "I never leave home or a bar without it."

She almost laughed. She wanted to. The small spurt of amusement was out of place, and definitely out of character for her.

"You're making a mistake, Wolf," Farce growled, but she heard the defeat in his voice.

"Lad, anytime I'm rescuin' a pretty little thing from your clutches, then my time's not bein' wasted." Smooth as aged whiskey, rough, filled with determination, that brogue seemed to caress the senses despite the fact that there was nothing about Breeds that she considered being the least bit caressable.

"Run along now, puppies, and I'll pretend to be the nice Breed everyone thinks I am and let you live for another day."

Storme searched for a way to escape, and came to the conclusion that she was stuck between a rock and a hard place, in the most literal sense.

"This isn't over." Farce directed his comment to her as she watched Dog slowly disappear into the shadows as though he had never been there.

Storme kept her mouth shut. The Wolf Breed standing so imposing and determined to her right seemed to have the bluff on the bastard to her left.

That meant the Coyotes were Council controlled. She knew Styx was a part of the Wolf Breed community, Haven. Since he appeared less than friendly with but certainly familiar with Farce, it answered the question of who the Coyote's handlers were.

Farce snarled back at her, his canines gleaming in the dim light before he too slowly eased back and disappeared around the side of the building.

Running was an option now.

"Lass, they're just waitin' until you try to run," Styx warned her as he lowered the weapon before moving to the lethal black motorcycle she had only now realized was parked in the shadows. "I can give ye a ride wherever you're goin' if you like. I didn't rescue your pretty self just to see them jump you again later. They don't like losing a play pretty when they pick one out."

She stared at him in confusion. This Breed had been tracking her for nearly as long as Farce had been, yet he acted as though he didn't know her, just as he had acted inside.

She almost smiled.

"Ye know, the scent of your fear is being overshadowed by the vaguest scent of pure devilry." His smile flashed in the darkness. "Come on now, I've work to be doing tonight as ye've already turned me down. Rejection tends to depress me, ye know. I'd hate tae be left in tears afore the night is over."

She rolled her eyes in exasperation. The man didn't seem to have a serious bone in his body or a lick of bloody sense. Which was more or less what she had already decided over the years as she followed him online.

"You never did tell me exactly what that work is." She didn't budge as he watched her expectantly.

He grunted at that. "Chasin' shadows if you be askin' me. I've been on the same assignment for a year now, and I've had enough of shadows." He sighed as though truly fed up with chasing her.

"You're a Breed. I thought Breeds enjoyed chasing things?" She posed the question while making certain she did nothing to deliberately deceive him. She was very well aware that Breeds could clearly scent emotions, deceit and lies.

"Aye, I'm a Breed. As for chasin' shadows, I've always preferred more entertainin' prey and lass's that don't run near so fast." He laughed back at her as he pushed the weapon into a compartment at the side of the cycle's base before turning back to her. "Come now, don't leave me to worry about ye for the rest of the night. I'd like to head to my bed for a wee bit of a nap sometime before dawn."

"Lost a woman, did you?" She stepped closer. It was possible that he didn't know what she looked like now, that the neutralizer she wore had hidden her scent enough that he had no idea who she was. That and the temporary hair color, the colored contact lenses. She could get lucky.

She couldn't imagine he would get this close to her and not jump her if he knew who she was, if he knew she was the shadow he was chasing.

"Let's say, there's a lass that enjoys playing hide-and-seek," he chuckled as he reached back and scratched at his neck with the air of a man that found that confusing. "Some women enjoy games, I've found."

"And you don't?"

“Only if it involves chocolate and sweet heated flesh,” he drawled with a quick, charming grin before straddling the motorcycle and turning back to her.

Patting the seat behind her, he watched her expectantly.

“And I’m supposed to trust you?” she asked.

“Beats the alternative, lass.” He glanced back at the entrance to the alley. “You can ride out of here with me safe and sound or take your chances with Farce and his buddy.”

“They didn’t seem like the type to take home to mother,” she commented as she took another step toward him.

“Hell, are any of us?” he chuckled. “Come on, sweets, pony up and let’s ride.”

He had no idea who she was. Storme moved closer to the cycle, watching him warily as she felt a strange tingle of anticipation running through her.

“So you’re searching for your shadow tonight then?” she asked, as she did as he’d suggested and mounted the bike behind him.

“Perhaps.” He shrugged. “I’m the new Breed here tonight, you might say. When I couldn’t find the lost little waif on my own, they sent in reinforcements.”

He didn’t sound as though it bothered him.

“I thought Breeds could scent their prey a mile away,” she commented as the powerful motor began to throb beneath them.

“Here, lass.” He handed her a helmet.

Pulling it on, she found that the headgear was equipped with communications, evident by the short mic that rested close to her lips.

Following suit, he pulled on a larger, full-faced helmet he had taken from the handlebars and strapped it on.

“You’d have to get a scent of your prey to track it first,” he told her as he slid the powerful machine into gear and moved toward the entrance. “Hold on, we’re gonna blast out just in case.”

Just in case Farce and Dog were still waiting at the entrance.

He shot out of the exit as Storme gripped his waist and leaned in close to maintain her seat. The exit was exhilarating, filled with the throb of the cycle beneath her, the heat of the Breed in front of her, and the danger that could be waiting just outside the alley.

But it seemed Farce and Dog had slunk back into whatever slum they were hiding in. They weren’t waiting outside the exit, though she was sure they were watching from nearby, just to be certain Styx hadn’t left her alone.

“Where’re you stayin’, lass?” he asked through the comm link.

“The Lincoln Arms,” she answered. It seemed she would be renting another hotel room for the night.

“You’ll be easily found there if Farce and his buddy decide tonight’s the night for havin’ fun,” he told her. “Ye’ll need to check out and find another hotel.”

“Suggestions?”

He was silent for several moments. “Hell, get a room at my hotel for the night. I’m not leavin’ till mornin’, and knowin’ Farce, he’ll definitely be lookin’ for ye tonight.”

What an interesting invitation.

Could she be wrong? Was he simply more deceptive than most Breeds?

“I thought you were chasing shadows tonight.”

He chuckled again. “Join me for dinner and I’ll let my friends continue the chase while I enjoy your fair company for an hour or so. It’s not as though I’ve picked up the scent of her yet. I’ll be of little use to them.”

She had been successful. In the months this Breed had been tracking her, she was aware that he had never really gotten that close. He was always several steps behind her, there but not really a threat.

Maybe the neutralizer combined with her attempts to stay on the move had managed to put enough distance between them that she could remain hidden for just a little longer.

“So how ’bout that offer of dinner?” he asked. “The hotel I’m at has excellent room service.”

She could rest. Maybe he would even be nice and get the room.

“The Lincoln was the cheapest accommodations I could find,” she said regretfully. “I can’t afford anything more expensive.”

“Never fear, I’ve a suite. I know how to share.”

She just bet he did.

“What about your friends?”

“They’re not invited,” he growled good-naturedly. “Let’s say I know who to share with, and some treasures are like fine chocolate, and meant to be enjoyed without company.”

So his friends wouldn’t be there.

“Are there strings attached?” She had no intention of becoming his playmate, or his chocolate for the night.

“Only if you want them,” he promised her. “Come on, lass, I’m the knight in scuffed and dented armor tonight, remember? Besides, some things a man doesn’t force, if ye know what I mean.”

She knew a bit about this Breed and that seemed to be a philosophy he lived by. Of all the Breeds that had been sent for her, Styx was the one known more for his playfulness toward women than his mercilessness, or bloodthirsty abilities.

At the moment, he was the safer bet. No doubt Farce and his buddy would track her to the Lincoln before the night was over. They had tracked her to the last hotel she’d taken; she’d lost the security of her vehicle, her

clothing and several weapons.

She was hungry, tired and wanted just a chance to rest for a few hours. A nice meal would be a hell of a bonus.

Styx Mackenzie was still a Breed though. He killed, as they all did, and it was rumored he killed with a smile. But the only hits she knew of him making were against Council soldiers, Breeds or scientists.

She wasn't naive enough to think she knew all there was to know about him, or that this Breed wasn't as deceptive, bloodthirsty and capable of damned near anything any other Breed was. The simple truth was that he was her only chance of escaping a fate worse than him tonight.

Of course, could there be any fate worse than a Breed?

"Here we go, sweets." The motorcycle roared into the entrance of the most exclusive hotel in the sprawling city.

"You're a Breed, why not stay at Haven? It's not far from here," she asked as she dismounted and pulled the helmet from her head.

"Lass, I told ye, I'm supposed to be workin'. If I were at Haven, then my boss would realize I'm more intent on the pretty lass some Coyote Breeds were harassing than the one I'm tae be lookin for." He winked with a quick grin as he pulled the wicked black helmet from his own head then secured both pieces of headgear to the side of the motorcycle before tossing the valet the keys. "Did you know we were followed?"

He placed his hand against the small of her back, forcing her forward rather than allowing her to turn and glance behind her as she would have done. As self-preservation urged her to do.

"They followed then?" The weariness was dragging at her.

The Coyote Breeds chasing her had stayed hard on her ass for weeks, giving her very little time to sleep, and no opportunities to find the odd jobs that had sustained that pesky desire she'd acquired for food.

"They followed, but we'll take care of it," he promised as he guided her through the elegant lobby to the elevators on the other side. "It would be interesting to hear how ye managed to acquire their attention though."

The edge of amusement in his voice assured her that he wasn't really suspicious . . . maybe.

"Same ole, same ole." She shrugged, thankful that certain Coyote Breeds had the same reputation that a member of a criminal family might acquire. "All you have to do is be in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"That's fairly accurate." There was a hint of a growl in his voice now, and less of that Scottish brogue that she realized had managed to calm her some small amount.

That surprised her. Breeds had a tendency to make her incredibly nervous, and she never allowed herself this close to one. She wasn't nervous with Styx though. Perhaps she was just too damned tired to care anymore.

"Here we are." The elevator came to a smooth stop on the top floor, the doors opening soundlessly to the secured eleventh floor. "I've a suite here. You can have a lovely meal with me; the chef in the kitchen is damned near a genius with food, and let's not discuss his abilities with chocolate." There was an edge of love in his voice.

That was right. This was the Breed known to love his chocolate. She'd heard rumors, jokes and had even eavesdropped on a conversation between two other women several nights before regarding his penchant for women and chocolate together.

He was known to kill with an easy smile and a complete lack of mercy, then turn around and devour chocolate as though it were the nectar of the gods.

"Here we go." He opened the door to the suite and escorted her in as though he were no more than a good Samaritan, eager to please and score brownie points to heaven.

The suite was elegant; soft cream carpeting, caramel leather furniture grouped in a seating area in front of a large screen television. To the side, an eight-place conference/ dining table sat, and through double doors she glimpsed a king-sized bed that looked airy and comfortable.

"There's another room through here." Styx opened a second set of doors to reveal another bed, which looked just as comfortable.

God, she would have given her eyeteeth to curl beneath the snowy white comforter and just sleep until she couldn't sleep another wink.

"Dinner menu is on the table," he told her as he strode to a wet bar behind the table. "What would ye like to drink, lass?"

Something strong enough to make her forget he was a Breed. That was what she wanted. Something that would loosen the knot of nerves in her stomach and allow her to relax long enough to enjoy a few hours without the threat of Breeds hunting her.

Styx had no idea who she was. As far as he was concerned she was just another woman he wouldn't mind fucking. The fact that he obviously had an ulterior motive for helping her should have pissed her off rather than intriguing her. Maybe she was just too damned tired to care?

Moving to the menu, she stared down at it for long moments, mouth watering, fighting to make a choice.

"Why don't I just order a sampler of the chef's favorite fare?" he suggested when she didn't answer.

"That sounds perfect." Clearing her throat, she looked around the opulent room once again. "Haven takes care of its Breeds while on a mission."

He chuckled at that. "Ah, lass, if only I could convince them to be so kind. No, the suite was in exchange for a fine hand of poker I played. The owner lost, I won. Unfortunately, he was a bit short on cash at the table, and I don't take IOUs. So we made a bit of an exchange."

"Must have been a hell of a hand," she commented.

"Lady luck was smilin' on me. Now, about that drink?"

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