

SLEEPING BEAUTY EXCERPT

“Demetri, you shouldn’t have awakened her.” Father Kenny swiveled in the chair as he tugged at the starched white Episcopalian collar that was too tight around his neck. His expression flat and voice as calm as always as he relaxed his body against the leather and intertwined his fingers together at the nape of his neck.

Captain Demetrius Perry looked past him to the clock on the far wall. His eyes unreadable and mystical, gave nothing away. He glanced at Father Kenny through a veiled darkness none of the pack understood. Didn’t want to.

“It was time.”

“What if she’s not?”

“She is.”

“And if she refuses?”

He didn’t want to think of the implication of her refusing. He glared at Father Kenny but looked past him. “Then I die.

Captain Demetrius Perry of Fire Station Two-Two, closed his eyes, sucked in a deep breath and let it out on a rush of air. His heartbeat escalating in his chest and pressing against his ribs sent once forbidden sensations surging through his body. He didn’t like the feelings surging through his body. If Stormy Knight made him feel this way and she was a door away, what would happen when she was in front of him?

He’d seen Stormy numerous times, too many to count. She pulled him to her with such strength he had to have her. Have her near him. Become a part of him and vice versa. Demetrius had been in her dreams, her thoughts. He knew more about her than he wished. Private things no one should have been privy too, but somehow she came to him in his sleep, sharing dreams, desires, passions, and lust. Shivering inward, he tucked his feelings and unfamiliar emotions back down to where they wouldn’t reach up and grab at his gut.

Pushing up from the over sized desk, Demetrius walked to the far wall and threw back the heavy curtains hiding the window. Father Kenny’s hand flung up to shield his eyes from the bright sunlight suddenly illuminating the room; an uncomfortable frown twisted his face.

Demetrius thought about Father Kenny’s words for a moment. He’s been right on more than one occasion in the past, but not this time. Kenny, the historian of the wolf. His comrade. Priest. Friend. He was the first person Demetrius met when he joined the force and would probably be the last he saw. Kenny had spent years, almost a decade teaching, and guiding his pack. Sheltering them through the many storms their minds went through and their hearts. When they couldn’t confide in anyone else they confided in Father Kenny.

The captain spoke over his shoulder, “She’s here.”

“And, you know this how?” Father Kenny straightened his back, looked from the captain to the closed door of the office and back to the captain.

Demetrius turned his head toward the cleric, placed his index finger alongside his nose and tapped it slowly.

“Ah yes,” Father Kenny pushed up from the chair and strode over to the opposite side of the room. “The proverbial beacon. How stupid of me to forget.”

The loud repetitious rap on the door signaled her arrival.

“One day your senses are going to fool you and I’m going to be there to make witness.”

“Captain Demetrius,” the door slid open. “Firefighter Knight,” Firefighter Parker announced. The door opened the remainder of the way and two people entered.

Knight strode in with confidence, dropping her duffle at her feet with a thud. The other man backed out of the room and pulled the door shut behind him.

She stood at attention, gaze locked, body stiff, arms straight at her side, “Firefighter Knight reporting for duty, *Sir*.”

Her nervousness danced along Demetrius’ skin sending flutters of anticipation through his stomach. He wanted to smile at her strength, stubbornness, but didn’t.

“At ease, Knight. There’s no room for formalities in this fire station.”

She relaxed her legs a fraction and clasped her hands together behind her back.

“Lighten up and take a seat.” He bore his gaze into her... testing, but she refused to look away. “I’d rather stand, sir.” Her shoulders loosened and she let out a quiet breath.

Captain Demetrius Perry’s expression stilled and his gaze cut from her to Father Kenny. Pulling a file out of the drawer, he opened it and began to read its contents. A minute passed before he closed it, then looked up and caught her gaze.

“Extensive. You are an excellent firefighter, but you could be better if--”

“Captain, may I speak freely.” Knight cut him off.

“As free as you want. Like I said there are no formalities here.” He settled back into the soft leather of the chair.

“I don’t understand what I did to get transferred . . . here.” She took a step toward the seat facing the desk. “Am I being reprimanded?” She folded her body into the chair and clasped her hands together in her lap.

He let out a heady laugh. “Punished, is that what you think? This is the best damn fire station in the state,” slapping his open hand on the desk. The sound loud and sharp sliced through the air. “We are the toughest, meanest, bad asses around. There’s a waiting list to come here.”

Unfolding his body from behind the desk, he took a few steps toward her and spoke into her ear. “I requested your transfer. You have talents that were being wasted at the other station. You used to be a hot shot until they stuck you over at one-oh-one. Put those crap ideas of desk jobs and research out of your head. Don’t you get tired of everyone going about his or her day doing everything that is asked? Not asking any questions. Everything by the book.”

Her body tensed and her energy stood the hairs on the back of his neck and arms. Her scent, wild and tamed, fresh and old tightened his gut. He felt his eyes grow from chocolate brown to black then red almost instantly. Demetrius turned his head, as he sucked in a lung full of air and held it there until her scent singed his lungs. He straightened his back and blew it out in one long slow puff.

“Isn’t that how it is supposed to be? By the book.” She glanced in his direction. “I’ve never been rebellious.” She mumbled, her voice low and unsteady. It almost cracked.

“Yeah, sure, by the book and it drives you out of your mind, doesn’t it? How often does your skin itch for excitement?” He asked a question he didn’t expect her to answer. “Your talent has been wasted for the last time.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You will.” He rotated his neck, rounded his shoulders and stepped to the door. He pulled it open. “Parker!”

The same man who walked her into the office materialized.

“Show Stormy. . .” a subtle laugh rumbled from his throat, “Stormy Knight where she bunks and get her stored away.”

“Right away, Captain.” Parker grabbed her duffle from the floor and held the door open.

Knight seized her bag from his hand, “I don’t need you to carry my gear,” her voice firm. She paused at the door, turned and faced the captain. “Nothing to laugh at, *sir*, family name. But if you ask me, a curse.”

More than you know.

Demetrius’ skin had begun to boil as soon as Stormy walked into his office. It itched from inside out making him want to tear it away from his bones to scratch it. If he hadn’t been alpha he’d have had no control over the pull and would have changed at that very instant. No woman and he meant *no woman* had ever had that effect on him. Only the alpha to his alpha could pull the beast from him.

Stormy was his.

She disappeared behind the closed door. Father Kenny stepped out of the shadows, walked over to the chair and sat down. “She’s a tough one, not like the others.”

“This is what I was telling you. They weren’t . . . alpha.”

“You’re going to have to be careful. Take it easy. Slow.”

The Captain arched an eyebrow and shot him a confused look. Father Kenny placed his index finger under his eye and tugged on the lower lid. *Good*. Kenny hadn’t noticed the firmness stretching against the fabric of his pants. Heat flooded his body when Stormy entered the office. Demetrius felt his flesh rise as soon as a whiff of her scent fractured his shields in one quick stab and settled into his brain. He’d wanted to take her right then and there. Push everyone out of his office and lay her across his desk. Her strength was going to be trouble.

Demetrius drew in a deep breath, held it for a brief second and let it out slowly. “She has power.” He rubbed his temples. “Her aura stood the hairs on my arms.” He unconsciously stroked his hand down its length.

Father Kenny leaned in and lowered his voice. “Are you sure?”

“The dream torments her. It’s strong.” He closed his eyes and inhaled a lung full of air and captured the subtle scent that was Stormy.

“How much time do we have?”

“Eight full moons, maybe less.” The remnants of energy pricked its way down his back. A subtle frown he didn’t let hit his eyes tugged at the corners of his mouth. He didn’t like the way it settled in the pit of his stomach and twitched the muscles in his thighs and groin. He closed his eyes to consider the possibilities. “What do you think?”

Father Kenny laughed. It was light, almost a chuckle. “Like you said . . . it was time.”