

MUST LOVE DOGS

Lena Austin
Tuesday Richards

Changeling Press

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In the mid 21st century, paranormal creatures have come out of the shadows. After the plagues of 2010, the human population has been decimated, but some still scream over racial purity -- and not just among the humans.

Roni Engelmann is a were-dog. Talk about your interracial relationship! Not only is she not a pure werewolf, but she's a crossbreed Chuskie -- offspring of a Siberian Husky and a Chihuahua. She's looking for love and isn't surprised to find it in a human. Who cares what she sleeps with? Except Corbin isn't human.

Corbin is a pure werewolf Alpha and heir to the richest pack in three states. He's also tired of being pursued by werewolf females for his money and his title. Pretending to be human and breaking tradition is the only way he sees of finding his dream Alpha Bitch. Who cares if he dates a were-dog?

Who cares? Their parents. This is so not *Romeo and Juliet*. You won't hear any Shakespearean whines or rhymes, but you may hear a whole lot of howls and growls.

Chapter One

Crack!

Roni's hand connected with her date's face. Teaching the guy not to get grabby made her hand hurt like hell, but the lesson was worth the bruising she'd have later.

The lust faded from the vampire's dark eyes. His jaw clenched in anger. "Wench! How dare you slap me?"

Roni laughed. The sound echoed through the trees outside her home. The moonlight made the vampire appear even paler than he had in the restaurant. Or maybe it was just shock. "Wench?" When had this guy died? Why had she chosen to go on a blind date with this geek? "This is the mid-21st century, pal. Nobody uses that word anymore. Another rule for this century is to keep your hands to yourself unless you're invited."

After the plague of 2010 humans had welcomed the paranormal into their world. At least most of them. Then again, there were some who just didn't belong in the world today, like this guy.

He threw his shoulders back, pointed his nose to the sky and straightened his old-fashioned coat. "You moonlit curs are all alike," he growled back. "A pack of teases."

Roni's annoyance turned to amusement. Cur? She bit her lip hard to hold back a snicker. Even the crickets chirping in the woods seemed to laugh at the archaic term. "I'm not going to justify that with a rebuttal, but I will leave you with some advice." She straightened her back in mocking nobility. "Hit a tanning salon. You might have more luck with the ladies if you didn't glow in the dark." Roni turned with dignity and walked inside the house, closing the door on a vicious string of French curses.

She leaned up against the cool wood and pushed her golden brown hair out of her eyes. "Dating pool -- fifteen. Roni -- zero and alone."

In exasperation she pushed away from the door, her high heels clicking on the hardwood floor. She stalked down the hallway to the living room and tossed her purse onto the overstuffed chair.

Her shoulders slumped. The house was dark and quiet. The smell of Ana's perfume lingered in the air. She kicked her black stilettos off into the corner. Losing four inches depressed her even more.

Roni flipped the wall switch on. Light flooded the living room and only illuminated her loneliness from the outside. She dropped her keys on the desk.

The note taped to her computer didn't surprise her. Rolling her eyes, she pulled the note off the monitor. Ana had been turned back when handwriting and manners counted, and the early training showed.

Roni,

Hope the date went well. You'll have to give me the nitty gritty when I return tomorrow evening. I'm at Jon's. If the date sucked (sorry for the pun <grin>) I have signed you up for an Internet dating site. Your login information is below. I don't expect you to find Mr. Right, but hopefully you could find Mr. Right Now. (Don't kill me. You love me!)

Ana

"Can't kill what's already dead, Ana, but I'd have fun trying." Roni dropped the note on her desk. She dragged her feet into the kitchen. "What the hell is it with vampires and 'sucking' jokes? They're not that funny." She pulled a bottle of red wine out of the pantry, blowing the dust off. The cloud descended on her head, and she sneezed. "What a surprise. Even my roommate thinks I'm desperate while she's out fucking feather boy."

Ana dated a half-angel, half-human crossbreed called a Nephylum. Jon was a surgeon and a nice guy. Roni almost envied her roommate. Ana had a steady boyfriend

-- someone to hold her when she was sad and someone to love her when she was lonely. The familiar green-eyed monster sat on Roni's shoulders and taunted her.

She brushed jealousy off and poured a glass of wine. Ana was the best friend she'd ever had. Roni was happy for her. She missed her company but couldn't be selfish.

Roni hung her head and walked to her bedroom where she changed into her silk nightie. She sat down on her bed, grabbed her book off the nightstand, and tried to read. When she realized the book was upside down Roni gave up and put it back. "Great. Another Saturday night with my hand down my pants."

She stood up, walked across her room, and felt a breeze under her nightie. She glanced at the mirror and saw a thin layer of brown fur and her tail peeking out from under the silk. "Nice. My tail is showing. I really am horny." Roni frowned at her reflection. "The bright side? At least I inherited my mother's Husky tail and not my father's Chihuahua whip cord." Roni wagged her tail, relishing the elegance of the brown and gray fur. Grinning at her vanity, she plopped down in the chair.

Locating the dating website was simple enough since Ana had saved it to Roni's Favorites. Damn meddling vampire.

Logging in, she found the website had already listed some matches for her. She pulled up the first profile.

Techno music blared from the speakers.

Roni clapped one hand over her ear and fumbled to find the elusive tiny button on the corner of her keyboard. "My kingdom for the mute button!" Silence blanketed the cottage once more. Her ears thanked her. "Strike one for this guy. Our taste in music doesn't match."

Roni studied obnoxious music boy's photo. He had short blond hair, thin wire-framed glasses, and a smile only his mother could love. Robert Dickerson was five foot eleven, one hundred and ninety pounds. Romantic and an accountant. "Accountant? If we were to have a date I'd get a math lesson." Roni smiled as she looked through the profile and read aloud. "'I've been told I'm romantic to a fault, always doting on the

woman in my life.'" Roni raised an eyebrow. "Romantic to a fault. Translation is, he's clingy, desperate, and the only romance he's had was with his mommy or his hand." She closed the profile and scrolled to the next one, realizing she enjoyed the excitement of the hunt for a mate, be he human or paranormal.

Oscar Hinojosa was a werewolf from the Bronx. Roni read his information with amusement. "'I would like a woman who will nurture me and love me for who I am,' he says. Meaning you want your mommy. No way, loser." With a click of the mouse she closed the window.

The next profile opened quickly. The man staring back at her was attractive, with brown eyes, short hair, and a square jaw. Tony Bibosa was six foot two, two hundred and ten pounds. Human and proud of it. "Oh, God. One of those." Roni rolled her eyes. "'My ideal woman is slender with a little extra junk in the trunk. No kids but the possibility for kids. She cannot smoke and cannot drink.'" Roni couldn't help but laugh. "You don't ask for much, do you? Translation is -- a woman who is twig thin, doesn't want any kids because he doesn't want her to lose her figure. I think not." Thankfully that was the end of the measly matches the website had found for her.

The three bad matches piqued Roni's curiosity. "What did Ana say about me in this profile?" She moved the mouse to the link that would take her to the profile Ana set up. "What the fuck is this?" Roni read through the profile with visions of a blonde vampire hanging from the ceiling fan. "Five foot seven? Try five foot five wearing my high heels." Roni ground her teeth together. "Chubalicious? I'll kill her. So not complimentary, Ana!" Butcher knives and duct tape danced like sugarplums in her mind. "Honey brown eyes? Who am I, Winnie the Pooh? Screw this." Roni hit the link that took her to the homepage of her personal profile, intending to correct the profile and exit. She saw another match had been found for her.

Curiosity made Roni move the mouse to the match link. She closed her eyes and prayed it wasn't another loser. Roni peeked an eye open. The picture staring back at her had her body trembling in lust. "Hello, baby!" Roni howled softly to herself.

Chiseled chin, piercing brown eyes, and a tumble of black hair didn't begin to describe the handsome and charismatic face of the man. Roni checked the profile again. Human, age thirty-three, who worked as an assistant to a general contractor. The dark tan indicated he was a hands-on kind of guy out in the sun and nature. She could easily imagine his lean and rangy body on display in a pair of well-worn jeans and tool belt. Yum.

She read the profile and tried not to drool on the keyboard. Corbin Thorne was six foot one, two hundred five pounds of work-built muscle. His profile read like a fantasy. "My ideal woman would be of any body type, any fur or hair color. The only thing I request is that she has a personality that I could potentially fall in love with. I am willing to relocate or pay for her to relocate closer to me, and she must love dogs."

Roni could feel her chair getting wet. What was a hunk like him doing on a dating service site? Any bitch would be willing to lift her tail for him if he were were-folk. What was with human females, anyway? Couldn't they see how gorgeous he was? Oh, right. There weren't that many anymore.

She continued to read. "I love moonlit walks on the beach, romantic steak dinners by the fire." She could almost swear she was dripping on the carpet. Beaches and steaks were her kind of date, clichéd though they were. The exotic nature of a human who sounded like a werewolf in his tastes was damn sexy. "Oh, boy. Tell me you like your sex on the furry side of life, handsome. Please? I love dogs. I am one!"

She emailed Tall, Dark, and Romantic before she could talk herself out of it. "You have my attention. Now you have my email. The ball is in your court." Staring at his picture, she could feel the heat radiating off her body. In full lust, Roni slid her hand between the blue lace of her panties and her sweating flesh.

Best-case scenario, she really wanted an Alpha, but those rare males willing and able to rule a pack were few and far between. Like coveted stud racehorses, they kept to their own circle of the wealthy, and the loveliest the pack could provide were at their disposal.

A mutt like Roni didn't qualify, but that didn't prevent her from dreaming. Could Corbin be an Alpha human? Did those exist? Well, why not? This was her fantasy, after all.

Corbin's eyes glittered in the moonlight of her fantasy. His breath smelled deliciously of their steak dinner, and his hand slid down her back to where her tail wagged from under her skirt. "I happen to find tails very sexy."

Roni saw herself kicking off her heels until she could nibble easily at his nipples right through his shirt. Her tongue flicked out to wet her lips, and she shuddered, lying back in the big desk chair. Her fingers busy, Roni imagined Corbin moaning and disarranging her hair until it fell around her ears like a blanket.

"No fair. I want those luscious tits." Like she would object to that. Right. Corbin took her lifted chest as permission and ripped off her shirt until it hung in tatters from her shoulders.

His work-roughened hands slid over her skin, tickling and teasing her nipples to hard peaks. His mouth, hot and firm, suckled her breasts until she thought she'd scream.

His mouth inched lower, doing impossibly hot things to her body. She hardly felt her own furiously working fingers anymore, so deep into her fantasy was she.

Roni was close to howling in pure ecstasy when her computer brought her out of her haze with the age-old phrase spoken in a robotic tone. "You've got mail."

"Of course," she groaned. "Oh, my." Her heart stopped. Tall, dark, and romantic had responded, setting a date for next Friday. "Oh, shit." Nervously, she looked around, not knowing exactly what she was looking for. "I have nothing to wear. I need to go shopping. Retail therapy to help my nerves. Yeah."

Roni jumped up and raced for the door. Grabbing her purse on the way, she stepped outside, then immediately ran back in as the cold night air pinched her almost naked nipples. With her back plastered against the cool wood door, Roni remembered she was still in her nightie. "What the hell was I thinking? I'll go shopping tomorrow. Now my only concern is what does a bitch wear to date a human?"

Chapter Two

Corbin sat in his Lexus hydrocar in front of his date's house, his fingers clenched in a white-knuckled grip on the steering wheel. He looked around at the ancient forest as if seeking an answer in the sighing of the wind through the oaks. The whole area surrounding the seventies-style house was straight out of the previous century, with large trees, neat flowerbeds, and real grass. Someone was obviously willing to get their hands dirty to keep up the display of middle-class prosperity. Real wealth like his father had as pack leader was rare indeed. Most people couldn't afford acres of land for the pack to run in, but many could afford the half-acre of land to aid in sustainable oxygen renewal with a few trees. Eco-awareness had come to the world with an ugly bang in 2020, when most of the oilfields dried up. What little was left was conserved ruthlessly, and that had started the whole world "going green." He patted his Lexus affectionately. It really wasn't that difficult to treat Mother Earth well when the alternative was very cold and dark.

"What the hell am I doing?" Corbin sighed heavily. "I can't date outside the pack. It's not allowed and never been heard of." He dropped his hands to his lap, rubbed them on his chinos and then put them back on the wheel. "I can't do this. My father wouldn't approve."

Visions of his father and the pack at one of the boring monthly meetings floated before his eyes. The memory of the unmated females' hungry stares helped Corbin decide and outweighed any anticipation of his father's ire.

"Why do I give a damn what my father says?" Corbin squeezed the steering wheel briefly as guilt gave one final gasping attempt before it died. He'd never had reason to blatantly disregard pack tradition and his father's wishes but the bitches of the pack were about as interesting as wet cardboard. "I'm just nervous... or am I

scared?" Nerves. It had to be nerves if he was talking to himself. "I don't know. I should just get this over with. I should tell her the truth."

He'd lied in his profile on the dating service, but, dammit, he didn't want to date another pure werewolf from his pack. All they wanted was a chance to be the mate of the most eligible bachelor in the largest pack in three states. Corbin wasn't a male to them. He was a title -- Heir to the Thornburn Pack.

He put his hand on the door release. "So why the fuck am I not getting out of the car?" An owl hooted laughter at him from the sighing trees. He hated to be the butt of jokes, and a blind date was the equivalent of asking the cosmos to shit on him. "Come on, Corbin. Are you an Alpha or are you a mouse?" He drew a deep, fortifying breath. "Woof fucking woof."

The front door opened and a woman walked out on the porch. Short and gorgeous stood on the porch wearing a pair of low-cut black leather pants with a shimmering soft dusky blue halter that draped around the neck with an oval cut-out showing just enough of her round, perky breasts to make his blood boil. The black leather mini-jacket did him in and presented a dichotomy of leather and silk sensuality. She smiled and walked down to meet him.

"Chubalicious, my ass. That woman is voluptuous." He had no hesitations about getting out of the car now. He did have some difficulties, however. Forgetting to take off his seat belt held him back a little. Fighting with the mechanism to unbuckle himself, he finally made it out of the death trap of a vehicle and met his date on the sidewalk next to the passenger side of his car.

For three seconds he lost himself in the biggest brown eyes he'd ever seen. Corbin forgot her name from the emails. He cleared his throat. "I'm Corbin, my lady. It's a pleasure to meet you."

Perfect white teeth flashed a cheerful smile. "It's nice to meet you, Corbin. I'm Roni." Roni looked down at his feet. "It's seems you've forgotten something."

He followed her gaze only to see that in his struggle with the seat belt he had lost one of his loafers. It was a wonder he hadn't noticed, but the girl had kept all his

attention. *Great image presentation, Mr. Heir to the Thornburn Pack.* In an attempt to save what was left of his dignity, he reached into his coat and pulled out a rainbow colored teddy bear with a bright pink bow. "I didn't know if you were allergic to flowers or candy."

Charmed, she cuddled the bear close, clearly enjoying the soft plush body until he envied the toy. It almost looked as if she began to melt right there on the sidewalk. "It's very cute. Thank you. So where are we off to tonight?"

"How do you like your steak?" Even a human like he pretended to be knew to take a werewolf out for real meat and not any sappy seafood or salad bar.

"Still mooing." Her chin lifted as if her response was a challenge. Maybe it was. For omnivores, humans could be squeamish.

"My kind of girl." Corbin opened the door for her in a display of old-world courtesy females still appreciated.

She looked up, her eyes glittered in the moonlight. "Not the final question of the evening but an important one. How do you like your potato?"

Once again Corbin found himself enthralled by her brown eyes, and this time the scent of leather teased his nose as well. He struggled to formulate a coherent answer. "Baked, with everything."

Her eyes lit with pleasure, and her smile widened with approval. "I think I'm in love."

Could an Alpha melt on the sidewalk in the moonlight? This she-wolf was a real kick in the gut. Corbin's mouth opened before his brain recovered from the urge to chase her into the woods. "As long as you're also in lust 'cause I am."

Roni's eye widened to the size of saucers. She didn't back up, which earned her kudos for courage on a blind date. Her lip didn't even curl into a were-bitch's snarl for male arrogance.

Embarrassment flooded his face and soul. He probably stood out like an aircraft beacon in the darkness. *Way to go, Mr. Sophistication. You've been hanging around construction sites too long.* "Did I say that out loud?"

Her reply was a soft “Yeah.” Incredibly, her lips twitched into a mysterious smile worthy of the Mona Lisa. Maybe he hadn’t screwed up the entire evening. “It’s okay. It was cute, and the possibilities are there.” She slid into the passenger seat as if she owned the evening and buckled the full-body restraints required of all passengers.

Elated, Corbin closed the door and refrained from skipping around the front of the car to the driver’s side. Sliding into the seat, he suavely put his seatbelt on without strangling himself and surreptitiously put on his shoe. He’d do his best to repair his slip of the tongue, but at least she’d subtly let him know he’d not blown the evening completely. “How about we dine and get to know each other first?”

Mischief sparkled in her dark eyes, and her tone insinuated much more. “Isn’t it stupid that we’re going to busy the only orifice that we can legally be interested in publicly?”

His brow furrowed. Orifices? Was she really implying that he wasn’t the only one with erotic designs on the brain? “Is that a trick question?”

The sexy confidence in her eyes was breathtakingly different from the average werewolf ladies of his acquaintance. Roni was a bitch who knew who and what she was with no shame. “No, darling. Take it as a glimpse of the future.”

His hopes of at least chasing the sexy lady around a bedroom increased exponentially. “You’re beautiful and sassy. I think we’re going to have a great time.” Corbin stomped on the accelerator and sped down the street to the sound of her laughter.

At the steak house, Roni and Corbin listened to the waitress run through her opening lines. When she pointed out the salad bar Roni stopped her by raising one hand, palm out. “I did not climb to the top of the food chain to eat vegetables.”

Corbin thought he was going to die of either laughter or suffocation from trying to hold the laugh back. Instead he choked and coughed politely into his napkin. “Excuse me. We’ll have the special.”

The annoyed waitress frowned and brushed her feathery hair, identifying her as at least part Nephylum, back over her shoulder. "I understand, ma'am. I'll be back with your order shortly." He thought he heard her mutter, "Carnivores."

Soon the waitress returned, fully composed, with two plates. T-bone steaks just brown enough to sizzle but still bleeding sided with two mounds of butter, sour cream, bacon, cheese, and chives topping what Corbin hoped was a baked potato. The scent was enough to make any were-folk howl with pleasure.

Roni had no lies to restrain her. "Pardon me while I forget that I'm a lady. Cover me. I'm going in." She picked up her fork and knife without modesty and started slicing.

She really was the woman of his dreams. Like a good carnivore, she was unashamedly all about the meat. Yet she'd had the courtesy to beg forgiveness of her supposedly human date. Corbin squirmed, caught in a trap of his own making and hating his lie. Now for the ultimate test. Could she handle his favorite fantasy? "Here's another question for you. What do you think of roller coasters?"

Her fork paused at her luscious lips, meat dripping deliciously down the metal. Her brown eyes twinkled with delight and challenged him silently. "My favorite is the Aneurysm at the theme park on Evergreen."

"Where do you like to sit?" Corbin leaned closer and watched her put that beautiful chunk of meat into her mouth. Corbin's vision blurred as he fantasized about other meat she could put between those full red lips. She chewed the meat so seductively he thought he was going to come right there at the table.

She swallowed the steak and bared her teeth in full challenge. "The front, where I can scream."

His dick was so hard he could have hammered nails with it. Challenge accepted. He had to challenge her back. "The roller coaster won't be the only thing making you scream tonight."

Even the Mona Lisa didn't have a smile that mysteriously enticing. "Promises, promises."

Corbin shivered as her foot slid slowly up his leg and settled between his thighs. When exactly had she taken her shoes off? Corbin immediately forgot the question, and his dinner, as she tickled his balls with her toes.

Roni's smile was feral and enticing. "I think I'm going to enjoy a wild ride, aren't I?"

* * *

The crystal tumbler hit the wall paneling and shattered into a thousand sparkling shards. Duke took a few calming breaths and stared up at the holo image of his deceased wife. He missed her every day. How would she have handled this? The news was so unexpected. "My son has a date with a *what?*"

The informant blanched at the dangerous tone in his boss's voice, but stood his ground. "A Chuskie, sir. She's a mutt. I dated her last year and recognized them in the restaurant."

Duke stalked over to pour himself a fresh whiskey from the decanter, his lupine eyes dark with thought. The pickings weren't that slim among the unmated bitches of the pack, but Duke understood Corbin's disgust. The ladies, no matter how beautiful and accomplished, made no secret of their interest in wealth and power. Even he, graying at the temples but still in shape, felt like a prime piece of beef for sale. Still, a mutt was an unacceptable substitute, even for a one-night stand. "I do not approve of my son dating a mutt. I will stop this. Go."

The informant scurried out like a were-rat with the keys to a recycling plant. Duke made a note to himself to fire him on the next available pretext. He didn't trust spies, even when he himself benefited. No one could guarantee another with deeper pockets and a need to know about Duke's business couldn't buy the spy's information.

The fine, aged whiskey failed to warm Duke's aching heart. He stared into the darkness outside the window of his office. He wanted his son to rule the pack, but not yet. Corbin was strong and willful. He needed time to make his mistakes and settle down. All Duke could do was pray the mutt wouldn't hold his son's interest.

Chapter Three

Corbin smiled to himself as he led his amorous date into the roller coaster's first car. He had no defense against the one-two punch of her perfume and the musk of a were-bitch in heat. Not that he intended to try. Was this how all the were-bitches acted around humans? Somehow he doubted it. This was all Roni.

The lady in question eagerly hung onto the restraint bar with a huge grin on her face. She kept him completely off balance. At dinner she'd managed a perfect combination of ladylike politeness combined with discreet seduction, all overlaid with a were-bitch's supreme confidence in the male she'd chosen. That wasn't new. All females, once they'd selected a male, were aggressive in their seductions. The new part was Roni acting like a big kid, full of excitement at the old-fashioned amusement and disdaining the more sophisticated entertainments available. She crooked her finger at Corbin. "Come on, Corbin. They can't start until you're restrained."

Obedience Training 101 -- Come when the lady calls. Corbin slid into the plastic seat and pulled the iron bar down securely. "Oh, baby. You're making me come with just one finger."

Roni rewarded Corbin's lame joke with a peal of laughter. "This is the best date ever!" She shot him a look under her lashes. "I don't ever want the fun to end."

That was an invitation if ever there was one. "Me either." The words slipped out before he could censor himself. Man, he was sunk. All he had to do was continue to hide the fact he was really a werewolf, and that would be difficult if she lived up to the promises of her seduction. He'd have to fight for self-control and not shift to lupine while they made love.

The car rumbled forward, and the first drop loomed in front of them. All Corbin could see was starry skies and blackness below. His heart raced, and he clamped down on the urge to howl.

Roni had no such restraints to keep her from peeling out the wildest howl he'd ever heard. "Woo-woo-wooo!" She threw back her head and sang to the moon.

The carriage shot them down into the blackness of a dark cave. At least Corbin assumed it was a cave. He couldn't see the stars or the moon but he could see the luminous red nature of Roni's eyes. She looked like the legendary demon dogs. Wait. Her mother was a Siberian Husky werewolf. Their eyes turned red in low light. His heart raced faster, and adrenaline shot through his system. He'd howl in a few seconds if he didn't do something, and his body reacted before his conscious mind thought up a plan. His arms clamped around Roni's, and he yanked her closer for an adrenaline-laced kiss.

She returned the kiss in kind, smelling of excitement and a trace of fear from the ride. Her lips worked beneath his, nibbling on his bottom lip with tiny nips both painful and arousing.

They were still locked at the mouth like two teens with stuck braces when the ride ended. The attendant chuckled when he lifted the restraint bar and whispered the name of the nearest hotel. "Get a room, you two."

Roni released Corbin's lips and giggled. She tugged on his hand. "C'mon, handsome. Your car is this way." Then she let go of his hand and ran. The wink over her shoulder invited him for a short chase.

He knew where the damn car was. Barely. Not that it mattered. She couldn't run fast in those heels and presumably she left them on to let "the human" catch her. He laughed and loped easily after Roni.

She let him catch her at the rear bumper of his hydrocar. Her hand reached up to grasp his head and pull him down for a lingering kiss.

Corbin wrapped his arms around her and lifted Roni's butt until it rested on the trunk of his car and equalized their heights.

Roni responded by wrapping her legs around his waist. The heat of her arousal smacked his nose like a fist. "We need a room. And a bed. Now."

Those panted demands acted like the strongest aphrodisiacs known to lupine kind. Corbin stroked her whole body from breast to hip and back. "Yes. Your place is closest." It was a lie. His home was closer, but the last thing he wanted was for Duke to see or get involved. She was his, and he didn't want to share even her face.

Roni dove for the passenger side and had her seatbelt on before he could even get in. Her big brown eyes flashed with that demonic light once more in the streetlamps. Her fingertips stroked his zipper, but she couldn't reach any further. "Damn the laws that keep me locked away from you. I'd suck on your cock the entire way home."

The aforementioned body part stood at rigid attention like a soldier called to duty. Corbin's mind blanked as all the blood rushed out of his brain. "Yes, ma'am. I'll drive as fast as I can."

They made it to her place in less than fifteen minutes. They didn't make it to the porch. He tackled Roni on the lawn, and clothes scattered while they rolled on the grass, locked at the lips.

Her shirt and bra didn't survive the initial rip. No doubt her leather pants would be somewhat the worse for a night on a dewy lawn. Roni didn't seem to care. She threw them off with abandon while Corbin kissed anything he could reach.

His clothes fared no better. Roni was so aroused she grew a light coat of brown and gray fur, and her feathery tail wagged happily while her claws shredded his clothes off him. Good thing he kept a spare set in the car in case he had to travel on a moment's notice. Driving home in rags would be sure to attract unwanted attention. Wanted attention came when Roni's lips found his aching dick. Coherent thought flitted away on wings of the night.

Roni hummed happily as soon as he grabbed her hair. Her fingers cupped his balls and gently fondled. Her tongue expertly provided just the right amount of pressure.

Corbin moaned with a heartfelt need to express his enjoyment. The heat of her mouth and the strokes on his balls were too much to take. He had to say something or the evening would end too quickly. Hell, he didn't want being with Roni to ever end. Was it love? Nah. Couldn't be. "Baby, if you don't slow down, I'll..." He couldn't think of a polite human's way to say it.

Another chuckle teased his cock, but she let go with a soft pop. She lay back in the grass, bringing her legs out of what seemed an impossible position, like a yogi from the Far East. "Then let's do something worthwhile in the meantime. My implants are up to date. Come and get me. Or, in this case, vice versa -- get me and come."

No further invitation needed. Corbin damn near fell on top of her, catching himself with his arms in a pushup maneuver. "One of these days I'll take my time with you, I swear it."

Roni laughed and pulled his face to her breasts. "Another day. Yeah, later. That sounds good. For now though, fuck me in the moonlight. I need to howl."

His dick homed in and plunged without conscious thought on his part. Good thing. The way she clamped her legs around his hips and pulled him in deeper drove him crazy. Sure, he had to arch his back like a feline because she was so short, but who cared? All Corbin's self-control was centered on not changing -- no fur, no tail, no teeth. No matter how badly he wanted to flip her on her stomach and make her his in true Alpha fashion. *Stay human. Stay. Human. Stay. Sit. Stay. Beg. Oh, God, how I want to beg.*

Roni matched him stroke for stroke, and she had no restraints about fur, tails and teeth. She bared her fangs, and her claws ripped what remained of his shirt to mere tatters. Her nose lengthened but her eyes remained big and brown. Odd-looking, but strangely beautiful. Her howl, half lupine half "talk," rang out. "Woo-wooo!"

Corbin, unable to stop himself, felt his balls contract. His final thread of control snapped in an instant. He came. And came. His sac emptied. He thought he'd turn inside out until his heart seemed to lodge deep inside Roni. Oh, yeah, he was in love.

Dammit. He was in trouble.

* * *

Roni sat in the overstuffed chair and chewed on a manicured nail. "I fucked up. I had the best sex of my life last night with a human." The nail broke. She stared at it stupidly, still grinning about their night rolling around on the grass tangled together. Yes, with a human. "Fuck, Dad is going to shit a brick."

She smiled at the thought, considering the brick would be bigger than her father, but he stood a good chance of throwing it at her. Roni frowned. Her dad might be tiny but he had the arm of a major leaguer and the temper of a Tasmanian Devil.

"What does a girl do with no place to turn?" She picked up the vid keyboard and punched up her mother's URL. "Hello? Mom?"

Her mother's face on the screen winked with amusement. "What have you done, my darling?"

Chagrin mixed with a sigh. "Damn, Mom. Are you psychic or something? What makes you think anything is wrong?"

The bottom of a mug covered the camera's view for an instant before her mother's face reappeared. Katriena didn't function without her ubiquitous coffee. "I'm a mother, and you're calling me at dawn."

Roni backpedaled and wondered at her sanity. Calling Mommy like a wet-behind-the-ears pup? What had she been thinking? "Can't a daughter call and have phone coffee with her mother?"

"Not at eight in the morning. Spill it, Veronica." Ouch. The full name would be next. Roni wasn't getting out of talking to her now.

Roni winced and took a deep breath. "I-had-sex-with-a-human-last-night."

Katriena didn't hesitate a second. "Okay. Was it good sex?"

"It was mind-blo... Mother!" The heat rushed to Roni's cheeks. You just didn't discuss the intimate details with your mother. Did you?

"What? Your father hasn't been giving me any lately." The laughter in Katriena's voice made it clear she was teasing her only daughter. Figured. Katriena had always been the coolest mom in the neighborhood, willing to destroy her tidy home for a tea party with a gaggle of giggling girls.

The image of Katriena and her father rolling around on the lawn of their perfect suburban home right in front of the shocked neighbors swam before her eyes. Not an image any offspring wanted to think about. "Mother! Please!"

"Come on, Roni, let me live vicariously through you. I'm frustrated." Now Katriena was openly sniggering. She was enjoying embarrassing Roni.

"Mom, please. I don't need to know this. Besides, Dad's a Chihuahua. What kind of pleasure could you possibly get out of that?" Curiosity did kill the cat, didn't it? Well, the titillation distracted her mother from why Roni had called. Sort of.

"Hey, he may be only a few inches tall but I assure you it's not his feet holding him up."

"Oh, God, Mom!" Roni shrank in her chair in disgust. The distraction was worse than the original problem. She gave up. "Can we get back to my problem, please?"

Her mother giggled. "So tell me about your human."

"Well, he is tall, dark, and seriously romantic. He took me to a steak house for dinner. Then we went on a roller coaster ride where the foreplay was so completely... Oh, good God." Roni shuddered just remembering. "We were so hot for each other we made love on the lawn. Then when we finally made it through the front door, he laid me down on the bed. We -- you know --"

"Fucked is the word you're looking for, dear."

"Mother! Anyway it was slow and sensual at first then he pounded me like a two-cent hooker through four orgasms." Roni squirmed and got wet all over again. "Daddy is not going to like this. What am I going to do?"

"Do you love him?" Typical question and not unexpected. Katriena always got to the heart of the matter.

"Mom, I just had my first date with him last night." Roni stopped. "Why do I all of a sudden feel like such a slut?" She'd fuck Corbin again in a heartbeat with no shame. A human had brought the daughter of the Alpha of the Engelmann pack low.

"Because you had sex on the first date." Her mother could barely finish her sentence before Roni heard her father's booming voice in the background.

"She did what?"

"Eduardo, shush, I'm talking to Roni," her mother called back. "Don't worry, honey, your father will come to accept a human in the family."

Roni cringed when she heard her father shout, "I would never!"

"Baby, I've got to go deal with your father. Call me later." Katriena's voice remained calm and confident. She'd managed her volatile mate for many years.

Roni could have sworn she heard the brick hit the floor as her mother hung up, cutting off a string of cursing in Spanish, which she thought really odd seeing how her father was born in Indiana.

"Well, fuck, now what do I do?" Roni thought she heard a higher power laughing when Ana barreled through the front door and flew into the chair practically on top of Roni.

"So how did it go? Tell me everything." Ana straightened out her legs so that both of them could sit comfortably in the oversized black velvet chair.

"It went fine." Roni hedged automatically with Ana, who violated anyone's privacy with complete disregard. Nothing was sacred to a vampire who'd seen it all in her un-life.

"Oh, don't be cryptic. What happened?" Ana, who used her position as lifelong friend ruthlessly, wasn't above begging, either. She wheedled like a kid denied a treat.

Roni sighed dramatically and refused to look into Ana's bright blue eyes. Vampires had an ability to mesmerize, supposedly to make hunting fresh blood easier. "If I tell you, will you leave me alone?"

Ana knew the old game well and kept dipping her head into Roni's view, pretending to use her "mojo" on Roni. "Of course not, but would you tell me anyway?"

Trapped and amused simultaneously, Roni shrugged her shoulders at Ana's pestering. "I had sex with a human last night." Once again, Roni spit the words out like she'd committed a crime.

"You got laid?" The high-pitched squeal that reverberated through the house nearly shattered Roni's eardrums. Ana clapped one hand over her heart and pretended to faint over the arm of the chair.

Exasperated at her best friend's antics, Roni folded her arms. Ana was the most hyperactive drama queen, dead or alive. "Yes, I got laid. Did you miss the part where it was with a human?"

Exhibiting perfect muscle control, Ana flowed upright and stole Roni's cooling cup of tea from the side table. "So? I'm sleeping with a bird-slash-human. What's your point?"

Roni looked at Ana cross-eyed. "You know, Ana, not all of us are lucky enough to fall in love with a Nephylum. Damn angel-human crossbreeds keep vampires up way past their bedtime."

"Yeah, I know. Isn't he a peach?" Ana's happy sigh and soft tones happened only when she spoke of Jon. Something about her Nephylum lover calmed Ana and softened the cynicism out of her blue eyes.

"He's something." Roni personally found the calm, soft-spoken surgeon soporific. Like all of his kind, he was a vegetarian. Hanging with him was like living with a particularly ascetic monk as far as Roni was concerned.

Ana nudged Roni back to reality. "So tell me, how did you meet this guy? What's his name? How was the sex? Is he well hung?"

"Would you slow down for a minute, you energizer vampire?"

"Sorry, please continue." Ana's eyes crossed and she sat very nobly with her hands in her lap and her nose slightly turned toward the ceiling. Her perfect blonde hair fell down her back in a ruler straight line. She did haughty very well when she chose.

Roni tried again. "His name is Corbin. I met him online..."

"You used the dating site I signed you up for?" Another squeal from Ana shattered Roni's eardrums.

"Yes, I did." Roni shook her finger at her friend seriously. "For one, Ana, I am not chubalicious. For two, I am only five foot five with my heels on."

Ana grinned, her fangs gleaming brightly. "You'd be taller if you had sex upside down."

Beleaguered, Roni rolled her eyes to the coffered ceiling at the joking suggestion. She stole the cup back from Ana and drank the cold tea for fortification. "Nowhere near the point I was trying to make. Thank you for the Internet assistance, but would you butt out?"

"Why, when I'm so good at butting in?"

Roni began to feel crowded and trapped. "You're impossible." She slid out from underneath Ana, went to her room and locked the door in Ana's face.

The vampire pounded on the door but didn't break the oak. "Aww, but Roni! I'll be quiet. Please come back and finish your story. You can't just leave me hanging like this!"

"Yes, I can, and I did," Roni shouted through the door. "Don't you have a coffin to go to, you meddling vampire? It's after sunrise."

"I thought it was bright in here." Ana played the ditz very well when it suited her but in reality she was old enough as a vampire to be able to withstand sunlight for short periods of time. She also slept on a huge four-poster bed, not in a coffin.

Roni heard Ana's bedroom door close. She breathed a sigh of relief, knowing she'd have about twelve hours before Ana renewed her assault on her privacy. "The only thing stopping me from hanging that woman from the ceiling by a meat hook is the fact that I'm so short. But then again, isn't that what ladders are for?"

Chapter Four

"You wished to see me, Father?" At precisely nine in the morning, Corbin walked into his father's office.

Duke turned from his contemplation of Corbin's mother's holo picture.

"I do not appreciate your choice in friends." Duke's tone was cold, and his words were cryptic.

The chill in his tone iced Corbin's heart. If they had been in lupine form, Duke and he would already be circling and snarling. Damn, he didn't want to challenge Duke, who was a fine and responsible pack Alpha. "What, may I ask, are you talking about?"

One side of Duke's mouth twisted upward in a half-smile that acknowledged he was dealing with another born Alpha. "I heard that you had a date the other night?"

Damn. Caught. Brazening it out might be best. "If you must know, yes, I did have a date." Memories of Roni caused Corbin's heart to flutter. "She is beautiful, funny -- in a nutshell, she is just great."

"She is a mutt." Duke spat the words out like he would bad fish.

Corbin blinked in surprise. Duke rarely used such derogatory race-related terms. "Excuse me?"

"She is a cross breed and -- of all things -- part Chihuahua and part Husky." Duke went for his private bar and poured himself a well-watered drink. It was business hours, and Duke prided himself on never taking advantage of his position to goof off. "Look, son. The mixed races can be very beautiful and enticing. I just don't want you losing your position as my heir because of a pretty mutt."

"How do you know all this about Roni?" Corbin clenched his fists and ground his teeth. How dare his father pry into his personal life this way and then judge the one person that Corbin could see a future with?

"One of her ex-boyfriends works for me." Duke stared him down. "Being the loyal employee that he is, he let me know that my son is dating a mutt."

A red haze covered Corbin's eyesight. He could read between the lines. Not only was Duke snooping but another employee was spying on Corbin. He slammed his fists on Duke's desk and pinned his father's dark brown eyes with his own. "It is none of your business who I date. It is none of these bastards' business who I date." Corbin growled to emphasize his point. "If you don't like it, too bad. Get the fuck over it." Corbin straightened, turned on his heels and stomped out the door without waiting for a response.

"I will not allow this, Corbin! I will stop this no matter what it costs me!" Duke's shout easily carried through the thick wood of the door.

Corbin leaned against the door of his father's office and noticed the smirking and whispering employees walking by on their way to some job. Great. Whoever the spy was, he was also a gossip. The whole damn company knew about Roni. The most sympathetic of Corbin's allies would automatically assume Corbin was -- what was that old-fashioned term? Oh, yeah. Slumming. No matter what, this was the kind of conflict that usually ended with two Alphas battling it out in the dueling ground on pack lands next full moon. "Now what do I do?"

* * *

"Ana, what the fuck are you still doing here?" Roni walked into the kitchen where she found Ana sitting on the tile counter having a tall goblet of blood. Deliveries of blood from special supply houses ensured the local vampires didn't make meals of their neighbors.

The perky blonde, fresh from her daytime snooze, flipped her ponytail back. Her blue eyes were alight with cheerful good humor and a touch of mischief. "Chill out. I'm waiting for Jon."

Roni wrung her hands and glanced nervously at the clock. Corbin would arrive within a half hour for their next date. "You know, if Jonny-bird is not going to be on time for your dates, I think you should find a boyfriend a little more punctual and a little less feathery."

Ana rattled her ice cubes and grinned indulgently at Roni. The toothy smile of a vampire could be intimidating, but Roni was too used to Ana to feel any concern. "Listen, Crazy, he got off work late. I'll be out of your hair in about twenty minutes."

Knowing Roni's luck, Ana would still be there when Corbin arrived. Ana had made it clear she was curious to meet the guy who'd managed to not only get into Roni's bed but also conned Roni into a second date. "Unfortunately, you won't be out of my hair until you die."

Wrinkling her nose, Ana played along with the old game of death threats when Roni couldn't think of a way to squash Ana's enthusiasm. "I'm already dead."

"Don't threaten me with an eternity dealing with you." Roni turned and walked out of the kitchen. She returned to her bathroom to finish her makeup. She couldn't explain why she was so worried about how she looked. Corbin was just coming over for dinner and conversation. For the fifth time, she applied her makeup, trying to make it look as natural as possible.

"Thinking about a career change?" Ana lounged in the doorway of the bathroom.

"What?"

"You look like you could be the lead singer of Kiss." Ana smiled. "Would you like me to help?"

"Would you like to die a second time?" Roni tried another empty death threat. Cripes, her hands shook while she applied her mascara. She probably would put an eye out in a minute.

"Sorry, Ms. Snooty." Ana just stared at Roni. "What is your problem, anyway?"

"I'm nervous. I have a lot of stuff on my mind." Roni gave up and put the mascara down.

"What your parents said?" Ana was all sympathy for the uncomfortable vid call and subsequent fight between Roni and her parents. "Ugly words, ugly feelings."

Roni's shoulders slumped. Her heart still ached, and half the reason she wore more makeup than usual was to hide the puffiness from the crying jag after her parents had disconnected. "More specifically my dad's words. Who knew he was prejudiced against humans?" Roni picked up a lipstick and then put it back down without applying it. "Mom was okay, but she's got to live with Dad. She couldn't exactly stand firmly on my side, just referee the worst of it."

"Do you realize that you are a grown woman and your parents have no say in what you do with your life?" Ana always made a good point. It still irritated Roni.

"Yes, you dead busybody, I realize I am a grown woman." Roni growled at her reflection in the mirror. "I just don't want my choice in men to come between my parents and I."

The doorbell bonged Pachelbel's Canon. Ana looked behind her. "Your parents love you. They'll come around to love whomever you love." She started to walk away. "I'll get the door, you de-clown."

Roni stared at herself in the mirror. Her mascara had clumped, and her eyeshadow resembled that of some Egyptian goddess. "Why does she have to be right?" She washed her face. "Fine, no makeup it is."

Ana's high-pitched laughter carried through the house.

Roni's heart sank. "Oh, God, what is she doing?" Terrified of what Ana would do to poor Corbin, Roni raced to the front door.

Ana was leaning up against the wall and giggling. Tears slid down her face, she was laughing so hard.

Corbin stood on the porch, a shocked look in his dark eyes at the hysterical blonde. The cause of Ana's amusement was a stuffed black and white cow cradled in his arm. He clutched a grocery bag in his other hand.

Roni's face flooded with embarrassment and sympathy for Corbin. He looked so adorably confused. Roni's heart plopped at his booted feet. "Corbin, I'm so sorry. Please come in." For good measure, Roni kicked Ana in the shin.

Corbin stepped over the threshold, giving the still softly snickering vampire a wide berth.

Roni sighed and plastered on a cheerful smile. She didn't blame Corbin much. After all, Roni had taken all her life to get used to her vampire friend's insane ways. "Please have a seat in the living room and I'll be right with you after I kil... I mean get rid of her."

Corbin winked as he turned and walked down the hallway. A soft "Moo!" from the cow punctuated his turn into the living room.

Of course, that sent Ana into another giggling fit.

So much for dignity and grace. Roni shook Ana gently by the arm. "Can I please ask what the hell is wrong with you?"

Ana wiped tears from her eyes and straightened, but her lips twitched as if she were on the verge of hysteria at any moment. "You have to tell me why he is holding a stuffed cow."

"I don't know yet." Roni breathed a sigh of relief when she saw Jon's rattletrap converted Corvette pull into the drive. "Oh, look, it's Jon. Bye." Roni pushed Ana out the door and shut it on her heels.

Ana yelled through the door. "Can I have my purse, please?"

Roni yanked Ana's purse off the hallway table, opened the door, tossed the Prada bag at the blonde's head and slammed the door shut.

"I love you, Roni! You'll tell me later, right?" Ana shouted through the door with a giggle. A minute later Jon's Corvette putted out of the driveway.

Roni wanted to crawl into the nearest crack in the wall but pride forced her to march down the hall to the living room as if nothing ever ruffled a hair on her head.

Corbin stood in the living room with a bemused smile still on his gorgeous face. The cow held court on top of two steaks on her coffee table. "So, that's Ana, huh?"

"I'm so sorry about that. She's an undead annoyance, but she is my undead annoyance and has been for as long as I care to remember. Can't seem to get rid of her." Roni ran an exasperated hand through her hair to emphasize her frustration.

He frowned. "Have you tried?"

"Yeah, but she's like a vampiric bloodhound that followed me home one day. I've dropped her off on the side of many highways but she always seems to find her way back." Roni grinned. "Seriously, she babysat me when I was a puppy. Now that I'm grown, we're roommates and best friends."

"She sounds great."

"I'll leave you to your illusions." She couldn't help staring at the stuffed cow sitting on top of the two steaks Corbin had brought.

He caught her gaze, pressed the cow's stuffed hoof, and it started mooing. "Still mooing, just like your steaks."

Instantly, Roni turned to mush. The best she could do was restrain a squeal. "That is so cute."

He pressed the soft stuffed bovine into her arms.

She put her nose in the micro-fiber skin of the cow and nuzzled. He was so nice not to bring her dying vegetation or fattening candy. "Thank you so much, Corbin."

"You're very welcome, beautiful." His smile melted her heart. He grabbed up the steaks. "Point me to the grill and I'll start dinner."

Roni walked him through the kitchen to the back deck and introduced him to the solar-charged grill. She'd already arranged partially cooked potatoes, onions, and common seasonings on the outdoor kitchen prep surface. She and the cow sat down to watch a male perform the ancient rituals of outdoor grilling.

After dinner Corbin and Roni curled up together in the overstuffed chair in the living room, staring at the fire. The conversation she'd had with her parents weighed heavily on her mind, and Corbin looked just as pensive.

"My dad thinks you're no good for me." Corbin's comment sliced through the silence like a hot knife through butter, startling Roni out of her thought coma.

"Funny -- my dad says the same thing." Roni sighed. Corbin was rich. She'd figured that much out by the fancy hydrocar. The few humans who had massive credit were the most vocal about racial purity.

Corbin kissed her nose. "I don't care -- do you?"

Roni shook her head. She relaxed and snuggled closer to Corbin. "Not a half-credit. What is it with parents and their inability to stay out of our lives?"

His brows knit together, and his look became fierce. "I don't know. My dad has become overbearing. He thinks I should date and marry inside our p... social circle."

"My dad thinks the same thing." Roni frowned, remembering what her father had said about Corbin. Humans were not "dangerous cockroaches that should be exterminated on sight."

"I don't care what my father thinks. He could fall out of a tree, sprout wings and fly, and I still wouldn't care." Corbin leaned in, brushing his lips against her cheek as he spoke.

"I care about what my father thinks, but most times I just don't pay attention." Roni finished her sentence with his lips pressed lightly to hers. Any sensible thoughts flew out the window into the night.

"Fuck what our parents think." Corbin pressed his attention further, sending her nerves into overdrive. For a human, he certainly knew how to dominate and control a were-bitch's heat.

Roni shivered with both anticipation and the naughtiness of their socially unacceptable behavior. Okay, so they were both breaking the rules, dating outside their species. Big deal. Isolationism and misunderstanding had led to the paranormals being shoved into the shadows for centuries. Now humans needed her people, and she was happy to bridge the gap with Corbin. "No, fuck me." Roni permitted Corbin to shove her onto the rug.

With aching slowness, Corbin pulled down the zipper of her minimalist jumpsuit, designed to hug every curve of her body. She'd bought the jumpsuit with Corbin in mind, and he seemed to appreciate the effort on his behalf. His lips followed

the zipper's slow trail down, licking and nibbling every inch revealed. "Did I mention how much I love this suit you sprayed on?"

Roni gasped and wriggled beneath him. The tiny bites and soothing licks, moving slowly down to her dripping pussy, made the anticipation increase to unimaginable levels. Most guys hopped on with minimal attention to her needs and rode her like a racehorse doing the two-minute mile. Not Corbin! The human was a master of the slow, sensual lovemaking most women dreamed of. "You're showing me just fine."

Corbin chuckled softly at her moaned answer. He continued to pull the zipper down past her hip joint, but stopped its progress midway to her knee. There, his lips worked their way to the soft flesh on the inside of Roni's thigh. "Open for me, baby."

Obediently, Roni spread herself before him, helplessly caught in her need for his tongue or his cock. She didn't give a rat's ass, as long as she got relief from the rumbling volcano inside her. She could feel her skin heating, knowing her fur was showing and unable to stop it. She just prayed her shaved pussy would be enough to keep the virtually hairless human aroused. "Corbin..."

Her zipper slid down to her knee, exposing more of her flesh. Corbin's hot mouth attacked her pussy like he was a hungry predator. His sensual hum vibrated up her entire body.

Her delighted shudders echoed his hum, and her entire focus narrowed to how his tongue scraped across her swollen clit, and his chin ground into her flowing pussy. One of her hands crept downward and pulled apart her labia to give him full access.

Corbin responded to her silent plea by delving even deeper into his treat. If she'd been an ice cream cone he'd have been swirling his tongue to relish every bit, fueling a thousand fantasies of every woman in view. As it was, he was all hers, and he was a master at his art.

Roni had no warning. Her body stilled only for a second, an eternity of waiting before she exploded. Her back arched, and she clawed the rug to hang on to sanity. Roni screeched his name, helpless and caught in the force of her orgasm.

Her human lover wasted no time. He knelt upright and wiped his chin of her juices with an evil grin of triumph. Had he been a werewolf, such an expression would have been a serious challenge to her as a born Alpha Bitch. Then, he ripped her new jumpsuit to shreds with his bare hands.

The loss Roni counted as a small one. She'd buy another. She restrained herself from the urge to go completely furry and demand a chase in the woods. Poor primate that he was, he'd never scent her out, much less catch her and tame her as an Alpha Male claimed his mate. What a shame. He came so close to perfection, Roni almost howled in despair.

Corbin closed his eyes for a moment and shuddered. He bit his lip and took a deep breath. His dark eyes opened, and he grabbed her ankles. Before Roni could even squeak, he put her feet on his shoulders and hauled her bodily across the carpet until his cock nestled against her still throbbing pussy. "C'mere!"

The Chuskie in her obeyed before the thinking woman caught on. Roni blessed her daily sit-ups and came upward to put her arms around his neck. Seamlessly, she slid down on his cock and fell backwards toward the carpet.

Corbin's strong arms saved her from a nasty bump on the head and gently lowered her back now that he was firmly entrenched inside her. Again, he shuddered, perhaps to avoid coming too soon. He put his hands on her thighs as his brace. "Ready, baby?"

Unable to speak, Roni nodded and grabbed the carpet once more. She'd be at his mercy, and unless she wanted a serious rug burn on the parts not still covered by the remains of her jumpsuit, she had to hang on tight.

The first thrust rocked her back into orgasm. Roni clawed the carpet. Again and again, each thrust shoved her further across the Oriental rug. Ana was going to kill her, but Roni didn't give a royal damn. She howled her lover's name. "Cor-wor-wor-woo-woo!" God, Roni hoped she didn't sound like an idiot.

Corbin's breath came out in harsh, ragged gasps. He followed her in their progress across the room, and the sounds emanating from deep in his chest were almost

barks. She'd heard humans could make those sounds, but they were doubly erotic coming from Corbin's throat. He gasped out, "Your tail! Your tail! It's tickling my ass! Oh. My. God!" The last of his thrusts was so deep and hard it seemed to almost break her pelvic bone.

That was the ultimate for her. Roni screamed and came again in waves. The blood rushed to her ears and made her temporarily deaf. If he called her name, she never heard it. The vision of her tail sweeping between his legs, caressing his balls and ass did her in. She decided to never laugh and come simultaneously again. *The orgasm wins, but you can't breathe.*

Apparently, the squeezing of her pussy combined with the eroticism of her tail on his nether regions into one massive orgasm. His face contorted to the half-pained-half-ecstatic rigidity of a male emptying his life into her. In an amazing feat of pure strength and willpower, he reached down and pulled her onto his lap as he knelt upright.

Roni felt every pump of his cock's explosions. Unable to bear losing one moment of the sensation, she wrapped her arms and legs around him and rode to a sweaty, roaring finish. Even after their tremors stopped, she held on, unwilling to let him go.

Corbin shivered and squirmed. "Baby?"

"Mmm?" Roni didn't want to talk. The caress of his softening cock kept her writhing and happy a few minutes more.

He choked and moved again. "Could you change back now? Your tail makes it really hard to hold still." He swallowed, gave up, and wriggled in a desperate manner. "Please?"

Her shoulders shook with the need to giggle. It took a moment to regain self-control long enough to change back to human. Roni looked up at his red face and bit her lip. The laughter bubbled out of her.

Corbin mock-frowned, though his eyes twinkled. "Okay, that's it with you, sweet little Chuskie. Don't make me get out the rolled-up newspaper." He smacked her ass with his bare hand and released her.

Roni squeaked and landed on the carpet. No Alpha Bitch would let that threat go unanswered. She'd have her revenge in the next round. She let the challenging sarcasm drip from her words. "Oh. Baby. Oh. Baby. Oh. Why don't you prove you're wolf -- I mean, man -- enough to tame me?"

Corbin laughed and stood. He was damn big that way, looming over her. He scooped her up and carried her to the bedroom. "I'd be glad to. In the morning."

Chapter Five

Roni stood at the kitchen sink and waited for the morning coffee to brew while Corbin took a shower. The thought of his glorious body wet and dripping with slick soap made her smile. The words her father had spoken the day before about dating a human crept into her mind, and Roni's smile faded and her good mood evaporated instantly.

She spoke to her reflection in the coffee pot. "What if my father is right? I'd outlive Corbin by a good sixty years." Roni sighed heavily. "I couldn't stand to be without him but I also couldn't stand to sit there and watch him grow old while I don't." The coffee pot sighed as if in sympathy even though she knew it was just steam escaping. "I should just end this now and save him and myself the future heartache." Roni's mouth moved but her heart rejected the words.

The coffee pot bubbled out the last drops. She poured them each a cup and left his black the way he said he liked it. Roni walked through the living room to her bedroom door. It was cracked open an inch. Corbin's voice came through the wood loud and clear.

"I don't give a fuck what you think, Father," Corbin growled into his phone. "I will marry who I please, and you have nothing to fucking say about it." Corbin paused for a moment, breathing heavily. "I don't need your blessing. I am going to ask her!"

The coffee cups rattled in her shaking hands, the hot coffee splashing on her skin, jerking her back to reality. Part of her wanted to jump for joy at Corbin's shared feelings, but the rest of her slammed on the brakes and said hold on. Did he want to marry her out of love, or out of spite for his father? She composed herself and waited for the bleep as he closed the phone before she walked into the bedroom.

Instantly, his face lit up, and he smiled. He tossed the cell phone back on his jeans that were folded neatly on the bed. Beads of water slid down his chiseled chest, soaking into the towel that hung around his slender waist. Lust surged forward, and she put her concerns to the side for another day.

"Everything okay?" She handed him his coffee. "You sounded upset."

"Just some issues at work. All is taken care of." Corbin smiled back but his eyes clouded with what could have been guilt.

"I'm glad." Roni suppressed her need to scream "liar." Where exactly was Ana when she needed her to interrupt? As if on cue she heard the front door slam closed and she inwardly sighed with relief. She set her coffee cup on the nightstand and turned to the door.

Ana's panicked voice shrieked at supersonic speed through the house. "Roni? Where are you? I need you! This is unbelievable!"

The frightened tone in Ana's voice had Roni scared. She walked through the door and bumped into Ana. Both had reached the threshold between the bedroom and the living room at the same time.

Ana grabbed Roni's arms, her eyes wide with panic.

Roni could feel Ana's hands shaking. What could scare a vampire? "What is it? What's wrong?" She might have had more success if she were talking to a cabbage. "You need to calm down, take it slow, and tell me what's wrong."

Ana's mouth moved but no sound came out. Her gaze bounced from place to place, never settling on anything in particular. "Jon... I can't... he... the audacity..." Ana's grip on Roni's arms tightened with every word.

Pain shot up Roni's arm. Werewolves were famous for their ability to ignore pain but a vampire's strength matched that gift. If Roni didn't free herself she'd be wearing a cast. One by one, she pried Ana's fingers loose.

The blonde barely noticed, so intent on her problems was she. "He... He... proposed."

Roni had to think about that for a second. Had she heard Ana correctly? Did Jon realize what he was getting into? Jon was only half-angel, and not immortal like Ana. Such a mating was unheard of. Wasn't it? Roni thought of Corbin. Her heart sank. She looked up at Ana and saw her best friend was waiting for some kind of response. "Jon did what?" Okay, maybe it was the stupidest statement on the planet but it was the best she could come up with at the moment.

Ana looked at Roni like she had horns growing from her forehead. "Do you have a mental block that keeps you from listening?" Ana shouted and paced the floor in front of Roni. Frustration had her stomping around the living room -- the heels of her shoes pounded on the hardwood floor so hard the pictures on the walls rattled.

Roni looked at Ana in amusement. "The mental block doesn't keep me from listening -- it just helps to block out decibels of a million or higher."

Ana slapped her roommate's arm. "Oh? Whose woo-woos could wake the dead recently? Uh, wait. They did wake the dead. Me!" She shook her finger at Roni. "I don't want to hear any more comments about my squeaky bed. Tart."

They both giggled and hugged one another.

Corbin grinned in camaraderie at their shenanigans. "If it's a congrats moment, congrats. If it's not, then I'm leaving, 'cause the first thing she'll lash out at is the testosterone." Corbin sidled around the panicky vampire. He started down the hall.

Roni noticed Corbin's butt playing peek-a-boo from the towel. "Um, babe?" Roni snickered. "I don't share very well."

Corbin looked down at the towel, blushed, and darted back into Roni's room to get dressed.

"Cute male butts aside, I'm in crisis." Ana resumed her circuit around the living room, wringing her hands.

Corbin emerged from Roni's bedroom fully clothed. He cuddled Roni for a moment and kissed her hair. "Bye, my sweet Chuskie."

Guilt washed over her. "I'm sorry about all this."

Corbin gave her a squeeze. "Don't be. I have work to do, anyway. I'll see you Sunday?" Corbin looked hopeful.

Roni's heart beat just a little faster. "Of course." Males were such contradictory creatures. One minute they wanted in your pants, but only if you ran away. However, if you screamed, "Take me! I'm yours!" then they ran in the opposite direction. Weirdos. Corbin cuddled and talked. For hours. Amazing.

He kissed her quickly and jogged down the hall. His cell phone's ring tones reverberated through the house moments before the front door slammed.

Roni turned back to Ana, who seemed about to hyperventilate. Rather impossible since vampires didn't breathe. If Ana weren't already dead, Roni would swear she was about to die of fright. "Ana, calm down and tell me what happened."

"Weren't you listening, or was I not yelling loud enough?" Ana stalked to the sofa. Roni smiled when her drama queen best friend plopped onto the couch and sighed heavily. "Don't you get it? Jon proposed! What am I supposed to do?" Ana shook so hard that it reminded Roni of her father when he got excited.

Roni sat on the couch next to Ana. "I heard you loud and clear, but I barely understood you. I don't understand what the issue is. Tell me from the beginning." Roni placed a comforting hand on her shoulder.

"After you so unceremoniously shoved me out the door last night, Jon took me to the finest restaurant in town. He had roses delivered to the table." Ana pointed to the huge bouquet of flowers that rested precariously on the edge of the computer desk. "He had a violinist come to the table and play a song by Beethoven. We went back to his place and he had bought new furniture, the kind of stuff that I would have decorated my own place with. All old-fashioned wood décor and none of your kitsch." Ana jabbed Roni in the ribs.

Roni smiled. "What? You don't like the glass pelican with the fish in its belly?" She pointed to the pelican that sat on the coffee table next to them.

The age-old argument between them made Ana smile slightly. "I hate that thing." Ana pushed the pelican closer to Roni.

"Yeah, well, the constant creak of your wood bed frame doesn't leave much to the imagination when Jon is over." Roni poked Ana in the arm.

Ana's features fell back into worry. "After he showed me the living room, Jon took me into the bedroom and there was a new wardrobe in the closet. Not for him. For me. In the bathroom was a new toothbrush, hair brush -- everything I would need if I was moving in."

Roni frowned, totally confused. "You have toiletries. Why did he buy you new stuff?"

"I asked him the same thing 'cause I thought at first he was just asking me to move in." Ana fiddled with her nails. "He said that a new beginning requires new stuff. I just rolled my eyes. It's not like I can't afford whatever I want."

Roni made a rolling gesture with her hands and urged her on. "What happened next?"

Ana sighed deeply. "I turned back into the bedroom, and on the bed was a black velvet box. My heart froze. Hell, my whole body froze. Jon picked up the box and got down on one knee." Tears clouded her blue eyes. The way they shimmered and sparkled reminded Roni of the ocean. "He opened the box. There was this beautiful diamond ring in it. The size of the diamond alone would probably drown me if I were to swim while wearing it." Ana deliberately drew in a breath and whooshed it out almost as if her lungs still functioned. "Then he proposed."

Roni sat quietly for a minute to see if Ana was done talking. Roni took a deep breath. "What did you say?"

"What was I supposed to say? Yes?" Ana's mood went from panic to anger as if someone had flipped a switch. "I'm immortal and he's not. What if he realizes that I'm going to outlive him and all of his relatives? What if he wants children? I can't give him children." The switch flipped again. Ana's expression went from anger to fear. "What if he leaves me because I can't die, can't have children, and can't give him the things I know he wants most in life? So I asked him for time to think." Ana stood and paced the living room.

Roni knew that Jon was aware of Ana's fears, being the half angel that he was. Jon would give her a lifetime to think if she needed it. "Ana, honey, are you sure those are the things he wants in life? What if he just wants you, and that will make him happy?"

"Are you fucking senile? Every man wants children to continue his bloodline. I can't live without him, but what kind of a life would he have with me?" Ana plopped back down on the sofa and sobbed into the pillows.

Roni finally realized what Ana had said. She'd voiced exactly what Roni felt about Corbin. Ana was in the same situation. Corbin was human. Roni was a long-lived werewolf. What if he realized that he would die before her? Would he want children? How about a whole litter?

Ana's voice cut through Roni's thoughts. "When he dies, I will have someone stake me. I can't live without him. I love him so much." Tears streaked her face as she cried.

Roni pulled Ana into a hug and held her while she sobbed. Roni envisioned herself alone and heartbroken after Corbin died and found herself feeling the same way. "I know the feeling, honey. I couldn't live without Corbin either." Roni stroked Ana's blonde hair, and decided to inject some humor into their situation. What was love but a comedy of errors? "How about this? Since our men will probably die about the same time, I'll stake you as you shoot me with a silver bullet."

Ana lifted her head from Roni's shoulder, looked at her and smiled. "That's probably the craziest double homicide plan ever, but you have a deal." Ana and Roni shook hands and sealed the pact. They stared at one another in silence.

Roni snickered first. "How many times have we sworn we'd kill each other knowing you can't shoot a gun and I can't hammer without breaking a thumb?"

The toothy flash of Ana's smile brightened the room. "More times than I care to count. No man is worth death, honey. Thanks for the reminder."

"Men. Can't live with 'em and can't shoot 'em. If we could give birth without them, I say we kill them all off." Roni shrugged and laughed. "I love Corbin and you love Jon. So, we're stuck with the venereal testosterone injections."

Ana sniggered. "I died once because of a man. It won't happen again."

Roni nodded and hugged Ana. "Let's get a drink. You look pale, anyway. When are you going to answer Jon?"

"I'll give him his answer when he comes over Sunday." Ana stopped on her way to the kitchen and looked puzzled. "Didn't you say you were going to see Corbin Sunday, too?"

He'd called her a sweet little Chuskie. Roni grinned and felt giddy. She didn't even try to stop the stupid, besotted grin that spread across her lips. "Yeah. Let's double. Everybody needs to meet, anyway."

Ana snickered. "Oh, that could be fun. A human, a Nephylum surgeon, a werewolf and a vampire. What a fun meal that's going to be. We should hold a buffet. The omnivore human can clean up what the carnivore and vegetarian don't eat. At least I get all the blood for myself."

Roni walked to her bedroom to retrieve the coffee she'd left on the nightstand. "I'll call the local blood bank to see if they cater."

Ana squealed in laughter.

Roni emerged from the room, cold coffee in hand. "However, honey, if you want to live long enough to answer Jon, you should probably go to bed."

"You just had to go and bring that up, didn't you? As if I didn't have enough to worry about, you had to bring up the fact that he can only have a life with me after dark!" Ana stomped off to her room. The door slammed behind her.

Roni followed, wishing desperately for the manic vampire to go to her daytime rest. The need for coffee began to outweigh friendship. Roni's brain and heart craved a morning to sort through everything going on. "Ana, he's a surgeon. He hasn't slept all night since before he was in med school."

"So not the point!" Ana screamed through the wood. The thump-thump of two shoes hitting the bottom of the closet followed.

"Talk about a case of nerves. I'll let her sleep it off today, and I'll bring it back up tonight." Roni spoke to the potted fern that sat in a niche in the wall between the two bedrooms. Coffee would come soon.

"I heard that." Rustling announced Ana was undressing for bed.

"Jump in your coffin and shut up, or I'll open the curtains." Roni's empty threat was another old game of theirs. Eventually they'd get around to silver jewelry and stakes for dinner jokes. What would good friendship be without threatening your best friend's life at least once a day?

"I painted the windows," Ana sang from behind the closed door. "And besides, my bed is much more comfy than a coffin."

Roni snickered. "Beds are a coffin with no lid."

"Don't make me call your father!" Ana threatened. She always brought out that old warning when she was losing the verbal war and her battle with sleep.

Roni frowned at the thought of how mad her father was. She recovered quickly with a rebuttal. "How are you going to do that if you're a big pile of dust?"

"Don't confuse the issue with facts. I'm in crisis here." A yawn interrupted her words. Soon Ana would crash into the coma-like state of a vampire's rest.

"You're blonde. You're always in crisis." All Roni wanted to do was draw a target on the wall and bash her head against it in an excess of emotion. "Where the hell is the red Sharpie?"

"I have it in here. I'm drawing the target first!" Ana yelled around her laughter.

"Well, fuck, now what am I supposed to do with my day?" Roni looked around the house and contemplated. "I think I'll extend my day filled with headaches. Going to the grocery store ought to round things out nicely. How exciting."

"Oh, the problems of a trust fund baby," Ana sang. "The child of a pack leader. Poor pitiful were-bitch has to go to the grocery store."

“At least I’m not masochistic enough to marry a surgeon.” Roni walked away before she heard Ana’s reply.

Roni slid her shoes on and walked down the hall. “What a buffet of personalities we’re having over for dinner.” She picked her purse up off the hall table. “This is going to be the mixer of all mixers. Now watch some bastard louse it up.”

Chapter Six

Corbin stepped up on the porch and rang the doorbell. It was a cool Sunday morning, and the sun had just peeked over the horizon when the door opened.

Ana, her eyes red and sleepy, peeked around the edge. She squinted in the light and hissed, moving quickly back into the shadows.

Corbin held the bakery box out in front of him. "I come bearing gifts of pastry for anybody I woke up or kept awake."

"I'm up way too late. Please come in, Corbin." Ana grabbed the bakery box out of his hand and shut the door behind him. "Roni is in the shower -- I'm going to bed. I'll see you tonight at dinner."

"Oh, to be able to sleep all day." Corbin followed her down the hallway. "Sleep well, Ana."

Ana turned and looked at him, her eyes bleak. "It's a curse, not a blessing." Ana smiled sadly. She turned, walked to her room and closed the door behind her.

Corbin was left in the dark paneled short hallway alone. He didn't know what to do. The Thornburn Construction inspector in him was tempted to take a look at the well-preserved architecture, including the huge open concept living room with dark ceiling beams and functioning track lights. He hadn't gotten much of a peek around while Roni and he were behaving like rabbits whenever they met.

Speaking of rabbits and other furry things, it was time he revealed his true nature to Roni. Corbin rubbed his thumb and forefinger together nervously. He didn't like lying, especially to Roni. He knew she'd react badly, but it was important to clear the air. Still, he was tempted to wait until after her shower and delay a few precious moments more.

He wanted to remain in this joyous state of new love and lust. Telling Roni could destroy everything, but he had to live with himself first and foremost. Besides, it was becoming increasingly difficult to remain in human form when they made love.

Ana's door creaked open across the living room. Ana had a powdered doughnut in her hand, her red lips covered in sugar. "As I said, Roni's in the shower." Ana looked absolutely evil as she tilted her head toward Roni's room, only a few feet away from Ana's own door. Then her door creaked closed.

"I understand." Corbin crossed to Roni's door. "Showtime, like it or not. The truth is more important."

The first thing to hit him was the smell of lavender. The second was the words to an old sports arena song about letting dogs out. Roni's off-key song, punctuated by barks at the appropriate points, was bad, so why did his heart flutter?

He took his clothes off and left them where they landed. The anticipation of Roni pressed up against him naked, wet, and soapy made his dick hard. Corbin opened the curtain and stepped in.

Roni spun around, loofah in hand. She looked like a deer in headlights, and she smelled heavenly. "Arf?"

Corbin smiled and let out a deep "Woof."

Roni looked at him with shock in her eyes. She realized that he was dusted with dark brown fur. "You son-of-a-bitch! You lied to me!" Her teeth were sharp and clenched. "After all you've told me, all I've told you, and you're a wolf!" Roni opened the shower curtain and attempted to step out.

Corbin reached around and cupped a luscious breast. He closed the shower curtain. "I didn't lie so much as I didn't tell the complete truth."

Roni turned toward him and roughly pushed his hand away. "A lie is still a lie no matter how you dress it up."

He slid his hands around her waist and pulled her to him. He rubbed his fingers up and down her spine. A thin layer of fur grew under his hands. He was getting to her. "I'm sorry."

Roni didn't move away, but she stood rigid. "Why would you lie to me?"

He continued to caress the soft fur of her back. The scent of wet hair, aroused female, and lavender mixed into a new perfume only a werewolf could appreciate fully. "I lied so that I could hide."

She pushed away from him. "What the hell is that supposed to mean? Hide from what? From me?"

Corbin looked at his partially clawed feet. How could he put into words every humiliation involved with his past? "No. What can I do to show you how sorry I am?"

Roni opened the shower curtain, stepped out, and wrapped a big pink towel around her body. "You can explain yourself."

Corbin stepped out, accepted another pink towel, and wrapped it around his own waist. He followed Roni into the bedroom and sat down next to her on the bed.

Roni was stone-faced with her arms crossed over her chest. The light dusting of fur remained on her body, giving him a small measure of hope. Still, the regal look on her face warned him she'd kick his ass to the curb without mercy if she felt it necessary. The ring carefully hidden in his jeans pocket might never make an appearance.

He sighed heavily. "I lied in the profile because I was tired of all types of women wanting me for my money and my title." He looked down at his hands. "I wanted to find a woman who wanted me for me and only me. Then I thought I would find the right moment to tell her -- you -- the truth." He stared at his jeans piled on the floor, the lump in one pocket a recrimination. He had fucked up and knew it.

Roni's silence continued, but her eyes held wary confusion. "I'm sorry, but what the hell are you talking about?" Roni's eyes flickered. Sorrow, fear, and lack of understanding battled for supremacy.

Corbin braced himself. "Are you familiar with the Thornburn pack?"

Roni looked to the ceiling in thought. "Yes, I am." Her wary, light brown gaze returned to study Corbin's face.

"I am the heir to the Thornburn pack. My father insisted most of my life that I needed to marry a bitch from the pack. They were pure and would make the perfect

litter.” He looked back down at his hands and picked at a recently acquired scar. “I dated a few bitches and even slept with them. Then I realized that all they were after was my money and the title of Alpha Bitch. They never wanted me for me.”

Roni’s face held complete understanding and acceptance. She even had a wry smile on her face. “Are you familiar with the Englemann pack?”

Corbin looked up. His own words had been thrown back at him in a new light. “Somewhat. My father is always fighting with the pack leader Eduardo over territory.” He grinned and shrugged. “As you can imagine, we don’t socialize with the canine packs much.”

Roni cocked an eyebrow, her eyes alight with regal amusement. She bit her upper lip for a moment. “I’m the heir to the Englemann pack.”

Corbin blinked. Then he leaned back on the pillows and chuckled. The irony was too much. “Talk about your Romeo and Juliet.”

Her snigger reassured him she’d understood the nature of the cruel joke fate had played on them. “I certainly do not wish to commit suicide for you despite the similarity to the present situation.”

A thought struck him. Corbin sat back up and stared at Roni. “Why did you lie on your profile?”

Roni smiled and shrugged her shoulders. “Ana set it up. She also comes from money and has been a friend of the Englemann pack for as long as I can remember.”

Corbin leaned closer and caressed her cheek, noting for the first time the similarities between the female he loved and the scrappy Eduardo Englemann. “So what do we do now?”

She slid closer to him. The friction between the towel and the sheets pulled the tucking loose and the towel fell around her hips. “I have a few ideas.” She pushed him down on the pillows, disarranging a few.

The pink satin pillow beneath his head started to vibrate. Corbin shot back up to a sitting position. “What the...” He grabbed the pillow, unzipped it, and removed a ten-inch long vibrator. He held it up with an evil sparkle in his eye.

Roni shrugged and blushed simultaneously. The morning sun mercilessly highlighted the red flush beneath her fur. "I've been a lonely girl."

Corbin got up on his knees and loomed over her. His wolf side wanted to take dominance, but his human side wanted it to be equal. He pushed her back onto the bed and leaned over her. The dildo still vibrated on one side of her head. His hand held her hair on the other side. "As long as I am alive you will never be lonely again. You'll only be naughty." He leaned down and pressed his lips to hers.

Their tongues warred for dominance. Two Alphas would battle in bed because he had to prove he was worthy of an Alpha Bitch. Similarly, she had to eventually submit to her chosen Alpha Male if he'd won her well enough. Fortunately he had assistance and -- temporarily, at least -- the upper hand.

Lust surged through his body. His cock twitched in response. He sat back up on his knees and caressed her rosy clit with the dildo.

Roni sucked in a breath and moaned. Her nipples hardened and her skin flushed beneath the light dusting of fur. "I'm so glad you like your sex on the furry side of life."

Corbin smiled. The lust in her honey eyes gave her away even if his nose hadn't sniffed out her arousal. He'd won, at least for now. "Got any lube?"

Roni's eyes shifted to the nightstand. She blushed, but stuck out her chin defiantly. "I have my own natural lube, you know."

He leaned over her and opened the drawer. The red, helmet-shaped lid of the bottle lay right on top of a pile of romance novels and assorted feminine junk. He dug it out and brandished the red and white bottle at Roni. Deliberately he made his cock brush her pussy.

She wrapped her legs around his waist and tried to pull him into her wet slickness.

Corbin avoided entering Roni with a twist of his hips and mischievously read the bottle's label as if he had all day. Well, as far as he was concerned, he did. "Cherry flavored? My, my." He squeezed a glob into his hand and rubbed it over the dildo.

Roni shivered in clear anticipation. She ran her hands up and down his chiseled chest. "I want to feel every part of you in me and on my body."

He chuckled and moved the dildo's vibrating head to caress her clit once more. Then, with an evil smile, he moved it lower to play with her wet opening.

She moaned and lifted her hips, begging for more.

Corbin gave more to her. He dove down to lick and suck on her clit while he worked the dildo inch by inch into her pussy.

Roni yelped and arched her back. Her fingernails became claws, dug into her comforter and shredded it. The silky fabric snarled like a beast as it tore. Her pussy flooded his chin in hot moisture.

The temporary victory over Roni sped up his heart and his arousal. He ground his erection into the edge of the bed to give him some relief from the ever-increasing need to plunge in and claim his Alpha Bitch as his own.

Roni stiffened and her back bowed. She shrieked loud enough to wake the dead and came like a fountain.

Corbin prayed her shriek wouldn't cause Ana to rise and burst in on them. Dead girls joining the party could ruin the mood. He kept his tongue busy and begged whatever gods were listening that Ana stayed asleep, curled up with the pastry box.

His bitch -- he knew that now -- came until she jerked like a marionette in an earthquake. Her hand reached down, clawed his hair into a fist and pulled him away. She was halfway to all fur, strong, and half-growling. "Come up here and fuck me, damn you!"

He gritted his teeth and wondered if she'd pull out his hair before they were done. "One moment, my love."

Roni panted but released his hair. "Hurry! Please hurry!"

Despite her pleas he refused to rush. He fumbled until he found the dildo still vibrating beneath her thigh. Carefully, he fed the dildo to her puckering pink ass.

Roni's breath hitched, and the sheets joined the comforter as future recyclables. Still she lifted her butt off the bed to give him easier access. "That's usually exit only."

Corbin chuckled softly to himself. This would be a total surprise to her. "Then prepare for a new sensation, baby." The dildo slid in a few more inches. He didn't want to go too far. Good enough. He positioned himself between her knees.

"I'm more than ready! Gimme or I'll kill you!"

The strains of an old opera filtered through the wall speakers. Ana had apparently been wise enough to recognize no one was in any danger and had turned on the house stereo system. *Carmina Burana* had enough beat to help them along and still mask the sounds of their play.

He didn't waste any more time. Corbin plunged in before Roni turned into full lup -- er, canine -- and went for his throat. Were-bitches weren't known for patience during mating. He'd better deliver the goods.

She was more than ready for him. Hot, slick, and wet didn't begin to describe her pussy. The vibrator hummed and doubled both her pleasure and his. The thin membrane separating them was no barrier at all.

His heart and cock were hers until they both came. She'd submitted to him, and now he was at her mercy and a slave to his own body's need for release. He couldn't stop thrusting if he wanted to, and he would have rather died than try.

Roni reached up and clasped him to her. "Fill me! Please! Now!"

Corbin helplessly obliged. The axiom "The claiming of a mate means more than mere jewels" now became clear to him. The ring in his jeans pocket was nothing more than a symbol. Enclosed in his heart was a hot fire only Roni could ignite, just as the diamond held within it fiery lights.

Locked together, they lay panting until Corbin's cock relaxed and softened. He pulled the vibrator from her ass, rolled away to place it on the nightstand. Then he cuddled her next to him, unable to bear one moment without her. His guilt for disobeying his father gave one last dying gasp.

He didn't care. He loved lying there next to her. Gloriously naked, hot, sweaty. He plunged in heart first. "Roni, will you marry me?" He'd just asked a mutt to marry him and there was no turning back now. The words were out. He should have thought

about this a little bit more. Corbin had thought about it, though. He loved her. She loved him. Didn't she?

Roni sat up and stared at him intensely with those deep brown eyes. She looked conflicted, like she wanted to answer but didn't know if she should. "Before I answer you I have to know one thing."

The smell of lavender overwhelmed his senses. Roni's soft naked body called to him once more, and he was instantly hard for her again.

"Did you propose because you love me or to defy your father?"

Chapter Seven

Roni curled up on the sofa, admiring the bright pink toenail polish she'd just applied. "...After I asked him whether or not he wanted to marry me for love or rebellion, he hesitated so long I told him to think about it while we shopped at the grocery store. Ana, he rarely spoke after that and seemed lost in thought all afternoon. I was ready to scream to break the silence when you finally woke up."

Ana listened intently and nodded occasionally while she painted her nails a soft peach.

What was it with folks taking three years to respond to her today? Roni squirmed and drummed her unpainted fingernails on the end table. "He never answered the question. What does that mean? Did I force him to have second thoughts?"

The aroma of steak seeped in from the back deck. She ignored the urge to walk outside and supervise. From her position on the sofa, she could crane her neck and look through the kitchen sliding glass doors to the deck. Corbin and Jon looked deep in their own serious conversation.

"I don't know what to think, honey. I'm in the same boat with Jon." Ana studied her newly painted nails. "I don't know Corbin very well. I didn't hear the conversation between him and his father." Ana turned her blue eyes to Roni. "What do your instincts tell you?" Ana looked pale and wan.

Roni stood up and walked to the kitchen, reached into the refrigerator and pulled out a pitcher of blood. She poured her best friend a glass and handed it to her.

Ana mouthed the words "Thank you." Then she drank deeply and winced. "It's disgusting cold, but better than wasting blood by letting it get warm and rancid. Blech."

Roni poured a glass of wine for herself. She closed her eyes and drowned in the aroma of the potatoes baking in the oven. "My instincts are telling me to run far and fast. He only wants to marry me because his father is so against it. My brain is telling me that his hesitation to answer the question is not a good sign." Roni looked down at her wineglass, put her nose to the rim, and inhaled the scent of the Merlot. "My heart tells me to go out there, throw my arms around his neck, and tell him I'll marry him."

Ana pressed her lips together and clearly struggled with whether or not to speak. She mimicked Roni's action and inhaled the scent of the blood. "What about the fact that he lied to you about being human?"

Roni sighed heavily. "I could get past that. I completely understand why he lied. With a father like his I would have done the same thing." Tears burned her eyes. "I just can't get myself past the possibility that he asked me to marry him just to piss his father off. Is this some repressed leftover teenage rebellion?"

Ana pushed herself from the counter and headed out of the kitchen. She turned at the door, love in her eyes. "Talk to him, honey. He may have hesitated because he didn't want to say the wrong thing."

Roni knew Ana was right, but she didn't have to like it. The doorbell rang and she walked out of the kitchen to the front door. She opened the door and her arms dropped heavily to her sides. "Mom? Dad? What are you doing here?" The hesitant smile on Katriena's face rubbed her already raw nerves.

Katriena held up a tin of cookies. "Your father and I came over to have dinner with you and apologize." Katriena looked to her husband and growled softly at the angry look on his face.

Eduardo looked over Roni's shoulder, and his lip curled.

Roni looked behind her. Corbin stood there with a plate full of steaks. Jon and Ana stood next to him. Roni turned back to her mother.

Katriena looked down at the cookie tin in her hands. "I see we're interrupting. We'll go." Her parents turned and started down the porch steps.

Roni wanted to stop her but she didn't want to deal with guilt. Ana's elbow connected with her ribs. She looked up at Ana and pleaded silently for her just to let them go.

Ana looked from Roni to her parents and back again. She nudged Roni again, who planted her feet. "Katriena! Eduardo! Please, won't you join us for dinner?" Ana stepped forward toward the door. Roni grabbed her elbow and pulled Ana back toward her.

"What are you doing?" Roni quietly hissed.

"Saving what is left of the relationship between you and your parents." Ana smiled and repeated her invitation. "Please, won't you stay for dinner?"

Katriena fiddled with the cookie tin. "I don't know. You folks seem busy." Katriena's words tumbled out of her mouth -- it might have been the first time that Roni had ever heard her mother lose her aplomb.

"Katriena, I insist that you stay for dinner and get to know our men." Ana looked at Roni over her shoulder and smiled.

Roni put on the best fake smile she could. "Yes, please stay." She spoke through clenched teeth.

"If you insist." Her parents hesitantly came back up the steps.

Roni turned and gave Corbin an apologetic look.

"I see where Roni gets her grace and her big brown eyes. I'll put on two more steaks." Corbin handed the plate to Roni.

Katriena favored him with a weak smile and clutched the metal tin like it was a life preserver.

Corbin peeked around the kitchen door. He gestured with the plate of raw meat. "Mr. Englemann, would you care to join the men on the deck?" His eyebrow raised in a silent dare.

Eduardo bounced on his toes, and smiled back at the challenge to meet and understand his daughter's choice. "I'd love to." He thrust his coat at Roni. "We'll see about this."

After a quick conference between the females, they changed the location from the too-small dining room to the informality of the deck. The steaks of course didn't take long, since Katriena and Eduardo preferred their meat very rare. Jon quietly consumed his salad in the corner, cuddled up with Ana on a lounge.

"So, Corbin, what's it like being a human?" Katriena broke the silence and looked at Corbin over her wineglass.

"Mother! What the hell?" Roni screeched in shock. She stood up and walked to the kitchen. Her parents followed, just as she'd half-expected they might. Roni glared at Katriena with contempt.

Katriena, calm and in control, looked at Roni in confusion. "Roni, what is your problem?"

Roni stared at her mother in shock. She couldn't believe her mother was this dumb. "What is my problem? My problem?" Roni couldn't speak, she was so mad. "What the hell was with the human question? Could you be any more rude?" She crossed her arms over her chest and waited for her mother to answer her.

Eduardo beat her to it, and he was furious. "It was a legitimate question. We want to know what kind of human wants to be with a shifter," Eduardo snarled.

"What exactly is that supposed to mean? Am I not good enough for him or something?" Roni was so angry a thin layer of brown fur formed on her arms.

"No, he is not good enough for you. Nobody but another shifter, preferably one from our own pack, is good enough for a long-term relationship." Katriena's calm, icy tone cut right through the anger in the room. "A fling is one thing. Mating is another."

"I don't care!" Roni yelled and stomped her foot. "I don't care what you think, I love him and I'm going to marry him." Roni turned and stormed out of the kitchen to her room and slammed the door.

Ana was instantly at Roni's door. She looked over her shoulder at Katriena. "Allow me to handle this, my queen and friend." Ana turned to smoke and slid underneath the door.

Katriena smiled despite her broken heart. "That's why you're the guardian of the pack."

* * *

Corbin watched Roni run from the kitchen. He wasn't the kind of wolf to come between family but something had to be done. He turned to the kitchen door.

Katriena was in Eduardo's arms with her head hung low. Her shoulders shook.

Corbin walked into the kitchen. "Excuse me, Mr. and Mrs. Englemann, I don't mean to interrupt." He looked down at his feet and vowed to remain polite. He could solve their concerns, if they'd listen. "If I may speak with you for a moment?"

"Corbin, I am sorry you had to hear all that. Our question may have seemed rude, but we are only looking after our daughter." Katriena looked at him, and tears clouded her ice blue eyes to the color of frost.

"It's quite all right. My father Duke is the same way -- no one but someone from the pack is good enough for me." Corbin saw recognition in their eyes.

"Your father is Duke Thornburn?" Like any good pairing, they spoke in stereo.

Corbin smiled as his tail split through the back of his pants. He shifted to half humanoid form. He grimaced when his face changed but other than that it was easy. Corbin stood there slightly hunched and smiled at Katriena and Eduardo. "I am who you say." Corbin shifted back to human. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I think I need to talk with your daughter and my future wife." He turned and walked out of the kitchen.

Corbin knocked lightly on Roni's bedroom door and opened it. His heart sank. Roni was sobbing into Ana's arms. Not a coherent word could be heard.

Ana looked up and saw Corbin. She patted the bed next to her with one hand and winked over Roni's head.

As soon as Corbin was seated, Ana smoothly transferred Roni's weeping body to Corbin's shoulder. As quick and quiet as the predator she could be, she was gone.

Corbin lifted Roni's face to look at him. "Honey, I know you're upset. But you have to understand where your parents are coming from."

Roni's eyes shifted to her lap. "I do understand where they are coming from, and it still pisses me off." Roni choked the words out. "I don't understand why they just can't accept the fact that I don't want to be with anybody in the pack. I want to be with you." Roni paused and took a deep breath. "But you never answered my question. Did you propose to me because you love me or to piss off your father?"

Corbin looked into her brown eyes and fell in love all over again. "I didn't ask you to marry me to piss off my father. I asked you to marry me because I am so deeply in love with you I can't stand it." He stroked her soft hair. "You're the first thing I think about in the morning, the last thing I think about before I close my eyes, and you are a constant mental distraction all day."

Roni smiled through her tears. "Really?"

"Truly, and I hate to ask this but did you accept my proposal because you feel the same way or to strike back at your parents?" Corbin grinned, knowing the answer. At least he hoped.

Roni's leap into his arms was all the answer he needed, but she whispered with a glance toward the kitchen. "Would you mind if I put on the ring after my folks leave?"

Corbin chuckled and squeezed her against him. "Yeah. I don't want your father developing rabid squirrel syndrome and gnawing my ankles off to bring me down to his size, at least not tonight."

His little Chuskie buried her face in his chest. "First we have to confront your father. I'm not sure who is more dangerous -- the rabid Chihuahua or the pissed off wolf, but I personally would rather face down the wolf."

Chapter Eight

Corbin and Roni sat in his car out in front of a Victorian mansion. Tall white columns stood out over the lush green grass. The glass paneled front door sparkled in the afternoon sun.

Roni turned to Corbin. His hands gripped the steering wheel. He was at war with his emotions, and there wasn't a thing she could do to help. "What are we doing here, Corbin?"

Corbin stared past her at the house. "I want to introduce you to my father. It's customary." He pondered why he even cared. Family customs always won out with Corbin. He could never turn away from tradition.

"We don't have to be customary. What's the point?" she snarled without intention. "He has already formed his opinion of me." Roni's eyes narrowed. "Remember? I'm the fucking mutt."

Corbin focused on Roni and sighed heavily. "I have a little hope left."

She reached over and caressed his biceps. "Hope of what, darling?"

He closed his eyes and leaned into the comforting touch. "Hope that if he sees how happy I am with you he'll change his mind."

Roni leaned in and placed a kiss on his nose. "I don't even know the man and know you're just fishing for a broken heart."

Another heavy sigh, and he looked into her eyes. "Bear with me, honey, please. It's something I have to do for my sake."

Roni turned back to the house. A shiver passed over her in anticipation of a fight. The animal side of Roni urged her out of the car. A good battle always meant steak and potatoes afterward. The human side of Roni urged her to force Corbin to put the car in drive and leave. She hated the conflict of emotions and the loss of control. It always

made her nervous. She turned back to Corbin. "Let's get this Romeo and Juliet rule change over with." She opened the car door and stepped out, her knee high boots clicking on the pavement. Roni's skirt flapped around her knees in the slight breeze.

Corbin was out of the car and at her side in the blink of an eye. She looked up at him, and for the first time he looked scared. It broke her heart to know it was her fault that he and his father were at odds. He grabbed her hand gently and walked toward the front door.

They were met at the door by the butler, a short elderly man with white hair and a slight hunch. He stood to the side to let them over the threshold. The butler closed the door behind them and led them up a mahogany spiral staircase to a second floor office and left them at the door.

Corbin and Roni clasped hands in front of the great cherry wood door. Their palms were slippery with nervous sweat. They looked at each other. Both their backbones stiffened.

Roni squeezed Corbin's hand in reassurance. "Let's do this."

Corbin looked down at his bitch. "When this is over how about ice cream?"

She grinned in mischief. "You know you owe me more than ice cream for this."

"I know, honey, and I am fully prepared to accept any punishment you deem fit." He leaned over and kissed her neck.

He knocked on the door, and they jumped at the thunderous voice that came from the other side instructing them to enter. They opened the door and walked in.

Duke's baritone voice seemed to rattle the windows. "What the hell are you doing here?" His glare could have frozen the Pacific Ocean. He wore black satin pants and a ruby red smoking jacket like a lord out of a history book and looked perfectly normal doing so. Roni saw instantly that Corbin had inherited his good looks and black hair from his father, and she sincerely hoped Corbin developed the gorgeous silver streaks gracing Duke's temples. If this was what a wolf pack leader looked like, she could understand why the wolf bitches submitted to this man. Power pulsed out of him like a hydroelectric plant.

Corbin stood firm even though Lake Michigan was forming in the palms of their hands. "I came here to introduce you to Roni."

Duke turned his gaze to her. "How special. Do you mind if I ask a few questions?"

She put her chin in the air and stared back at him. "Not at all."

He smiled, and it was an evil grin. Roni would have run out the door but pride and Corbin's slippery hand kept her rooted in place.

The disgust dripped from Duke's words. "Do you like being a mutt?"

She stared Duke down. She knew his kind -- he made it a point to find a weakness and exploit it. "I don't consider myself a mutt, sir."

Duke snickered in amusement. "What, then, would you consider yourself?"

Roni held fast to Corbin's hand, and her other hand cupped his biceps. "I consider myself a different breed of canine, and I am proud of who I am."

Duke stood behind his desk, and his smile dripped with menace. "So you wouldn't mind if your children were made with another mutt?"

Corbin and Roni both looked at each other, dumbfounded. What had he just said? Roni wanted to hold Corbin. He'd told her how proud Duke was of being a pure. Had Duke or Corbin's mother deceived the whole pack? Why?

Corbin let go of her hand and took a few steps toward his father. "I'm sorry, I must have missed that last part. What was that?"

Duke sighed and fiddled with one of the golden pens on his desk. He looked pained. "Corbin, I should have told you sooner. Maybe it would explain why I am so hesitant to allow you to marry someone who is not purebred." Duke looked at his son, and his stare never faltered. "We are not pure. Your mother was but I am not. My mother was a Labrador and German Shepherd mix. That's why I can pass as a black werewolf."

Roni closed her mouth with a snap and promised herself to shut up unless Corbin needed backup. This was between them right now.

Duke didn't spare her a glance. "Son, it's hell being a mutt. I'm lucky. I look like a wolf even if my mother wasn't pure. To hide what she was her parents even had her ears bobbed so they stood up like a proper wolf's."

Roni winced, and Corbin's face reflected her disgust. Hadn't those ancient disfigurements died out when humans almost did? Most werewolf considered such practices torture unless for health reasons. In fact such surgery was considered illegal except in rare cases.

Duke's son leaned over the monumental desk separating them. "We're not purebred, and you had the audacity to tell me that Roni is not good enough for me because she is not a pure breed?"

"I do apologize, Corbin, I really do, but this girl is not good enough for you." Duke turned his stare to Roni. "I mean, look at her. She is glued to the spot because I said we are not pure."

Corbin glanced at Roni. "She is glued to the spot in shock, Dad. She can't believe it just as I can't."

Roni folded her arms. Her voice dripped with contempt for his prejudices. "I'm trying to stay out of your family issues. I'm sorry you have a problem with mixed breeds." She deliberately ignored the accusation that she wanted to marry Corbin because he was pure and a pack leader's son. She wouldn't even take notice of such a charge.

Duke's voice boomed through the room. "I do not want you marrying a mutt!"

Corbin looked like he would explode at the insulting change in decibel level. His face was red and his teeth sharpened to a fine point. He was halfway to full lupine and ready to spring.

Duke's lip curled. His eyes turned golden, and his skin sprouted a fine dusting of night-black fur.

Roni stepped back warily. Two Alphas going at it in a small room meant all non-combatants were in grave danger. Still, she wouldn't hesitate to defend Corbin if she

felt it necessary. She swallowed hard. Interference on her part would destroy Corbin's pride. She vowed to do so only in defense of his life.

At the last moment Corbin mastered his temper. "I don't give a fuck! I am going to marry the girl I love, and if you don't like it you can just die and stay out of my life." Corbin turned and grabbed Roni's hand and pulled her to the door. He turned back to his father. "Don't bother coming to the uniting ceremony. I won't stand for it."

Roni looked back over her shoulder just before Corbin pulled her out of sight.

Duke had a calculating smile on his face. He raised his glass and his lips moved.

Had she heard his whisper right? "Let the games begin?"

* * *

Roni sat behind a tree in her lupine form and smiled to herself. She sat downwind and out of sight. The Chase was always the best part of a Uniting. She'd make it difficult for Corbin to catch her, at least at first. The point was to be caught eventually, after all.

Corbin struggled to find her location. He sniffed in the right direction and looked around. The chase before the uniting ceremony proved that a united couple would be able to find each other no matter what.

Roni stood up to move to another tree. A branch broke beneath her paw. She didn't wait for Corbin's howl of triumph. She exploded out of her hiding spot and ran for a stream to wet her paws so he'd lose her trail.

He ran around in front of Roni to cut her off, but came to a sudden halt. He spun around into a defensive posture. Roni almost ran into his backside before she scabbled to a stop. She looked up over his tail.

A black wolf and Corbin growled softly to one another. The strange wolf made no other threatening moves, but his presence at a uniting was at best impolite.

Then the black fur registered in Roni's brain. Silently, in the way of her mother's breed, she took off around Corbin and sank her teeth into the foreleg of the wolf. Huskies for centuries had used their lightning speed to break the legs of their

opponents using that fighting trick, and Roni employed it now with no regret. The sickening crunch echoed through the forest.

The new wolf howled in pain and shifted back to human. It was Duke.

Corbin and Roni shifted simultaneously. Corbin stood protectively in front of her to hide her naked body. "Don't you dare come here causing trouble," Roni barked over Corbin's shoulder.

"This ceremony, from what I'm hearing, should not be taking place. You don't have an Alpha Male overseeing it." Duke rubbed his arm gingerly.

"My father is here to oversee the ceremony. As far as I'm concerned, Alpha Male is a title to be earned, not achieved through lies and deceit. Mutt." Roni snarled the last word.

"My kind of bitch. A bark as sharp as her bite." Duke smiled. "I would love to oversee the ceremony if you would have me."

Roni stared at him in confusion. "Huh?"

Corbin took a step forward. "This was all a test, wasn't it?"

"Yes, son. I needed to know that you were the Alpha Male I knew you could be, and I needed to know that you had found the Alpha Bitch I always thought you deserved." Duke turned his attention to Roni. "Welcome to the Thornburn pack."

Corbin, his head high, shook Duke's uninjured hand. "It would be an honor, Father, for you to oversee the ceremony if Roni's father will step aside. If not, you'll have to share with Eduardo Engelmann."

Duke licked his lips and smiled. "Eduardo and I may be rivals for territory now, but in college we were roommates. He married the sexiest..." Duke cleared his throat. "How is Katriena these days?"

Roni snorted. "Mom's fine. She's waiting with Dad. You can go wait with them at the clubhouse." Deliberately she permitted herself to begin shifting to canine. "I don't like being deceived, and you have a lot of trust to regain, but I appreciate the welcome." She turned, her tail sashaying behind her. She looked over her shoulder at Corbin,

wagged her tail. "Don't we have a chase to finish?" She took off into the woods with a howl.

"Excuse me, Father. I have a bitch to catch." Corbin shifted and, with a howl, ran after her.

* * *

"We now pronounce you wolf and mate." Eduardo and Duke shut the huge tome on the stand between them and shook hands with one another.

The roar of approval and applause from both packs and their guests shook the rafters of the warehouse-sized clubhouse.

Roni and Corbin, now dressed in white, led the procession to the reception hall for the celebration. The full moon clearly lit their way on the short walk through the trees in the midst of the Engelmann Pack lands.

Behind them, Eduardo and Duke talked about their old college days and acted like a pair of college kids on spring break. Katriena, Ana, and Jon tagged along behind, content to be out of the order of precedence.

Corbin proudly stood next to Roni on the dais and held her as if he'd never let go. The guests filed by, one by one. The rest danced and ate.

Jon and Ana raced up first. Jon pulled aside the collar of his shirt to show Corbin and Roni his bite. "Whew, am I glad I awakened -- er, arose? -- in time."

Ana smiled indulgently at her new husband. "Rose, darling. Just rose or risen." She leaned toward Roni and winked. "He didn't even get sick at his first goblet of blood."

Jon sniffed and pretended to be offended. "As if I would. I'm a surgeon. I never get sick at the sight of blood. What took me so long was convincing my oh-so-stubborn love that turning me solved everything. We'll just adopt if we get the urge to hear 'Whyyy?' a million times and want our stuff destroyed."

Ana playfully slapped him on the arm. "Who neglected to tell me he wanted a literal eternity in my arms, hmm? C'mon, feather brain, let's boogie!"

“Boogie? Is that a particular set of steps, like the Electric Slide you taught me last week?” Jon swung Ana out on the dance floor with his elegant white wings tucked close to his body.

Katriena mounted the dais, looking elegant and cool in gray silk. She accepted as her due Eduardo and Duke’s howls and whistles. She hugged both Corbin and Roni. “When do I get grandpups to spoil, hmm?”

All Roni did was smile. “Sooner than you think, Mom. I had my implants removed the week after Corbin revealed who he was to you.”

Katriena tilted her head in Roni’s direction. “Any offspring you have are going to be a pack of trouble. I can’t wait.”

Epilogue

Duke and Eduardo stood over the box bed, grinning as proudly as if they'd fathered the litter squirming on the padding themselves.

Eduardo nudged his old friend and bounced on his toes. "Those are some great-looking puppies. My daughter did very well for her first litter."

Duke looked at Eduardo sideways and folded his arms across his chest. "You mean cubs, and my son provided the seed."

Roni sighed inwardly. Werewolves called their young "cubs" to differentiate from the weredog "pups." Once again, the ugly prejudices could arise to bite them all over nothing. She jiggled the baby in her arms and he rewarded her with a burp.

"They are puppies," Eduardo corrected, his large brown eyes twinkling.

"Cubs." Duke stared him down, his lips twitching with humor.

"Would you two stop it?" Katriena hissed from her position comfortably curled up in the oversized chair and returned to her knitting of the sixth blanket.

Both pack leaders bowed in unison. "Yes, our beloved Alpha Bitch."

Jon and Ana laughed and applauded from their position at the music keyboard, where they took turns playing winter holiday music for the assembled grandparents.

Corbin silently squeezed Roni's shoulders. "I'll get them some punch." He sauntered off to the kitchen, whistling in time to the music Ana picked out on the keyboard.

Eduardo leaned down and straightened the fur on one of the smaller Chihuahua blends. He laughed when the feisty little fellow bit his finger.

"How about we just call them grandcubs?" Duke suggested and nuzzled a black lab blend.

Eduardo looked at Duke and smiled. "Done."

Roni tried not to laugh at their antics from her makeshift throne on the couch. She was exhausted but she was not going to deny the grandparents their bragging rights.

Eduardo looked at his daughter and pointed to the infant in her arms. "Roni, honey, why hasn't that one shifted?" Eduardo looked concerned.

"This is Luciano. We'll nickname him Lucky. It seems he is unable to shift." Roni tickled the chin of her son, and was rewarded with a baby sigh and smile.

Duke shook his head sadly. "Oh, no. We have a Faux Paws. I know the pain of being different. He's got a life of hell ahead of him."

Jon turned from the keyboard and winked. "Only if he doesn't find a guardian angel."

Lena Austin

Truth is often stranger than fiction, and Lena's experiences gave her a wide range of material to write about. Someone cursed her with "may you have a life so full you'll have many tales to tell your grandchildren." Hey, why waste these stories on kids who won't listen anyway? Writing them down is a nice way to spend her retirement. What? You expected an ex-BDSM Mistress to take up crocheting or something? See all her books at <http://www.LenaAustin.com> or write her at voiceomt2002@yahoo.com.

Tuesday Richards

Tuesday Richards is in the home stretch of college classes, working toward a business management degree. In her free time she works as a marketing coordinator and spends time with her kids. As for her name? No, her parents were not high or drunk -- she was named after "Tuesday's Gone" by Lynyrd Skynyrd. Visit her at www.tuesdayrichards.literalseduction.net. *Must Love Dogs* is Tuesday's first book for Changeling Press.