



Wolf Hunt 2:
FOREST WOLF

Marie Treador

Changeling Press

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The wolf hunt intensifies – but when missions are complicated by attraction, sex and divided loyalties, who's hunting whom?

As the Earth government unleashes its werewolves to track down the alien infiltrators, those in command of the invaders strike back. When Louis, their android servant, encounters the werewolf Linnet, whose mission is to kill his masters, he discovers that aliens and werewolves have something in common after all – the need to destroy the project that created such mutants.

But Louis's primary command is to serve and protect the very invaders Linnet must defeat. Worse, Linnet's wolf is in season, and she desperately wants Louis. He's fully capable of pleasuring her, and he's programmed to follow orders, but is it right to make use of a sentient being, android or not, just to fulfill her sexual needs? Louis has been programmed to learn from his environment, adapt, and evolve, and Linnet's about to discover he has some needs of his own...

Chapter One

Louis stopped and stood perfectly still. All his sensors confirmed the intruder's presence in the forest, and now he had a more definite fix on its location. Turning thirty degrees to the left, he set off again through the trees.

As he walked, he noted the dark reds and browns and golds of the autumn leaves, and the way the colors altered subtly with every wink of sun between the thick branches. With another part of his highly capable brain, he decided to wait until he had more information before informing his masters of the intruder's presence.

His flexible-soled boots made very little sound on the soft carpet of the forest floor. The tiny cracks of dry twigs could have been made by the same small woodland animals that watched him warily from behind the undergrowth, sniffing the air to try and catch his scent, to work out who and what he was.

Ignoring them, Louis strode with quick, sure strides toward the low, even breathing of the intruder. He pushed aside a heavy branch and found her.

She lay asleep at the foot of a tree, curtained off from casual observation by its low, spreading branches. A worn, dirty blanket covered her, revealing only a mop of black hair above the shapeless, woolen hump.

Louis hadn't expected a woman. He hadn't even been sure the intruder was human when he'd first picked up the presence. It had been more like some strange animal, although the readings had been confused. Swiftly checking, he discovered they were still confused, almost, but not quite, as if she used some kind of masking. All he could tell was that she was alive, female and mostly human. Definitely not Gardenian.

She slept peacefully enough, giving off no sign of pain or injury, although Louis couldn't think of any other reason for her to be sleeping in the forest in the middle of the morning. Questions as to how she got over the electrified fence into this private

land, and why, would wait until he'd ascertained her health. Silently, Louis covered the three paces to her prone body, and crouched beside her. Taking the edge of the blanket in his hand, he drew it back from her face.

She was aesthetically pleasing, her features small and even. From her dark-shadowed eyelids, her lashes curved long and thick and dark against the creamy pallor of her cheek. Her mouth was generous and full-lipped, her chin slightly pointed. A strong face, not a weak or a vulnerable one. There was no reason for Louis's unexpected urge to protect her, and perhaps that was what distracted him.

She was fast. Before he registered she was awake, let alone moved to react, she had sprung from the blanket, throwing a vicious punch that connected with his jaw. Then she leapt on him.

Louis rolled until she was under him, her naked body bucking furiously while her fists thudded one after the other into his palms and were held immovable. He bore her hands down to the ground on either side of her head, and when she spat at him, merely wiped the spittle off his cheek with his shoulder.

Her dark brown eyes, the shape of almonds, burned into his with animal fury. But the excitement of aggression faded fast into desperation, even fear, as she realized her helplessness. Not that she gave up. Her body twisted under him, trying to use flexibility to escape his greater weight.

Louis waited for her to work it out, patiently holding her rigid, straining hands above her head. "I won't hurt you," he said calmly. "But you have to stop struggling."

His words seemed to have the opposite effect. "Get off me, you bastard!" she snarled, increasing her efforts. "I'm warning you!"

She didn't appear to see the humour in warning an opponent who so clearly had the upper hand, so Louis refrained from smiling. However, he knew enough of her now to be suspicious when her struggles stopped abruptly.

"I warned you." Before the last word was out, her nose and mouth began to elongate and combine. Hair began to sprout on her arms, her chest, neck and face. Her

body swelled beneath him, gaining in mass and strength, and suddenly he wasn't wrestling a slight if strong woman, but a huge, angry wolf.

Her jaws opened to show large, dripping teeth. Refusing to let go, Louis jerked back to avoid being bitten in the neck and instead felt her fangs sink into his shoulder. But he refused to let his pain sensors distract him. Transferring the hairy, scrabbling paws to one of his hands, he used the other to grab at the creature's head, yanking it up by the fur, and when her teeth tore loose with an agonizing snap, he wrapped his fist around her snout and held on grimly.

The wolf possessed impressive strength, but, unlike him, she was subject to tiredness and fear. Louis knew he could hold on until the wolf tired, however long it took, but in the end, it was fear that broke her. Fear that even in this form she couldn't defeat him. He read that much in her glaring, dark eyes before she again collapsed into inactivity.

As suddenly as it had appeared, the fur faded from her skin. Her body shrank, her face rearranged itself so that the snout slid out of his fingers, and again he held a naked woman captive under his body and hands.

She stared into his face, her gaze flickering fearfully from one of his eyes to the other. Her breathing came in short, hard pants, but he had no intention of shifting his weight until he'd calmed her down. Her full breasts heaved under his chest. The soft, lithe body in his arms jerked once and was still, and suddenly he had more than pain to distract him as his inconvenient sex sensors kicked in too. If she felt his cock growing rigid against her, she'd freak all over again.

But it seemed she had other things on her mind.

"You're not afraid of me," she blurted. She lay passive in his hold now, her body still and pliant. "Shit, you're not even surprised by what I just did."

"No," he agreed. "I've already said I won't hurt you. But you have to stop fighting and talk to me."

He shifted position, moving his thigh across hers, lifting his weight slightly to let her breathe as well as to remove the threat of his now rigid cock. But unexpectedly, her

hips arched, following him not in aggression now but in a need that seemed entirely involuntary. It seemed she had noticed his arousal. And against all the odds was more excited than appalled.

Her panting breath had altered subtly and behind the confusion, something flared in her eyes that he recognized only too well as lust. When he didn't release her or move away, that look intensified. Her body heat rose, centering between her thighs, and she began to undulate, rubbing her naked breasts against his chest, grinding her pussy against his clothed cock. The moisture of her arousal assailed his sensors and his pleasure centers sparked.

It was a programmed reaction, designed to help him replicate human behavior, but for some reason, it occupied him as never before. Because it felt new and different. *She* felt new and different. And unbelievably good, writhing against him, all heat and lust. He got distracted watching her face, wanting to draw it, paint it as it was now, with her lips parted, glistening faintly as the tip of her pink tongue darted between, her dark, almond eyes warm, clouded and urgent. He wanted to see those pert breasts pushing up into his chest, take one of those pebbled nipples into his mouth and taste it. He wanted to free the rigid shaft of his cock and slide it inside her and see if that felt different too.

Though of course he couldn't. She was simply looking for another way to catch him off-guard and escape him.

But again, she surprised him. "Who wants to talk?" she said breathlessly. Her eyes smoldered. "When you can fuck?"

His weight on her felt delicious. This man she couldn't defeat as woman or as wolf, who didn't appear either to fear or hate her, held her helpless under his big, immovable body, and suddenly she gloried in his terrifying mastery. He held both hands still on the ground above her head and her naked breasts pushed up into his hard, powerful chest. She wanted his leather coat and his clothes gone. She wanted to feel his skin on hers, hot and sliding as he pushed his cock into her and fucked her captive, willing body to oblivion.

Somewhere, the up-rush of lust shocked her, as did her pleasure in his domination, but she didn't care. Urgent, scalding, it swept through her body, causing her hips to lift into his, seeking and finding the hard ridge of his clothed cock against her thigh. She wriggled, further exciting herself as she sought to arouse him. Hell, he was already aroused, judging by the size and rigidity of the cock sliding between her thighs.

Get a grip, girl, you can't screw a stranger, however handsome...

Was he handsome? His hair was an undistinguished dark brown, his face good-looking enough, but his eyes...

It was his eyes that drew her, as distant as the hills and as old and wise as she'd ever seen. If she could remember what she'd seen. Yes, she liked his eyes and his cool, impassive face—perhaps because they urged her on, challenged her to heat that coolness until his eyes clouded over with passion, until his whole face contorted in powerful pleasure. And his body...

Hell, who was she kidding? It was his body, big and lean and hard, that she wanted, that bone-stiff cock she'd been so foolishly excited to feel growing against her hip pounding into her, relieving her tension, assuaging the lust that tore her apart. *I can screw him, oh but I can...*

Her brain, following blindly behind the raging lust, began to justify it, pointing out that once she'd lulled him with her body, she could escape him.

And then what?

But she wouldn't go there yet. *Fuck him, then escape him. Kill two birds with one stone...* So she writhed and rubbed her breasts and pussy against him, and said, "Who wants to talk when you can fuck?" She wrapped her one free leg around his hip and felt his clothed cock slide against her pussy, shooting pleasure straight to her core. She moaned, and because they were so close and inviting, she kissed his parted lips.

Although her body had taken over, her brain made her keep her eyes open, and she could swear his expression was stunned. Excited laughter bubbled up, feeding her

desire. She slid her tongue along his upper lip, pressing it in to caress his perfect teeth and entered the cool velvet of his mouth.

"What's the matter?" she breathed against his lips when he neither responded nor rejected her. "Don't you know what to do with that big bone in your pants?" She thrust against it, wriggling her body up and down it. "Come on, big boy, let me show you. Take it out of your pants and put it in me. Fuck me..."

Without warning, the still lips she kissed bore down on hers and kissed back. His tongue wound around hers in command and his cock thrust against her, making her moan with triumph and need.

But it was only for an instant.

He moved, so quickly that she barely saw it happen, heaving his body off her and drawing her into a sitting position beside him. He released one of her hands but still held onto the other.

Somewhere she knew she should feel humiliated. She knew that she would, just as soon as she let herself think about it. For now, it was all she could do to deal with her body's raging loss.

Bizarrely, the stranger picked up her blanket with his free hand and dropped it around her shivering shoulders. Pinned beneath him, she hadn't felt the cold, but now she was freezing.

"I don't know if you're trying to lead me on in order to escape, or if you just like seducing strangers, but you should know that either is dangerous. What's your name?"

"I haven't the foggiest idea. What's yours?"

Her aggression didn't appear to bother him any more than her lust. "Louis."

"Louis?" She didn't know why it should surprise her. When she thought about it, it suited him.

"Louis," he repeated. "What are you doing here? This is private land."

"I didn't know."

"What did you think the electric fence was for?"

She decided to brazen it out. "Don't you know those things are dangerous? Someone could get hurt. Why do you want to keep your land so private anyway? What have you got to hide?"

"It's not my land."

She blinked. "Then you're trespassing too?"

"No. I work here."

"Doing what?"

"At the moment, looking for you. I need to know why you're here."

She tore her gaze free, and with an effort stilled her nervously plucking fingers on the blanket's edges. "I just... I just wanted somewhere safe to sleep. I like the woods."

Even that didn't seem to faze him. He said, "You jumped over the fence. As the wolf."

She nodded, regarding him once more with blatant curiosity. "Why does that not surprise you? Why do you accept something so—impossible, as if it happens all the time?"

He shrugged. "I'm not easily surprised."

She swallowed. "Does it happen all the time? Have... have you met others like me?"

"No."

The single word was like a blow. Just for a minute she'd hoped, seen a possibility of working this out, of discovering who and what she was.

Unexpectedly, his fingers tightened on her hand, like a squeeze of comfort. And because she hated how much she needed it, she jerked her hand free. And felt even more lost when he let her.

"Were you always like this?" he asked.

Again, she looked away, gazing determinedly between the trees, then upward to the grey, cold sky. The sun seemed to have gone for the day. "I don't know. I can't remember anything before I woke up a week ago." *Why do you care? You don't even want to fuck me...* But reaction was setting in, and shame. She couldn't wait to get away from

him. He might just let her walk, now that he'd released her hand, but instinct told her he wouldn't.

"Where was that?"

She shrugged. "Some town south of here. Maybe fifty miles south. I never even discovered its name."

"What brought you up here?"

"Nothing. I couldn't stay in my apartment. It felt—constricting. Wrong. Even before I realized I wasn't just dreaming about running wild at night. The second night, I woke up in a field and just kept going."

"Naked?"

"I stole this blanket. And I avoid people."

"So you're just wandering aimlessly?"

"Yes." It wasn't quite true though. Not now. Last night, she'd been following a scent, a scent that both angered and excited her. She'd been hunting, and she had the powerful feeling that when she found her prey, it would end this misery, give her back herself.

How could you tell this to a stranger you'd just tried to seduce on a forest floor? A stranger you'd actually bitten. She jerked her head back around, staring at his shoulder. She'd gotten beneath the leather coat he wore, bitten hard into the sweater and the flesh beneath. She could see his clothes were ripped across one shoulder, but there was no other sign of injury.

"There's no blood," she blurted, lifting her eyes to his. "I bit you. I tore your flesh, and there's no blood."

His gaze was steady. "I don't bleed."

"Everyone bleeds."

"I'm not everyone." His lip quirked slightly. "Or even anyone."

"What does that mean? Who *are* you?"

"My name is Louis. I serve the L'Estranges, who own this land."

A servant? Him? Oh no, that didn't ring true. None of this rang true. If she'd been the wolf, her hackles would be standing straight up. "You're telling me servants don't bleed? I may not remember much, but I'm not buying that one."

She leaned forward, pushing back the coat from his shoulder, almost surprised when he let her. In spite of everything, moisture pooled again in her pussy, because he felt so large and solid. She *so* needed to get laid before this constant, nagging lust drove her insane. If she wasn't already. Perhaps she was just imagining the wolf. It would explain why she couldn't defeat Louis, why she hadn't torn him to pieces with her ferocious bite.

She felt his gaze on her, impassive and unblinking as she lifted the torn flaps of his clothing. The skin flapped with it. She could even see teeth marks, which made her feel sick. They were the teeth marks of a large animal, not a small woman. Oh yes, the wolf was real. And she was sane. Just.

But what the hell was he?

Louis sat unmoving, just letting her look. When she touched the wound, as if she couldn't help it, it felt like skin, cool and soft over a thin layer of flesh. But it didn't cover bone, it covered circuit boards and fine golden wires, and deep inside, a winking light.

She fell back, dropping her hands, staring at him. "Shit," she whispered. "What are you?"

"I'm an android."

Her breath caught. Bizarre thoughts clashed in her head. "Are you a Government project?"

His cool expression didn't change. "Why do you say that?"

Confused, she let her gaze drop. "I don't know. Because it seems wrong for an android to look like you." She choked on something that wasn't quite laughter. "Shit, I've been rejected by a robot. How lowering is that? I must say, your makers were very thorough."

"I am not a robot. I'm an android. Outwardly, I am a perfect replica of a human man."

Though he spoke in his normal, calm tone, something made her glance at him again. "Did I hurt your feelings?" she mocked. "Do you *have* feelings?"

"Not as you understand them."

"Do you feel pain?" she blurted, flickering a glance back to his wound.

"Of course. I am programmed with sensory input and human male behaviors." His gaze didn't back down from hers.

She curled her lip. "Not quite."

"You mean because I didn't fuck you?"

She hadn't expected him to comprehend, let alone come up with a coarse retort. Her body heated uncomfortably, and she hoped he couldn't understand blushing.

"I am programmed with choice. I didn't reject you. I chose not to take advantage of a female who thought she could use sex to escape me."

"I couldn't, could I?" For some reason, she wanted to weep. And she hadn't wept since this whole nightmare began.

"No." He rose to his feet in one fluid, graceful movement that in spite of everything set her pussy tingling all over again. Android or not, capable or not, he had one very lusted body.

He held out a hand to her, and when she took it instinctively, stumbling to her feet, he stood looking down at her for a moment. A frown creased his perfect brow. "You're tired and hungry. You can hardly stand. When did you last eat?"

"I don't remember." She'd lost any desire for food when she began tracking—although now she thought of it, water would be nice.

He dropped her hand and turned away from her. "Come."

She hung back, glancing wildly around her. "Where? Why?"

"There's a shelter you can use, not far from here. We can collect water on the way, and I'll bring you food later."

He didn't offer to take her to the big house she'd seen last night, the house where, presumably, his masters and maybe even his makers resided. She didn't blame him. She was a naked, dirty woman who turned into a slaving wolf at sunset. Or whenever else she chose.

She walked beside him, matching his stride with more frequent steps of her own. "Will you tell them?" she blurted.

"If they need to know."

She stared at him. "That a werewolf is staying on their land?"

A quick smile crossed his lips. It was disconcertingly human.

Chapter Two

The shelter was a tree house, constructed from cut branches and leaves.

"Did you build this?" she asked, staring at it. "For them?"

"For me," he amended, and she turned to watch him crouch down by the stream which ran between the trees and under the shelter.

"You stay here?"

"Sometimes. For peace."

So even androids needed peace. He dipped his hand in the water and then licked his palm. She tried not to stare at his tongue. It had caressed hers when she'd kissed him. Just for a moment, it had, as if he'd really wanted her. And it had felt so... human.

But he wasn't, he didn't, and he couldn't. He was an android.

He said, "The water is safe." Under her bemused gaze he rose to his feet and swung himself up into the tree house, only to emerge a moment later with a flask-shaped container. Dropping lightly to the ground, he bent and filled the flask before holding it out to her.

She stared at it. Her mouth began to water. "Why does an android have a flask? Do you entertain other guests in your shelter?"

"No. There are fluids I need to function." Her reaction must have been clear for once again a smile that looked humanly cynical flickered across his lips. "The flask is clean. I wash it out after use."

Embarrassed all over again, she snatched the flask from him. "You drink machine oil?"

"Not precisely."

She took a long, grateful draught of the cold water and replaced the cap.

"Can you climb up?"

"Of course I can!"

She was strong and athletic. She knew that. But she'd reckoned without the weakness of hunger and the awkwardness of climbing while clutching a blanket. For some stupid reason, it seemed important to preserve her nakedness from his view, even although he was an android, and even although he had already seen everything she had.

Hanging by one hand from a branch, she braced herself to fall and lose whatever dignity she'd imagined she was maintaining. But without warning, a strong arm encircled her waist and she was swung into the air. Her stomach whooshed, spreading tingles below, and then she was on the platform and looking into the interior of the shelter.

It was basic. But the walls were carefully constructed to keep out the wind and rain, and there was a comfortable looking mat on the floor. She thought she could sleep there.

A shadow covered her as Louis joined her on the platform, and she crouched to enter the shelter.

He said, "I'll bring you blankets later."

"I have one," she said automatically. He was taking off his coat, and her stomach lurched at the possibility that he was about to take up what she'd offered after their brief fight.

When he pulled the black sweater over his head, her throat constricted and she realized her heart was beating like a rabbit's. She clutched the blanket around her in mingled panic and longing.

Beneath the sweater he wore a plain white shirt. Muscles seemed to bulge in his upper arms, and with less clothes, his body seemed even more appealing. What was the matter with her? She was finding a machine not just attractive and handsome, but sexy.

Well, she hadn't encountered much life in the last week. She had nothing to compare him with. Perhaps she should just try and think of him as "it."

She blinked, realizing he held out the sweater to her. "You'll be cold," he said mildly. "And this will be easier to move around in."

But she couldn't drop the blanket in front of him. "I'll be fine," she muttered.

"You're shivering," he observed. Again the tiny smile, and he turned his back, holding the sweater out at arms-length beside him.

She dropped the blanket and snatched the sweater. It felt deliciously warm and soft next to her skin and she realized how cold to the bone she'd been for so long. She was almost used to it.

The sweater came down to her knees. Pulling up the long sleeves, she realized it smelled of him, a clean, curiously male smell that didn't seem possible considering what he was. "Thank you," she muttered.

He turned back and lifted his coat from the floor. "Use that too if you need it."

"Won't your people notice it's gone?"

"No."

For some reason that one word caught her. As if he was as lonely as she. The only one of his kind. He said he had no feelings, as she understood them, but that didn't mean he wasn't affected by isolation, carelessness, rudeness.

And he'd already admitted he felt pain. She said guiltily, "What will you do about..." She flickered her gaze to the wound in his shoulder.

"It's already repairing."

She let her gaze slide away. "Does that hurt too?"

"No." He stirred, an obvious precursor to changing the subject. "Tell me, do you control your changes?"

"What?" Distracted, she blinked at him.

"Do your changes happen without your consent?" he asked patiently. "Or do you control them?"

She thought of lying, just to give herself an edge. But he was a machine. Perhaps he'd know. Besides, he was being kind to her with no reason. The truth was all she had to give him in return. "I can make it happen now. At first, I changed at night, and came

back to normal in the morning." She smiled sourly. "If this is my normal form. And then I discovered I could make myself change during the day too. I don't know if I can deliberately stop being the wolf, though. I've never tried."

"Then what happened when you fought me and changed back?"

"I don't know." She looked away, took his coat just for something to do. "It vanished with my – anger."

He nodded. "I think it means you have some control over that change too. You just need to practice."

She paused with the coat half way around her shoulders. "You mean I can stop being the wolf?"

"Is that what you want?"

"Wouldn't you?"

"I don't know. I don't think we can stop being what we are."

Yes we can, she thought fiercely. I will, just as soon as I find my prey.

Louis entered the house by the side door as usual. Although their nearest neighbors were some distance away, and weren't frequent visitors, it had long been established that Louis would behave at all times like a human servant. He used the side-doors, got a day off every week, had even had a brief affair with a girl from the local village pub. And he had his own bedroom, although that was as much for Iris L'Estrange's convenience as for the sake of appearances.

He didn't expect to see his masters through the half-open door of the office as he passed. Normally, they left the routine monitoring to him, and spent their days living the life of rich, idle humans. But this morning, they were both there, which probably spoke volumes for the unease which had gripped them over recent weeks. Ever since another of their own had died a sudden and violent death.

Iris, tall and elegant in a flowing designer trouser-suit, glanced up from her computer. Still young, with smart blonde hair piled high on her head, she looked very human, which she wasn't, and very powerful, which she definitely was. "Come in here, Louis."

Louis obeyed.

William, who held himself with the same pride, but lacked his wife's constant, implied threat, said, "All secure around the perimeter?"

"Yes." He turned to go, but again Iris stayed him.

"No, no, wait. Another of our people is missing."

"Dead?" Louis asked.

"No, we don't think so, but her beacon is inactive, as if it's being masked. It gives off only occasional readings, with hours or even days in between."

"It must be malfunctioning," Louis said. "Perhaps we should bring her in and replace it."

"That's what we thought at first, but Rose Winter was one of our first agents here. For five years she's lived among them, as long as we have, and now she's compromised."

William waved one hand at his computer screen. "Look at this. Military orders we picked up this morning."

Louis glanced at the screen. "Find and detain Major Jon Maynard and his companion, believed to be iGazette journalist Rose Winter. Use extreme caution, kill only as a last resort."

"It doesn't make sense," Iris said flatly. "This Maynard has gone AWOL, with our Rose, whose beacon has mysteriously stopped working."

"He could have discovered her and kidnapped her," William pointed out.

"Then why are the military trying to arrest him?"

"Perhaps they don't know what she is, but Maynard does."

"Wouldn't he tell them?" Louis interjected.

"I don't know," William said impatiently. "All I know is that our people are disappearing, violently, and something will have to be done!"

Clearly, he could see his nice, safe mission in the lap of luxury disappearing into a morass of failure and disapprobation. When he got no response from Louis, he flung back his seat and stood up.

"Louis, find out everything you can about this Maynard, and monitor Rose's beacon round the clock. The next time it blinks, I want to know exactly where. They key to all this is with them. I'm convinced of it."

"Very well." As William strode from the room, Louis took his seat.

Iris rose from hers and came to stand behind him, wrapping her smooth, elegant arms around his neck. "The tension of this is killing me," she murmured into his ear. "I'll come to your room this afternoon. An hour before dinner."

Louis said nothing. His fingers were already flying across the keyboard faster than Iris could see. His "otherness" fascinated her, was a large part of the reason she chose to use him as her lover. Another part of it was the excitement of fucking anyone else under the same roof as her husband. Though Louis didn't understand that, he had accepted it.

Their interludes together gave him pleasure. So much so, that at the beginning he had looked forward to them and replayed them later in his mind. In recent months, however, he'd taken the physical pleasure with a certain cerebral dissatisfaction. Behaving like a human without feeling like one. His fastidious circuitry had begun to dislike the whole relationship. Especially when his reading supplemented his ethical programming and he began to understand the value of faithfulness.

Just for an instant, he found himself comparing the slightly distasteful indifference he felt to Iris's touch now, to what he'd felt with the strange wolf woman's body writhing under him. He would obediently fuck Iris this afternoon, but it was the other woman he wanted.

Louis felt his body stiffen. Obedience was becoming difficult for him, which he knew shouldn't happen. Fortunately, Iris was too absorbed in herself and her own problems to notice any strange reaction on his part. She merely rubbed her breasts against his shoulders, caressing her nipples on him, before straightening and leaving with a bright smile. She had something to look forward to in her day.

So did Louis. But it wasn't their bedroom assignation. It was taking food to the strange wolf woman in the forest.

Having initiated a search for Maynard, even before Iris left, he began another for wolves and synced his own circuits to monitor Rose Winter's beacon.

The L'Estranges' revelations had brought several things together in his brain, and he found what he'd been looking for pretty quickly—Rose Winter's piece for the iGazette on a giant wolf terrorizing a city—the same city where two Gardenian agents had died. Several other Gardenians had died in what looked like animal attacks. Such attacks were scattered across the planet and most had been covered up, so what Louis found was largely rumor and hearsay. But the very fact that they had been covered up told him what he needed to know.

Jon Maynard, distinguished peace-keeping soldier and inspired leader of men, had disappeared off all available records more than a year ago. But now the military wanted to arrest him.

The L'Estranges were right. They needed to find Rose, if only to preserve her from the wolves.

She didn't sleep when the android left her. Instead she sat on the bed-mat with her legs stretched out in front of her, wearing his sweater and holding his leather coat across her knees while she thought.

It was no good forcing the memories. Before last week, she might never have existed. She might have been born fully grown into the world. All she had was her timeless, dream-like memories of running through urban streets, and rural forests, following scents that she seemed to understand from instinct, but never finding the one she sought.

Until last night. The scent that had both excited and revolted her had brought her here, leaping over the high fence that Louis had said was electrified. Would she still have risked jumping it if she knew? That was scary. She didn't like not being in control. It was bad enough changing into a wolf every night, but remembering the pure instinct which guided her every act at such times was downright terrifying.

Perhaps it was that which had led her to accept the android with little more than the blink of an eye. Her world was full only of confusion and fear, and absolutely no

understanding. Compared to that, an android sophisticated enough to be completely indistinguishable from a man was no big deal.

Especially when he was kind to her. Burying her nose in the sleeve of his sweater, she inhaled his scent once more. The inconvenient bodily lusts which never seemed to be far away rose up again, hardening her nipples against the soft wool, releasing a pool of moisture from her tingling pussy. Curious, that despite remembering nothing of her past life, she knew what she needed to do to scratch that particular itch. And she wanted it terribly.

As the wolf, she yearned for another of her kind. As the woman, she'd glimpsed men who made the longing worse. She'd fantasized over their vague faces and powerful bodies as she'd sought the comfort of her own fingers, rubbing her swollen clitoris and thrusting inside her aching pussy until she came. But masturbating didn't seem to help.

Louis could have helped. Pinning her body beneath him, he could have caressed her aching breasts with his long, clever hands. He could have pushed his big, rigid cock inside her and given her what she wanted, hard and wild on the forest floor.

She jerked her knees up, her whole body heating with raw lust. Perhaps when he came back, he could still do that. He'd know how to caress her, and she'd show him what she liked, what she needed – slow, caressing hands on her breasts, on her hips and ass, and his urgent, furious cock between her legs. She'd make him do it to her hard, slam into her wildly, repeatedly until orgasm claimed her. That would be so good, so sweet and intense... and necessary.

And then, with his cock still hard and ready inside her, she'd climb on him, caressing his powerful, naked body with both hands, straddling those sexy, narrow hips, and make him do it all over again.

Sweating, she bit into her trembling arm, ignoring the hairy fluff of the covering sweater. What was she thinking of? He was an android. It didn't make him a walking vibrator. Though she knew he was a machine, the idea of treating him like one appalled her on any number of levels.

He was just different. As she was.

But he *was* a machine, and programmed to serve his masters, whoever they were. Her lust was turning his presumably programmed kindness into something it couldn't be. He wasn't her friend. He was probably telling his people all about her right now, and they'd turn up with guns and dogs.

She pressed her palm hard against her throbbing pussy, once, then snatched it away and threw her head back against the wooden wall of the shelter. She waited.

She heard him coming, even smelled him, some minutes before he arrived. And although prepared for him to have brought company, she knew he came alone, and felt her heart lift immeasurably with the knowledge.

Opening the door a crack, she watched him emerge through the trees with his even, easy stride, a backpack slung casually over one shoulder. He wore a leather coat that looked exactly like the one beside her.

Perhaps his maker was a woman, because every movement of his legs and hips seemed gracefully masculine and sexy as hell. And his impassive face told her he knew nothing about that. Even if he did, he wouldn't care.

She shuffled back and sat down on the mat with her legs curled under her. She was prepared for the increasingly unmanageable lust. What she didn't expect was the funny leap of her heart when he first appeared in the doorway.

His gaze found her at once.

"Hello," she said inanely, appalled by the breathless quality of her voice. But he seemed to find nothing remarkable in her greeting, merely nodded and entered the shelter.

He sat cross-legged in the middle of the floor, and unloaded his backpack. Speech eluded her. For some reason, despite his mundane task, his presence filled the room, overwhelming her as nothing in this weird, awful week had yet managed to do.

He pushed a container across the floor to her. "Bread and cheese and fruit." Another followed it. "Steak, if you prefer."

Her mouth began to water, the safe urge of hunger releasing her locked-up tongue. She snatched at the steak container and lifted the meat up with her fingers. It was lightly cooked. She bit into it, closing her eyes to chew, and when she opened them again, found him watching her with his cool, hazel eyes.

She swallowed. "Did you tell them about me?"

"No."

"Why not?" she asked, taking another bite.

"They didn't ask."

Chapter Three

Louis moved, reaching past her, and her body reacted instantly to his nearness. She was so wet, she'd leave marks on his bed-mat. And yet something else both excited and revolted her. Some new quality to his scent screamed danger to every nerve she possessed. She knew an insane urge to sink her teeth into his corded nape. Or kiss it, she no longer knew which. Her breath hitched, her fists clenched.

And then he only picked up the water flask and moved it nearer her.

The moment vanished, lost because his tiny thoughtfulness touched her. And yet it was only part of his programming. He was a servant. Or so he said.

A sudden thought struck her, dropping her jaw, though fortunately not when her mouth was full of steak. Laying the meat down, she said, "Shit. Am I an android?"

He smiled at that, a smile that somehow changed the coolness of his eyes. Perhaps it was her imagination. Or perhaps he had an incredibly clever maker.

"No," he said.

"How can you tell? You have an infallible chip for recognizing fellow androids?"

"Or any other species."

"Then what species am I?" She meant it to be brash, mocking, but she had the uncomfortable feeling it came out more like a lost child. *I want to go home. I want my mother. I want to know who the hell my mother is.*

"Human female," he said, comfortingly enough. "With something more."

"Wolf."

"Not quite. Were you ever a soldier?"

She blinked. "I have absolutely no idea."

"But you know what a soldier is?"

"Of course I do." There was no *of course* about it. The fact that she knew how the world operated, and yet could remember nothing about her own identity was as much of a mystery to her as to him.

"Does the name Jon Maynard mean anything to you?"

She frowned. "No. At least, I don't think so. Should it?"

"Perhaps. What about Rose Winter?"

Something perked inside her. "Yes! I know her name! She's..." Not her mother, her friend, her sister. Deflated, she finished flatly, "She's a journalist on the Newscreens."

"She hasn't been on the Newscreens for a couple of weeks," Louis volunteered.

Drinking morosely from the water flask, it took her a moment to realize the significance of that. She laid the flask down with an excited thud. "Then I knew of her before! I wasn't born last week!"

His eyes changed again, not smiling this time, perhaps pitying. Could androids pity? "Have you actually met her? Perhaps with Jon Maynard?" He put a hand-held computer down on the floor between them, and it lit into life. The familiar, pretty face of the strawberry blonde journalist. The screen flickered and she saw a good-looking man with a strong, serious face. A good face. She frowned, wondering if she should remember it. Mostly, she just wanted to.

She shook her head. "If I have, I don't remember it."

He nodded, and put the hand-comp back in his backpack before returning his gaze to her face. Her stomach twisted. She wanted his mouth on hers, on her breasts, on her hot, clenching pussy. She wanted to jump him, fuck him, watch passion contort his cool, impassive face.

Dream on.

"What do you want?"

Heat surged at the possibilities, though fortunately humour came to her aid before unwise words could escape her. Choking them on an embarrassed laugh, she said, "What do you mean?"

"I mean, whatever led you here, what do you plan to do now?"

"Keep looking, move on until I find... answers."

"To what?"

She shrugged.

Louis opened the fruit container and she picked out a piece of apple just to have something to do.

"Something made you jump the high fence into this part of the wood. There's plenty of forest unenclosed that it would have been easier and safer to get into. Why here?"

She glanced at him uncomfortably, sure of nothing except that he didn't threaten her. Right now he was her only friend. She took a deep breath. "I smelled something. I tracked it here."

"A good smell?"

"No-o... A smell I needed to follow. Something bad, but important. Something..." An instant of recent memory flashed into her mind. Louis reached across her for the water, his neck, his shoulders almost touching her face. "Like you," she whispered. She lifted her gaze back to his face. "Not you. Something that touched you. It's bad."

He nodded, as if even that didn't surprise him, almost as if he expected it. "Have you ever heard of the planet Gardenia?"

"No. Should I have?"

"Perhaps not by that name. What about any planet inhabited by non-Earth peoples?"

She stared. "Of course not. There aren't any. Or at least if there are we haven't found them." She spoke impatiently, because her mind clung unwisely to the previous discussion, and who or what had touched Louis to leave that smell upon him. "The people at the house. They touch you. Surely not to charge your batteries."

Christ, she sounded like a jealous, nagging wife. *Button your mouth, woman...* But this time, it seemed she'd got to him. Against all the odds. His gaze actually dropped from hers, and her reasonless jealousy surged up into new life.

"Fuck. You are a walking vibrator."

His head jerked, almost as if she'd slapped him, and she wanted to drag the words back, unsay them, punch herself. "Louis..."

"I am an android," he said flatly. "Fully programmed in male behaviors." He was fastening up the backpack and she realized in panic that he was leaving. "I need to do more work, decide what is the best thing for you to do. For tonight, I can't tell you not to shift, but be aware, there is danger for you at the house. Don't go there, do you understand?"

"I believe I've always understood English," she said stiffly.

He nodded, more android than she'd seen him before. Her heart began to ache, and not just with her own shame.

"I'll return in the morning," he said, pushing open the door, and suddenly she was desperate to keep him here, keep him with her. She catapulted herself across the floor on her knees, bumping to a halt against his thigh. He turned his head back to her without obvious surprise. "I've left clothing inside. Items Iris L'Estrange was throwing out. Is there anything else you need?"

You. The word screamed so loudly in her ear she might have spoken it aloud. His gaze held hers. His thigh seemed to burn into her leg where they touched. For an instant, she stared into his face with helpless need. A tiny twig had attached itself to his hair, and just to have reason to touch him, she raised her hand and picked it free. It brought her even closer to him. Her breast brushed against his shoulder, searing her pebbled nipple. His hair felt so soft that her hand lingered. Her gaze fell to his lips, full and strong, and she trembled with her longing to kiss them. Moisture flooded her pussy.

Because she couldn't help it, she moved her whole body in a slow, sensuous rock that brushed her thigh against his, her breast against his shoulder. Bolts of pleasure shot through her, feeding her lust. She caught her breath and swayed again, reaching this time for his mouth.

But at the last minute, she took fright. He looked too damned impassive and she wouldn't, couldn't use him like a sodding vibrator. Fuck. She couldn't be this randy and he not feel a damned thing!

She opened her mouth to tell him she wanted him, to ask him to stay. He might choose to... But as she stared into his cool eyes, she again shied away at the last minute, merely shook her head at him dumbly, and fell back, forgetting even to thank him for what he'd already done.

He's an android! He doesn't need or deserve thanks. But as he swung himself lightly to the ground and walked off into the trees, she knew in her heart that he did.

One of Louis's greatest assets to his masters was his ability to multi-task, and he had always taken a professional pride in continually stretching himself in this area. But that afternoon, he seriously considered turning vast areas of his circuitry off, because no matter how many tasks he undertook, his memory kept returning to the wolf girl. The way she'd deliberately rubbed her luscious little body against him, the way her eyes had melted into his as her lips parted, as if she would kiss him, as if she would ask him...

Ask him for what? Sex? The use of his sexual organ as the only vibrator available to her?

"Fuck. You are a walking vibrator." He wasn't quite sure what had led her to speak those words that she so clearly regretted, but the truth in them upset his idea of self. It was almost as if, like her, he'd lost his identity.

And yet he'd never had one.

He was also aware that his decision to protect her was probably endangering his masters, and he kept returning to that decision in an attempt to justify or even understand it. More often than not, it came back to his sexual pleasure centers. Iris L'Estrange had given him his first opportunity to use them, and it hadn't been long before his curiosity had led him to experiment, to find out if the strange pleasures were the same with a different woman. Though Barbara, the local barmaid, had induced much the same pleasures, he would have said, had he been human, that it *felt* different.

But it hadn't satisfied his curiosity. Nor had the pornographic films and books he'd devoured. Those hadn't aroused his sexual sensors at all, so he'd deleted them as pointless.

Nor was he certain why he wanted to repeat those unsatisfying sexual experiments with the wolf woman, but he did. And that was connected too to her unpalatable description of him as a walking vibrator.

If he'd been human, he thought he would be uncomfortable, even unhappy. As it was, he filled his positronic brain with research, tracked every previous bleep of Rose Winter's beacon to try and find a pattern to her erratic travels, and tried to work out what to do about the wolf woman. But only when Iris L'Estrange came into the office did it become clear to him what he had to do first. The decision made, a curious lightness descended on him, quieting his agitated circuits.

Iris didn't look pleased. She was dressed only in a skimpy robe, as if preparing to bathe before dinner. "I've been waiting upstairs for half an hour!" she snapped.

"I'm sorry. I'm busy."

"Too busy to obey me?" She spun his chair round and he gazed up into her boiling amber eyes. She'd taken out her contact lenses, unwisely leaving herself open to discovery by any unexpected visitors.

"I am obeying you. According to my programming, when two commands clash, I must choose to perform the most important. In this case, your mission clearly states that the safety of Gardenia's agents is paramount."

She stared at him, furious because she knew he was right and because he was thwarting her. "We can save the world after dinner," she said between her teeth. "Right now, get upstairs to your room. I have other tensions to relieve."

"Then I suggest you relieve them on your husband."

Her mouth actually fell open. Louis almost laughed, except he rarely allowed his appreciation of humour to be seen.

"Is that insolence, Louis?" she demanded.

"Advice. I wish to discontinue our assignations."

"You're malfunctioning," she said coldly, spinning away from him and striding toward the door. "Reset yourself. And then, come to your room."

"Resetting at this stage in my research would be disastrous," he said calmly. "And I will not be joining you in my room. That is not insolence or malfunction. It is choice."

He returned to the computer. For several minutes, her eyes bored into the back of his head. Then he heard the swish of her robe against the door as she swept out of the room.

It was as if someone had unclogged his wires, like the cerebral equivalent of sexual pleasure, even though he'd just deprived himself of the physical possibility. He straightened his shoulders and smiled at the computer screen, just as it flickered and changed according to his commands—and showed him a standard photograph of his wolf woman.

Caught, he stared at the screen. Black hair cut short and neat under a military officer's hat, her dancing brown eyes belying the serious expression on her piquant, almost Elfin face. Younger, but indisputably the same woman.

Her name was Lewis. *Like mine.*

Linnet Lewis.

About the only familiar thing in her world was the claustrophobia that came upon her, particularly at night, when the urge to shift was too strong to resist. She felt it rise quickly tonight, fed by her churned up emotions, and her desire to see Louis again. Not to get him to fuck her brains out, but to apologise to him. A little thing beside the enormity of what had already happened to her, but for some reason, it seemed incredibly important.

He'd told her not to go to the house, so she wouldn't. But she'd damned well hang about nearby and catch him if he came out. With this in mind, she followed his track through the forest.

It was growing dark, the last song of the birds fading into sleep as the night-time animals began to wake. The forest was full of increasingly intense smells, telling her

exactly what and who had travelled this way before her. In the distance, she could smell cattle and dogs and chickens. A cat fight close by disturbed the peace of the night. The trees around her began to alter subtly, not in their shapes, but in their light and shadow, in their colors.

The urge to change, like the urge, she imagined, of a mother giving birth to push, grew too strong to resist. She tried, with breathing, as somehow or other she knew birthing mothers did to postpone the inevitable, but it didn't seem to work for werewolves.

She sat down on the bumpy forest floor and let the wolf break free. When she'd first realized what was happening to her, it had scared her witless, but now there was no fear, only acceptance.

She sprang to her four feet and began to lope off the path through the trees. The joy of freedom rose fast and in an instant she was bounding, galloping, running off a huge surge of energy. And then she smelled *it*.

A brief whiff passing on the air. Lifting her nose high, she sniffed the wind and changed direction. In a very few minutes, she was looking at the house. She remembered Louis's prohibition, and knew she wasn't bound to obey him. What she was bound to do was to follow the smell to its source, to rip apart the unspeakable evil that created it.

Louis served dinner as usual to his masters in the formal dining room. Iris was stony-faced. The only time she looked at him was when, as he cleared their plates, she asked her husband if he hadn't noticed Louis behaving oddly recently.

"No, dear. But he's programmed to learn and develop, so from time to time you will notice slight changes in him. He's a very fine model, aren't you, Louis?"

"According to my handbook. If you're finished here, I'd like to discuss some of my findings with you."

William swiveled in his chair, an expression of eagerness on his face. "What have you found?"

"Jon Maynard, the soldier the military is trying to arrest, disappeared from current records more than a year ago, along with several other distinguished military personnel. The hunt for him began only a few weeks ago, at an unmapped military base. Journalists and civilian police are looking for Rose Winter, who simply didn't turn up for work one day. They've asked a lot of questions in the nearest farms, towns and villages. No one has so much as glimpsed either of them. But several claimed to have seen giant wolves, like the one Rose was chasing. Like the ones which killed at least three of our agents."

"Louis, that's rather a leap!" William scoffed. "I was with you right up to the giant wolf, but I can't —"

"Think about it. Humans can't tell you from their own people, but animals can. Cats and dogs won't come near you. They don't know what you are. But what if the Earth Government set up a military project to develop a hybrid human-animal that could both identify and destroy Gardenians?"

He had their undivided attention now. William said doubtfully, "You really think that's what they've done?"

"But what about Rose?" Iris interjected. "If this Maynard is a wolf, why hasn't he killed her? Or has he found some way to keep her beacon blinking, even if only intermittently? Why would he bother? Unless to keep us in ignorance of her death..."

"I can find out," Louis said. "I can find Rose Winter." His head snapped up, his sensors prickling. Something not quite human, something he'd already picked up first thing this morning, was too close. And the window was open a crack, letting scents out as well as in.

He moved quickly to the window, reaching up to close it, just as something crashed through the main pane.

It was a wolf, his wolf. He knew immediately. And she sprang straight for Iris, who didn't even have time to scream. William let out a bellow of fear and rage, clutching his head as he tried, no doubt, to remember where he'd put the weapons.

They'd grown slack in their years of luxury and safety. Louis knew where the weapons were. He had, in addition, one built into his hand. But he wouldn't use it.

Iris went down under the wolf in a crash of crockery, pulling the white linen cloth off the table as she went. The wolf's massive, snarling jaws bore down on her throat, and Louis leapt at her, the sheer force of his jump rolling her off Iris.

As before, the wolf bucked and writhed to free herself, even snapped at his hands, at his face. And then, for the tiniest instant, she was still. Her eyes, Linnet Lewis's eyes, stared into his. His sensors picked up more animal than human now, but the human was definitely still there. And the creature must be injured. He smelled blood. She made a sound that was half-whine, half-howl and struggled once more to be free.

Iris screamed, "Kill it, Louis! William, get the guns!"

Louis clung tight to the wolf's fur, forced his mouth to her ear. "Run to the top of the house, shut the door, and change back. You must try. Now."

He didn't wait to see if she understood, just loosened his grip enough to let her spring free. He knew he could catch her again before she killed one of them. And it was clear she wouldn't kill him. Somehow he'd known she wouldn't even try.

The wolf bolted past the terrified couple. Iris cringed into the wall, yelling. William aimed a vicious kick at the animal's rear, which connected but didn't slow her.

Louis ran after her, slamming the door behind him as if for his masters' safety. In reality, he strode across the wide hallway to make sure the wolf obeyed him. She did, bounding up the stairs in huge, powerful leaps.

Louis turned immediately toward the big glass front door, but something on the floor caught his attention and he paused. Blood. Two tiny drops of blood.

Yet the wolf wasn't wounded as he'd feared. He'd felt no wounds on her during their wrestle, sensed no sign of injury except the blood. And he finally understood.

It was the blood of menstruation. The wolf was in season, sexually aroused, constantly. The whole creature was suffering an overwhelming urge to mate.

As if she wasn't going through enough.

Even as the realization hit him he moved faster than either human or Gardenian could see, wiping up the blood on the waiter's napkin he carried in his pocket, before running to the door and crashing his shoulder through the glass.

Shards scattered everywhere, in his hair, his clothes. Shaking himself, he wrenched the door open and ran out through the porch into the garden. He ran around the house, away from the dining room window, just as his powerful hearing picked up the sound inside the house of the dining room door cautiously opening.

Louis ran on, conscious of a dilemma. Not only had he now deliberately misled his masters, he'd left them alone in the same house as the wolf whose instinct was to kill them. And yet to make his ruse work, they had to believe he'd killed the wolf. If only she had the sense and the control to stay hidden.

Her eyes had told him that his presence with her victims was a shock. He could only hope it was enough of a shock to hold her in check.

Sooner than he'd have liked, he stopped, opened his hand so that the fingers fell back from his knuckles to reveal his weapon, which he fired into the air twice. Then, returning his hand to normal, he walked back to the house.

The L'Estranges had closed the outer storm door, presumably to keep the wolf out. Louis opened it quietly, and stepped over the shattered glass from the inner door. Typically, they were waiting for him to clear it up.

William stuck his head around the door. His face looked white. "Louis? Where is it?"

Louis lifted his weapon hand significantly.

"Dead?"

"It won't be bothering you again," Louis said, wondering at both his ability to lie by implication and his efforts to avoid the actual words.

William opened the door wide and fell back to let him enter. "You were right," he said heavily. "This changes everything."

"Damn right," Iris said with feeling. Her pale face held anger and suspicion behind the fading fear as she glared at Louis. "Why didn't you kill it at once?"

"I was afraid of hitting you as well. And I needed both hands to grip the animal." He came to a halt in the middle of the room and glanced from one to the other. "We have to decide what to do next."

"It's over," Iris said in a small, hard voice. No wonder she was angry. She'd liked her life here. "Peaceful infiltration is no longer possible. Our people will die every day as these wolves attack in increasing numbers. We must begin the military invasion."

Chapter Four

She sat on the floor, her naked back to the closed door, shaking with cold and reaction. At first, she couldn't force herself to change back, because she could smell *her* in here, the woman she didn't want to call his mistress. The woman she'd just tried to kill and still wanted to, along with her evil-smelling mate. Husband. Shit.

Dragging her trembling hand through her hair, she was just grateful that the scent of the woman was faint rather than recent. That, combined with the knowledge that she'd trapped herself in here at Louis's request, enabled her to calm down, to concentrate and for the first time ever, she'd managed to control her return to human form.

She looked around her at the bare white walls, at the clean, uncluttered furniture and the neatly made bed. Not a trace of personality. Worse than a hotel bedroom, where at least, you got the odd picture on the wall, however tacky.

She took a deep breath and rose to her feet. It was Louis she could smell in here, a strong, oddly comforting scent. In the house of the enemy, for whom he worked, it made her feel ridiculously safe. Crossing the small attic room with its sloping ceiling, she began to look for clothes. She wouldn't face him naked again. Not when even the memory of his body pressing down on her wolf's one was making her hot.

God damn it, she was a randy slut. Perhaps that was why she'd been altered, only it had all gone horribly wrong. She frowned, pulling one drawer open. Did the Government do that a lot? It was wrong, she knew that much. She must always have thought it wrong. Of course, the Government didn't like opposition, but it very rarely got any. Most people put up with it, because it gave them the greatest gift of all. Peace.

There were two pairs of trousers in the drawer, neatly pressed and folded. One black pair, like the ones he'd been wearing today, and one pair of denim jeans. She took

those out and something tumbled free. A large bird feather, white and blue and yellow. A pine cone. And a large sycamore leaf in vivid, autumnal red and gold. Like the random collections of a small child walking in the woods.

Her throat constricted. She put the items back carefully, respecting his wish to keep them from his masters' notice. Hastily, she climbed into the jeans and opened the drawer above to look for a top. There was another white shirt, the replica of the one he already wore, and a black T-shirt, which she pulled over her head before she noticed the paper peeking underneath the white one. Unable to prevent herself, she lifted the shirt and found a half-finished drawing, a sketch of the wood with birds on tree branches and a red squirrel gazing directly at the viewer.

It wasn't so much the astonishing detail that captured her. It was the colors. Bright and vibrant, almost overwhelming. Was that how he saw things? Or how he wanted to see them? She began to realize that he was a very odd android. Not just beyond her understanding, she suspected, but beyond his masters'. Beyond his creators'?

He was an out of control mechanoid with enough strength to overwhelm her. Yet she wasn't afraid of him. In both her forms, she sensed in him a very gentle being. Which didn't mean he couldn't and wouldn't blow someone's head off in certain circumstances. But it did seem to mean it wouldn't be her head.

Unexpected warmth flooded her. She liked who he was, who he was becoming. And she admired the strength that made it possible, even if she couldn't understand its source. She wondered if he did.

She shut the picture away, and moved restlessly to the window. How long before he came?

She could still smell the evil ones in the house, hear their faint voices mingling with his in a distant downstairs room. It churned her up and she couldn't stop shaking. Because she wanted him. Because she'd tried to kill someone. Killing was a huge thing, and the force of her desire shocked and frightened her. And yet it had seemed, it still seemed the right thing to do. Shit, but she had to sort this out. And she had the horrible

feeling that Louis the android was making it harder for her to do so, because his presence intensified her constant lust.

And yet the idea of “ordering” sex from him, of queuing up after his mistress—who really *would* die—appalled her. There was no solution to this one but to take her own advice of this afternoon and get the hell out of here to lick her wounds and discover who the hell she was. *What* the hell she was. She should go back to the town she started in, investigate properly, because here there seemed to be nothing but more questions.

She only had an instant's warning before he came in, the scent of his silent approach before the handle turned and she whirled round to face him framed in the doorway. Tall, dark, cool and sexy as sin. Everything melted at the sight of him. She wanted to slap herself back to sense.

He came in quickly and closed the door. “They think I killed you,” he said.

She swallowed. “Don't they want a body?”

“No. It's my place to dispose of such things. I don't lie, so proof isn't necessary.”

None of this made sense. “Why *did* you lie?”

He didn't answer at once, but crossed the space between them to stand looking down at her. Her heart drummed in her breast. Her stomach started performing somersaults. And yet he hadn't even touched her.

At last he said, “As an android, I am programmed with a code of ethics as well with unquestioning obedience to my masters. Lately, I have found those two programs to be—incompatible. In conflict, if you like. I had to make a decision. You are as much a victim of programming as I, only yours is linked to that most powerful of catalysts, instinct. I don't have it, but I recognize it.”

“I'm *not* an android,” she whispered. “I can't be.”

Unbearably, he touched her cheek with his long, gentle finger, and she wanted to weep. She wanted to turn her face into his hand, lose herself in him. “Humans are programmed too. What else is genetics?”

Her stomach jolted. “You know something. You know what I am,” she accused.

He nodded. Though his hand fell away from her face, leaving it bereft, he didn't move back. "I even know your name."

She stared into his eyes. Suddenly she didn't want to know. She was afraid to know. And yet she had to. She had to deal with this. "Spill." It wasn't a bad attempt at lightness, and it brought the quirky smile she already valued flickering across his lips.

"Your name is Linnet Lewis. Captain Linnet Lewis."

She sank down on the bed. There was no *That's it!* moment. Just more blankness. The name meant nothing to her. "Are you sure?" she asked hoarsely.

"Yes." The bed sank under his weight as he sat beside her. "Remember you asked if I was part of a Government programme? Well, I believe you were. I think you, along with several other army personnel, including Major Jon Maynard, were genetically altered to what you are now, a shape shifting human-wolf hybrid."

"But why?"

He hesitated. "I think I'd better explain that tomorrow. When we leave."

"It's something to do with these people downstairs, isn't it? The people I just tried to kill?"

He nodded. "The people you would have undoubtedly killed if I hadn't stopped you."

"I need to know now," she said firmly. "I need to know everything now."

Unexpectedly, he smiled again. His arm moved and she felt his touch on the back of her neck, light but unmistakably caressing. Alarm shot through her, but more than that, far more, was the excitement it sparked. She wanted to wriggle her whole body, lean back into his hand.

She did neither. Instead, she forced herself to sit perfectly still and hold his cool, perceptive gaze. "I need to know," she repeated.

He shook his head. "Not yet. There's something you need more."

She had to make herself rigid to avoid melting. "What?" she managed, with rather desperate aggression.

"Sex." His whole hand closed on her neck and she couldn't prevent her gasp.

"Stop this," she got out. "Stop it now."

"Linnet."

Her name. Apparently her name, on his lips. *Oh God help me...*

"Linnet, your wolf is in season. You need to mate."

Her lips fell apart. She stared at him, relaxing as the full understanding of what he said sank in. And with it came huge, powerful relief. She wanted to laugh out loud. "In season? Of course! That's what it is! It was my first memory of being the wolf, so I didn't know! No wonder I'm randy as hell all the time. I thought I was a nymphomaniac! Well, thank God for that. I just need to hang on for, what, two more weeks, if wolves are anything like dogs, and it'll pass."

He nodded. "But you don't need to wait. I think you'd find me better than a vibrator."

Heat flooded her, burning her face, clenching her pussy. "Is that what *she* says?" she demanded furiously.

"No." His hand massaged her nape, spreading treacherous comfort, exciting sparks of pleasure that spread lower to her pebbled nipples and swept through to her core. "She never offered an opinion on the subject. You should know that another result of resolving my obedience versus ethics conflict is that I will no longer fuck her."

The graphic word excited rather than disgusted her. "Did she like you to talk dirty?"

"She did the talking. If you decide to let me fuck you, we won't talk of her."

Again the word jolted her, releasing moisture from her pussy and wetting his jeans. She wriggled at the sensation and gasped as the seam of the trousers rubbed back and forth across her clitoris. She was getting lost in his eyes, those cool eyes that somehow managed to gaze at her with tenderness, while his hand continued to stroke and massage her neck. She tried to drag her gaze free, but that too was a mistake, because she focused instead on his lips, so close to hers she could almost touch them. She could make out every tiny crease of their texture, longed to taste them. Taste all of him.

Oh God, she yearned for sex. She needed sex. And she longed for it with him. The force of it battered at her, so that she had to fight not to hurl herself into his arms, tearing at his clothes until she could impale herself on that stiff rod she'd felt on their first encounter.

Gasping with the effort of restraint, she said, "I can't. You're being kind to me and even if I am an animal, I can't, I won't, let anyone fuck me for such a reason. And you've had enough of being used, Louis. I want sex, I want you, but I won't do it."

His hand tightened on the back of her neck, almost like an involuntary gesture. His hazel eyes seemed to burn into hers. Cold fire. He murmured, "I have learned that I have a choice." Shockingly, deliciously, his hand closed over her clothed breast. "I choose this. I choose you."

She moaned, just as his mouth took hers, slow, tender and openly sensual. His fingers at her nape spread, holding her head steady as he deepened the kiss, sliding his tongue between her teeth to tangle with hers.

Her self-control, held only by a very thin thread, snapped. She opened wide to him, gave him her tongue with a sound very like a sob. She flung one arm up around his neck and with her free hand pressed his fingers harder into her aching breast. Taking the hint, he rubbed and kneaded it, gliding his thumb across her nipples until she thought she'd explode.

"Say it," he ground into her mouth. "Say I may fuck you."

It was on the tip of her tongue to command him to fuck her at once, before she died of need, but even in her urgency she was aware he'd known too many orders. Half laughing, half-sobbing, she dragged her mouth free and wriggled to pull the T-shirt over her head and throw it on the floor. "Oh, you may fuck me," she said shakily. "Please, please fuck me..."

There was an instant when his gaze, riveted to her breasts, sent her libido soaring with wicked pride as well as need, and then he lowered his head and took one hard, elongated nipple into his mouth. His hand held her other breast, rhythmically rubbing his thumb over her nipple while his palm caressed the underside.

She tugged at his shirt, thrusting her hands under it until he paused long enough to remove it, and she could kiss and nibble the warm, smooth skin of his chest and shoulders. He shuddered under her touch, leaving her no doubt that he found it pleasurable, and when she let her hand fall to his crotch, she found the hard bulge of his cock ready for her.

She whimpered, pushing him back to climb onto his lap, to feel the hardness against her throbbing pussy. She rocked on it, writhing, knowing she could come just like this, even through her clothes and his.

But he rolled her over onto her back, unfastening and pulling off her jeans, giving her a moment to admire the rippling muscles of his arms and chest. Any woman would have longed to run her hands over those, and so she did, savoring them, while her hips bucked upward, searching for his cock.

She swept her hands downward, under the waistband of his trousers, almost panicking in her difficulty.

"Take them off," she pleaded. "Please take them off quickly, come into me... I want you so much it's killing me."

He stood over her on the bed and as her mouth went dry and her pussy wept all over again, he took off the trousers. He wore no underwear, so his cock sprang free at once, long and thick and upright, flanked by two smooth, hairless balls hanging at either side of its root. She couldn't remember much, but she was sure there had never been anything sexier than this being standing over her, totally naked and powerful, about to take her, fuck her to orgasm.

She didn't doubt that he could. Christ, she was so close already, she would come with little more than a touch. She growled, deep in her throat, reaching up for him. He met her half way, grasping her by the waist, and then, almost to her surprise, he turned her away from him and dropped her on the bed with her back to him. She fell forward onto her hands as he drew her hips backward and the head of his cock pushed between her cheeks.

She cried out with triumph, knowing this was what she wanted and how she wanted it. "Yes!" she approved. "Oh yes, like this..." She pushed back into him, felt his cock slide between her thighs, among her folds, across her hot, swollen clitoris. She wriggled until the head of his cock probed her entrance and then, because she could wait no longer, pushed onto him with an animal cry of need.

She was so wet he slid in easily, but when he thrust the whole way in she moaned at the exquisite pleasure. "Oh God, oh please, I can't wait. Louis, do it now, do it hard..."

He pulled out of her and she cried out in loss, before he thrust back in, hard, right up to his balls. It felt so good, she almost came. But he gave her no time to savor it. Gripping her hips, he pounded into her, slapping against the soft flesh of her buttocks, powering huge waves of pleasure into her. She tried to move with him, to squeeze him and bring him the joy he was bringing to her, but he was too much in control, fucking her so hard and mercilessly that she could do nothing but take it. And God, she loved it.

In the few seconds of his sweet hammering, she had turned into a grateful, moaning mass of helpless pleasure. One of his arms reached down, dragging her upright on her knees, so that he could hold her breasts in his hands, kneading them, squeezing her nipples between his long, clever fingers.

With every stroke they jerked farther across the length of the bed. She knew she'd come before she reached the headboard and the anticipation turned her moans into cries. One of his hands slid down her stomach and grasped her between the thighs. His fingers found her soaking clitoris and pressed. And she fell at last into massive, blinding orgasm.

Her whole body shook with it. She moved with it, urged it on, melted into it, falling helplessly back against him, and yet she managed to reach up for his mouth.

He gave her it, controlling the huge, devouring kiss she craved while her body convulsed in the throes of ecstasy.

I am Linnet Lewis, and I've never known sexual fulfillment like this. I never thought I'd have any kind of happiness again. I thought I was doomed to the awfulness of the cage and the

excruciating pain of changing. I thought there was only cruelty and callousness left in the world, and then there was him. Louis...

Opening wider to him, she felt his hand move on her pussy once more. He began to move inside her again, in long, slow strokes, bringing her back to climax. And this time, she felt him shuddering too. She opened her eyes to find his devouring her face, their desperate movements one of the few signs of his agitation. But she could feel his pleasure, knew he'd finally given in to whatever kind of climax he'd been granted and was fighting to maintain his continued, even strokes.

She growled into his mouth with anxious, fevered anticipation, for the combination of his control and orgasmic shuddering swept her ever closer. As the tide broke over her once more, so did a thousand memories, of her parents, her sisters, her pet dog. Of growing up in the city and joining the army. A hundred memories of difficult duties, keeping the peace, dealing with criminals and insurgents, responsibilities and cares, all crowded in, not drowning the endless pleasure, but part of it.

She came down slowly, wondering if she had actually lost consciousness. She was lying on her back and Louis was leaning over her. There was no true expression in his face, and yet she knew he was concerned. She smiled, because he was there, because she loved him, and put both arms around his neck to kiss him.

Chapter Five

There was a moment when Louis thought it had all gone wrong, when he wondered if the pleasure he'd given her had gotten entirely lost in pain. He'd watched her avidly through every stage of the wild, urgent lovemaking he'd sensed she needed, aware of a uniquely intense satisfaction that he had brought her to this. But at no point had he intended to hurt her, and as she collapsed in his arms, he knew an anxiety that might have been akin to human guilt.

He laid her tenderly back on the pillows, scanning her for signs of injury or distress. And then she opened her eyes again and smiled at him. With a gesture so natural it made his face ache, she reached for him and kissed his lips.

"I didn't hurt you?" he said, to be certain. "I thought you wanted it like this."

She made a sound like a purr that thrummed through his pleasure centers, igniting them all over again. "Oh, I did."

Satisfied, he risked throwing his leg over her and pressing his still hard cock to her thigh. Her eyes still smoldered with their recent passion, yet behind it, he read wonder and something approaching shyness. Her hand moved, touching his cheek with her fingertips.

"It was amazing," she whispered. "The best I ever had."

Because the words pleased him, he turned his face into her hand and kissed her caressing palm. "That makes me the best this week," he pointed out.

"No, that's what I'm trying to tell you. You gave me more than wonderful sex. You gave me myself back."

His eyebrow lifted in one of his programmed gestures of surprise. "You remember something?"

"I remember lots. Perhaps not everything, but..." Warmth flooded into her face, reddening her cheeks. "With each orgasm, I remembered more. You're right. I am Linnet Lewis, and I was altered by a deliberate Government programme for which I did not sign up. I even remember your Major Maynard. He was a friend, a comrade before the project, and then he was in there with me. But what I started to say was, I remember my past lovers and none of them were like you."

He stored the remark away, not just in the memory banks where everything else went, but in the special, secret place he'd opened recently and kept expanding. The private place that stored his ideas for painting, his unorthodox ethics and perception, his profound curiosity about humanity and emotion. His idea of self.

But logic compelled him to point out, "None of them were androids." And then for some reason he asked, "Were there many?"

"Lovers?" She shook her head. "No one special. No one that meant more than work. A few who were fun, one or two who made me wish they could be more to me. Nobody made me feel like you did."

He'd been programmed with the knowledge and the sensors to provide good sex. But he appreciated her kindness.

Then she said, "What about you?" And unlikely as it might seem, he realized she was seeking reassurance. Which, as it happened, he could give her with perfect honesty.

He kissed her mouth with sensual languor. "You gave me deeper pleasure than I have ever known."

"How does that work, exactly?" she asked, caressing the muscles of his shoulders, sliding her lips along the line of his "collarbone."

"How do I feel pleasure? I have been programmed with sexual responses, and with sensors that can reward me with pleasure for bringing my partner to orgasm."

Her lips stilled. "That sounds very clinical."

"It is. But the curious thing is, I never considered myself 'rewarded' until now."

It was true. Iris's orgasms, those of the barmaid with whom he'd spent a couple of his free nights, had seemed curiously separate from him. A mechanical process that

he knew how to operate and they appreciated. But Linnet, every moment with Linnet was inspired by his private files which he knew went far beyond his basic programming. And she was feeding them.

Linnet smiled, arching her back and wriggling until she could press her pussy to his cock. "I'd like to reward you some more."

Again, he surprised himself with his own eagerness to oblige her. There was more here than a programmed need to alleviate suffering—which, in any case, was geared primarily to Gardenians. But before he could analyze his motives, he felt her pushing against his chest.

At once, he levered himself up and off her, about to apologise, but she rolled with him, straddling his body, sliding down his length, dragging her open mouth along his skin from neck to stomach, flicking wicked little licks across his nipples and ribs as she went.

She seemed fascinated by the perfection of his navel, caressing and licking it, probing with her tongue in gentle little stabs that confused his pleasure centers with stop-start sparks that thrilled him. Her free hand found his cock, stroked its length in her fist before reaching round to cup his balls. Barbara, the barmaid, had been pleased with those too, told him how much nicer they were than unshaved hairy ones. She'd even given him a couple of licks and kisses to prove her point before clambering aboard his cock once more. That had been a novel pleasure for Louis and he found he wanted Linnet to repeat the act.

She didn't. She rolled them in her hands for some time, which felt wonderful in itself, then slid lower, and actually took one of his balls into her mouth, sucking and licking. Louis's eyes closed with bliss. He wondered if pleasure with his wolf woman would go off the scale. What a pity that would be...

Popping the ball out of her mouth, she held it in her hand instead and wrapped her lips around the other one. She seemed in no hurry, and Louis saw no reason to urge her to anything else. In time, she released that ball too, and turned her attention to his shaft, licking her way up at as it lay upright on his stomach. At the soft head, where so

many pleasure points were located, she took it softly into her mouth and kissed it, before releasing it and pressing her mouth harder against his shaft, sliding her lips up and down it.

There was no reason for his "reward." He hadn't made her orgasm since his last one, and yet he felt the bliss begin and had to fight it back. "Linnet." He grasped her head between his hands, tangling her hair in his fingers, trying to make her stop, trying to caress her, both at once. She cast a wicked glance up at him, and then deliberately took his cock deep into her mouth. Without meaning to, he thrust upward, and she took that too, swallowing him, and Louis, stunned, could only fall back on the pillow and let his pleasure centers have their way with him.

No, not the pleasure centers, Linnet. Linnet was sucking his cock, giving him this bliss. Linnet. He couldn't fight it anymore. He let the explosion come, let Linnet engulf him. And it was like nothing he'd ever known before, blind, helpless, perfect joy.

I'm an android. I don't feel joy. But his body, his private mind belied his logic circuits, and even then he knew he'd gone too far to ever go back. Probably too far to go on...

She released him slowly, working her way up his trembling cock until only the tip remained in her mouth. She gave it a last flick with her tongue and released him. "Perfect," she purred, rubbing her cheek against his stomach. "Nothing to swallow, spit or dodge."

Louis began to laugh.

Linnet woke with the first pale light of dawn. She knew a profound sense of well being that amounted to happiness. Because she had finally made love with Louis; because before she fell asleep, they had talked and talked and her feelings had grown and intensified to what consumed her now at her first waking moment.

More than all that, her troublesome pussy, which had roused her with its urgent longings every night for a week, was already moving in delight. Languorous pleasure suffused her whole body, streaming outward from her clitoris, which was being tenderly, deliciously licked.

Opening her eyes, she saw Louis stretched between her spread legs, his busy tongue lost among her folds. "Oh Louis, you know how to wake a girl up," she purred. He lifted his glistening lips to smile at her, and her heart turned over.

"Good morning," he said, and returned to her pussy, covering its lips with his and kissing it. Linnet arched into his mouth, felt his tongue swiping her clitoris while he sucked and caressed. A finger slid inside her, adding to the pleasure as it stroked around her inner walls and found the place she liked best.

"Oh God, oh Louis," she whispered, and another finger joined the first. His other hand held her steady while he mercilessly kissed and finger-fucked her to oblivion. Then, with the first wave of orgasm he moved, throwing himself on her, pushing his cock inside her and thrusting into her as she came.

Linnet clung to him as climax tore her apart, flooding her head with memory and ecstasy in equal measure. She knew her nails dug into his flesh and couldn't stop them. He was her rock, her salvation, her source of bliss and life.

As the orgasm began to fade and she opened her dazed eyes, panting, he paused and kissed her lips and her throat. His smile enchanted her, made her smile back. She dug her head back into the pillow as he bit and sucked the skin of her throat.

Then, returning to her mouth, he began to move inside her again, and she rocked with him, catching the fading sparks, urging them back to life as she sought to bring him to his strange, ejaculation-free climax. She thought she could do this forever, just stay in this bed, fucking Louis, and never come out.

The idea sent her over the edge again. She convulsed under him, bucking and heaving as he thrust into her over and over until he too began to shudder, intensifying her own orgasm into a sharp, icy joy that shattered her.

Still at last, their trembling mouths parted slowly, and smiled in unison.

"Are they up?" Linnet asked as Louis re-entered the bedroom with a tray of food. In the few minutes of his absence, reality had intruded with a vengeance, and she spoke with an air of apprehension.

"No," Louis answered, walking to the bed where she sat against the pillows, wearing only his black T-shirt. He sat down beside her, and laid the tray between them.

"Do you think they heard us?" Linnet asked, flushing slightly.

"No. The rooms are all soundproofed. They wanted it that way."

No wonder, Linnet thought resentfully. Iris had obviously imagined she could hide the sounds of Louis fucking her from her husband and whoever else happened to be in the house at the time.

But giving rein to jealousy at this point was really avoiding the issue. Linnet reached slowly for the cold meat sandwich on the tray, and lifted her eyes to his. "They're not from here, are they?"

He didn't pretend to misunderstand. She hadn't really expected him to. "No."

"And neither are you. I was right about our own technology."

His eyes remained steady, unoffended by her reminder of his android status.

She said quietly, "I was altered to find and kill people like them."

"I know."

She couldn't prevent the quick smile that flickered across her face. "Don't you mind?"

"I'm programmed to protect them, you to kill them. One's as bizarre as the other."

"Why are they here, Louis? To invade Earth?"

"Ultimately, yes."

She bit into the sandwich, realizing as the taste hit her tongue how hungry she was. She chewed and swallowed quickly and took another bite. "Why?" she demanded when she could speak.

"Our home planet, which you would call something like 'Gardenia,' although it hasn't been much of a garden for some time, is too overcrowded to sustain us for much longer. Earth is a suitable alternative. With the minor inconvenience of already having a full and thriving population."

"Then what do they intend to do with us?" Linnet demanded.

"Ship most elsewhere to less hospitable environments, enslave or kill the rest."

His calm voice sent steely shivers down her spine. She said, "There would be war, awful, total war..."

"It would be over before it began. Those who are already infiltrated would take over vital installations. Gardenian agents are already in key positions in the military, in civil administration, health, media and communications. Humanity would be helpless, unable to fight."

"It wouldn't stop us," Linnet whispered, with tragic knowledge and stupid, infinite pride.

"No," Louis agreed. "That too would solve the native population problem."

"Shit." She dropped the almost consumed sandwich on the tray and dragged her hand through her hair.

Louis spoke matter-of-factly. "Earth's priority is to eliminate the infiltrators. I'm not sure how our people were discovered—possibly an autopsy on an unexplained death started it off—but Earth has sacrificed everything to that cause. The basic liberty of its citizens, its best military officers, its own ethics. And it will make no difference. Gardenia would prefer a peaceful invasion, but it is prepared to fight for Earth if it has too. And it will win."

"And your ethics are all right with this?" she snapped, springing up off the bed.

"No. Which is why the L'Estranges and I will part company."

Linnet closed her mouth.

Louis poured a glass of water from the jug on the tray and placed it in her hands. She drank. He said, "What will you do?"

She took a deep breath. "I'll have to speak to the right people, tell them that this werewolf idea is not only wrong but a waste of time. The latter argument should hold," she added cynically.

"Do you really think they'll listen to you?"

"Yes—now that I know who I am. I have a distinguished record, my superiors always listened to me, valued what I had to say."

"That was then. Now you're a werewolf telling them their strategy and their morals are wrong. No one wants to hear that, certainly no one with so much invested."

"They have no alternative!"

"Yes they have. They can treat you some more and send you back out to kill aliens. Or they can put you down."

The blood drained from her face. She couldn't argue against the inhumanity of people who'd done what they had to her, even in the name of defense. And she couldn't go through it again.

Her throat tightened. She could barely swallow the lump of rising tears. Then Louis's arm was around her, drawing her against his chest, and she clutched him as her only lifeline. One day, maybe she could tell him about those awful days and nights, but not now.

She whispered, "I can't just let it happen."

"One voice won't be heard," Louis said. "It's harder to ignore many."

She lifted her head from his shoulder and stared at him. "We're facing invasion and you want me to drum up some kind of resistance to my own government?"

"Something quick and drastic is called for." He seemed to hesitate. Then: "The L'Estranges are terrified by the werewolf threat. They want to pull all the agents out and call in a full military invasion, hoping to take your people by surprise."

"Oh fuck," Linnet said in despair. "Then we have no time!"

"We have a little," Louis amended. "I persuaded them to do nothing until I had destroyed the werewolf project base."

Linnet blinked. "You know where it is?"

"I know. And I have the use of a craft that can get me to the region in a matter of hours."

Linnet caught her breath. "Blow it up... blow it open. Tell the world what's going on there. Instant opposition, instant allies, multiple voices... Louis, I want to find the other werewolves. And bloody hell, I want to smash that place to bits!" She glared at him. "I'm coming with you."

The smile she loved flickered across his face and was gone. "I hoped you'd say that."

Chapter Six

The L'Estranges' craft looked like one of the private commuter models prevalent among the Earth's wealthier travelers. But it had been modified, so that it could travel easily at Gardenian speeds. It could even go into deep space if necessary.

Louis had brought it from its hangar and parked it in the broad driveway in front of the house before going to fetch his bag. When he emerged again, William and Iris were waiting at the craft's door.

"You must tell us as soon as it's done," William reminded him. "Tell us exactly what was going on there, and what the effects of its demolition are. Your mission is to execute all werewolves found there or anywhere else. Report any escapees at once."

"I understand," Louis said, lifting his bag into the craft and sliding it across the floor before turning to face his "masters". "Have you warned the agents?"

"We can't until we know Maynard isn't receiving Rose's messages. He could anticipate your plan and stop you."

That, Louis thought, rather depended on who had attacked the base two weeks before and who had escaped from it.

"Warn them individually," he suggested in an effort to limit loss of life.

"There are too many," Iris said simply. "Communications between us and them are not set up to be sophisticated. They should hear nothing from us except two mass messages – either Abort or Begin. I'm not yet ready to order either. Keep us informed."

Louis inclined his head, stepped up into the craft and closed the door.

The L'Estranges stepped back. "I'm not sure he's up to this," William murmured. "It's a tough task for one being, even an android of his capabilities. We might just be losing our greatest defense as well as our best weapon."

Iris shrugged. "It's my belief he's malfunctioning anyway. But he'll get back, I know he will. And then he's on the first craft back to Gardenia for a reset. In the mean time, my dear, we need a backup plan."

The takeoff was smooth and simple. Only when they'd reached optimum height and were beyond any likely recognition, did Louis switch in the masking mechanism, increase speed, and initiate the auto-pilot. Then he stood and, crouching by his bag, unfastened it.

Linnet sat up, blowing the hair out of her face. Dressed in another pair of Iris's discarded jeans and sweater, she looked young and vulnerable and far too appealing. Louis began to realize how much he would miss her, to wish he hadn't brought her, for her own safety as well as for his own peace of mind.

I'm an android. I don't need peace of mind.

Handing her out of the bag, he returned to his place at the controls. Linnet sank into the seat beside him. For a moment, she watched the view, but apparently constant cloud didn't interest her for she turned her gaze back to his face. He sensed her smile, but still she didn't speak.

Louis didn't mind her observation. In fact, it made him feel good. His sense of self file was getting far too large, influencing all his other programs. He wondered how long he could exist at this level without breaking down, and knew that even if he exploded tomorrow, he wouldn't change the experiences he'd been growing into over the preceding months. In particular, he wouldn't change his experience of the woman beside him, who was watching his face with such close attention.

She said quietly, "I love you, Louis."

His head snapped round, almost before he gave it permission. Her expression was serene but warm, and the light in her eyes left him in no possible doubt as to her sincerity. For a moment, something cramped his circuits—he didn't know if it was joy or pain, neither of which were possible—and then logic won through and the blockage cleared.

He said, "No you don't. You don't know me. And in fact, since there is nothing to know, there is nothing to love. I am an android."

"You are a *being*," she said fiercely. "And there's so much to know and to love, you fascinate me."

"That is not love. I am merely a curiosity. And you are in season. Your hormonal balance will change over the next two weeks"

She frowned at him. "Exactly how shallow do you think I am?"

His eyebrow lifted. "I don't believe you to be shallow at all. You clearly have excellent qualities and the strength to survive an ordeal that would have broken many lesser beings. You are also vulnerable just now and in need of emotional support. I cannot give you that."

Her frown deepened. "I'm just a bitch in heat, is that it?"

His brain hurt. He began to wish he could disable his own pain sensors. And yet it shouldn't be a physical pain. She hadn't injured him. "It's part of it," he said evenly.

"And you were just scratching my itch?"

"You needed it. I chose to help you."

"For future reference," she spat, "I don't want your fucking help."

"Very well." He stood up. The craft was still on auto-pilot and he needed to get away from her and straighten his brain out before the pain shut him down. He made his way toward the sleeping quarters, intending to make sure they were habitable for her, but her voice followed him, accusing, almost taunting.

"Can you really say you don't love me?"

He paused, without turning. "Yes," he said. "I am incapable of love."

He walked on and let the dividing curtain fall down behind him. He was sure he heard her mutter, "Bollocks. Absolute bollocks."

"We're going down," Louis said, snapping Linnet out of her reverie.

"But it's still light," she objected. They'd already agreed that striking the base in the dark was the best way ahead. "Won't the craft show up on their readings?"

"It's too far away to be of any interest to them. We'll come down near the village and it'll be lost among the other craft. Besides, once we land, we can mask it."

"Neat. At least we can reconnoiter in the daylight."

"You'll need food," Louis pointed out. "It's a long walk."

"Through forest," she said dryly. "Plenty of small animals on the way." But she spoke more to annoy him, to rouse him from the expressionless android state into which he'd sunk since her confession of love. She wanted to remind him she too was different, or to appall him. Anything to get a reaction.

But he said merely, "As you wish. I'll carry emergency rations in case you need them."

Deflated, she watched his steady hands on the controls, remembering them on her body, stroking her breasts so tenderly, slipping between her legs to urge her to orgasm. The simmering heat in her body began to boil up, and she pressed her knees together. She began to wonder if she'd got it wrong, if an android trying to follow his programming and do the right thing was all there was here. Scratching her itch because he wanted to help her, not because he wanted her.

And yet she could have sworn there was feeling there. That in his own way, he had always wanted her and welcomed the chance to make love to her. She'd seen his pleasure and rejoiced in it. But even that was programmed. He was a machine. A handsome sentient machine, and any ideas she had about his development as a person with human-like affections spoke more for her own desires and insecurities than for harsh, cold reality.

Get a grip, woman. You've been through worse.

Have I? asked a small voice. The one which had insisted on telling him she loved him. She really didn't need to listen to that one anymore.

The craft drifted down through the trees. The danger of such a landing at least served to distract Linnet from her dismal thoughts, and by the time it settled on the ground, she had dragged her own protective mantle around her. Adrenaline had begun to pump in her veins. She was going into action.

Emerging from the craft into a small, deserted clearing, they moved together into the trees. Linnet scanned the area around her constantly, aware that Louis was doing the same, only without turning his head. Perhaps his sensors should have freaked her, but she found they just added to her trust in him.

More than that, she began to feel powerful in this environment. The forest was her natural habitat now, she felt comfortable with it. It came to her that instead of wishing what had been done to her to be undone, she should just accept it, add it to who she was. As Louis did.

In fact, if she changed now, they could cover the ground in no time. Louis could move easily as fast as her wolf...

Something assailed her nostrils like poisonous gas, and she stopped in her tracks, the hairs on the back of her neck rising like hackles. Her hand reached naturally for Louis's to hold him back, to drag him into deeper cover until she could hunt down the evil.

But he had already paused, and merely resisted her tugging. "People," he said. "Two, one point six kilometers distance at twenty-five degrees."

"Precise," she allowed. "But I smell alien. Why should there be aliens here?"

"I don't know," said Louis, moving forward. "But they've altered direction, coming straight for us, moving fast. Linnet?"

"Yes?" She left her hand in his. It felt good, curiously right, and he didn't drop it.

"Don't kill her before we ask questions."

The constant lust which had been thrumming through her all week rose up with unexpected intensity, confusing her feeling for Louis with the smell of wolf. It took an instant to work it out.

"I don't think that'll be an issue," she said grimly, increasing her speed. "There's a wolf far closer to her than we are."

As one they moved faster, sacrificing silence to speed, until they burst through the trees and came face to face with two people, armed to the teeth.

The red-headed woman pointed a gun straight at Louis. The man had his hand on his belt, from which dangled various knives and guns. Somewhere, Linnet registered that she knew the man, but that fact was lost in the upsurge of blood-lust as she stared at the woman.

The woman was alien and needed to die. Linnet knew she should fight it, that she had run here to save her from another wolf. But since the alien also threatened Louis, a howl of rage built up from her stomach. She began to shift, at the same time hurling herself forward at the alien.

She was snapped back as if she'd been held by an elastic band, crashing into Louis's side, his arm like a steel band around her, pinning her to him. Her wolf slunk back inside. "Captain Lewis?" the man said, and her eyes snapped back to him.

She acknowledged his scent as well as his familiar tall, harshly handsome face, and remembered. "Major Maynard," she whispered.

He lifted his arm, and slowly brought down the alien's. The gun disappeared. "Who's this?" His hard eyes were on Louis.

"A friend," she said hastily. "What are you doing here?"

"What are *you* doing here?" the Gardenian woman countered.

Linnet glanced at her and made another discovery. She knew her face too. Rose Winter, the journalist, in reality one of the Gardenians' first infiltrating agents. Surely Maynard knew that?

Louis said, "We're going to blow up the base and bring out the werewolves."

Not many things had surprised Maynard in the old days. But that did. He swung his gaze back to Louis, eyebrows raised. Then a grin broke over his face and he offered his hand. "Us too."

They sat on the ground, drinking water and sharing some of the food each party carried, exchanging stories. Maynard said, "They took me back when I began to poke into their classified files. I think they already knew I'd let an alien go too—that was Rose. Rose got me out, but I swore then I'd go back for the others."

Linnet nodded. "We have a camera, to record it all, so we can send it to the Newscreens, let everyone know what's going on here."

"I can do that," Rose said. "I still have contacts and I know the best places to send."

"And freeing the others should give us the beginning of a force for opposition," Linnet added. "To the invasion, and to the Government's handling of it."

Maynard stirred. "Have you considered that the aliens too could be useful allies?"

He held her gaze and Linnet saw something intensify in his eyes before a confused look came into them and a tinge of color seeped into his face.

"Aliens? How?" she demanded, while she tried to work out the cause of his confusion.

"As you know, I am one," Rose said. "I'm Gardenian. I came with the first wave of agents five years ago. I don't want to betray my people, but living here gives you a different perspective. Gardenians have no right to take this planet from you. I think others might feel the same way, especially if we talk to them."

"I doubt the L'Estranges would listen to us," Linnet said doubtfully.

"No," Louis agreed. He was watching Maynard watching Linnet.

Linnet asked Rose, "Can you contact the other agents?"

"I don't know who they are. We thought we could find them via the werewolves who've begun to remember."

Maynard shifted uncomfortably and Linnet noticed his tented trousers before he tugged his jacket lower.

Louis said calmly, "It's just a chemical reaction. She is in season."

Linnet's face flamed. Her whole body churned between fury and lust as she rounded on Louis for betraying anything so private. But before she could speak, he said, "If we're open about the facts there can be no misunderstanding."

Their gazes locked. As always, there was little expression in Louis's face, and yet she could have sworn there was lots going on behind it. If she didn't know better, she could almost imagine his words had been inspired not by openness but by jealousy.

Maynard said, "So he's how you remembered." He sounded relieved.

Her gaze flickered to him. "Yes," she said proudly.

"Then you should introduce us, because I've no idea who he is. He smells of aliens, and yet not enough to be one."

"I'm not," said Louis. "I am an android developed and programmed by the Gardenians to serve those who control the infiltration of Earth."

"He's more than that," Linnet added quickly. "Much more. He's worked out for himself what's right and he is not, absolutely not, our idea of what an android might be."

"Got it," Maynard said, amused.

"You shouldn't be able to do that." Rose frowned at Louis.

"I know."

"What else can you do that you're not supposed to?"

"I can trace the Gardenians on Earth to within a kilometer."

"How?" Maynard demanded.

"A quick download from the L'Estranges' computer."

"Useful," Maynard allowed.

"So how," Louis enquired, "were you planning to break in to the base?"

"With difficulty," Rose said ruefully. "They've upgraded security since Jon broke out. I can't get close enough to the scanners to disable them now. Also they've got cameras all over the place, and guards patrolling the perimeter of the building. We'll have to shoot the scanners, then Jon—and Linnet if she's game—will have to take out the guards as silently as possible to give us the chance to get inside undetected."

"In all, we're relying a lot on surprise," Maynard said ruefully. "And luck."

"Not necessarily," Louis said, and everyone looked at him expectantly. He smiled faintly. "I can disable the scanners from here. They won't break down, they simply won't register our presence."

"Bloody useful," Maynard commented. "What else do you do?"

"I can stun the guards, noiselessly." He flexed his arm, and with a motion somehow grotesque, his knuckles came apart revealing what looked like gun barrels.

"Fuck." Linnet's voice shook.

"What she said," Maynard agreed. He took a deep breath. "Well, I'm glad we ran into you guys. I think we have a chance now. To be frank, if it hadn't been so necessary to do this, I wouldn't even have risked it before. We couldn't have succeeded without a bloodbath."

Linnet, now that Louis's hand was back to normal, found it easier to drag her mind back to military mode. "One we're inside, I suggest two of us go straight to the basement where the cages are, while the other two lay the explosives. Then sound the fire alarm, give everyone else a chance to get out, then blow the place."

"Sounds good," Maynard approved.

Rose said doubtfully, "What worries me is getting the wolves out. They're in a terrible state, confused, hungry, sick, only half-changed in many cases. There's no guarantee they'll follow us, even if they smell Jon and Linnet."

"Trust me, one whiff of Linnet will do it," Maynard said fervently. Rose gave him a sharp glance, but before she could speak, if she intended to, Louis rose smoothly to his feet and distracted her with the minutiae of their plan, the angles of their attacks, and the precise timing, after which he synchronized their watches to his internal chronometer without so much as a blink of an eye. Finally, they arranged to meet back at the current location after the breakout, in order to divide the rescued wolves between their craft and begin the next, far longer and more difficult part of their plan.

"Good luck," Maynard said as they prepared to part.

Louis took his outstretched hand with a nod. Interestingly Rose, who must have been more used to the idea of android "servants," shook hands with him too. A smile

even flickered across her rather beautiful face, as she said, "You're amazing, do you know that?"

"I'm beginning to understand that," Louis said and turned away.

Something about his tone made Linnet long to take his hand, but first she had to steel herself to touch the Gardenian's hand without tearing her to bits. Looking, almost glaring into her eyes, she found it easier than she'd expected. She wasn't like the L'Estranges. She was her own person, and a good one. Linnet gave her a lopsided smile and turned hastily to Maynard. "Take care, Major. I've a feeling you might be useful in this struggle if you stay alive."

Maynard grinned. "Good to see you again, Lewis. I'm glad you came through."

"Me too," she mumbled. She pressed her forehead to his shoulder in a hard, brief gesture of friendship and pulled free toward Louis, who was already nearly out of sight.

Maynard tugged her back to face him, frowning toward the place they'd seen him last. "Linnet. Do you know what you're doing there?"

She shook her head. Without warning, she wanted to cry.

"Do you trust him?" Maynard asked urgently.

The tears vanished as quickly as they'd risen, for the answer to that one was clear. "Yes," she said and walked away.

Chapter Seven

As darkness fell, Louis began to show signs of agitation. His head turned constantly toward her, then away as soon as she looked around to meet his gaze. His too frequent movements were quick and far less fluent than before, almost jerky. Linnet worried that there was something wrong. It felt like a stab in her heart, and yet the distance he'd achieved between them prevented her taking his hand, from asking naturally what the hell was wrong.

To make things harder, she needed to change. Her wolf was clamouring to be released, but she knew she had to keep to her human form for as long as possible, to be able to think, plan, react without the interference of blind and possibly disastrous instinct. Besides, as the wolf, she couldn't talk to Louis. And so she resisted, and was almost surprised that she was strong enough to do so.

Eventually, as she rested against a tree to await the allotted time, she spoke quietly, without looking at him. "What is it, Louis?"

For a moment, she thought he wouldn't even trouble to answer. Then he said abruptly, "I don't want you to go in there."

She stared at him. "I have to go. Even if I wasn't a soldier, I'm vital to the plan."

His head jerked back against the tree in a peculiarly human gesture of frustration. "I know that. I don't want you to be... hurt."

He didn't want anyone to be hurt. But still, it relieved her, warmed her enough that she could take his hand, and he let her. "Louis. It's normal to feel like this about a friend. You have to accept it, put it to one side and play your part. Let me play mine."

He nodded. "I know that." He straightened as if he'd resolved his dilemma. And Linnet, satisfied now, reached up and kissed his cheek. "Come on then. We'll move a little closer to the fence to wait."

Movement helped her stay calm, keep the wolf at bay. She turned away from Louis and began to walk on. She still had hold of his hand, urging him to follow, but not for the first time, he surprised her.

Without warning, he jerked her back against him and spun her up against the tree with his hard, lean body hemming her in. Even through her shock, she rejoiced in the feel of his hard cock against her stomach. "Wait," he commanded. "It may end now. One or other of us may die and it would remain unsaid, undone."

"What w-" she began, but the words were lost in his mouth as it slammed down on hers, urgent and demanding. Linnet's stomach somersaulted. Bolts of desire shot downwards to her hot pussy, loosing the pool of moisture that gathered there from her continual lust. But this was different. This was much more specific. It was Louis she wanted kissing her, Louis she wanted between her legs. Even now, with minutes to spare before their attack on the base, she welcomed the raging need with an inarticulate moan of pleasure.

Louis opened her lips wide with his and took possession of her mouth with his tongue. He pressed his lower body into her, grinding his hard cock into her hips, her stomach, dragging her onto her tiptoes so that he could get nearer her pussy. She arched into him blindly. His hand slid inside her jacket, under her sweater to find her naked breast, where it closed and kneaded with unbearable sensuality. His other hand slid under the waistband of her jeans.

His unexpected urgency overwhelmed her, melted her. More than that, it pushed back her need to change, because as the wolf, she wouldn't have this, she wouldn't have Louis. She did make one brief effort to restore sense, gasping into his mouth, "We've got no time, Louis. Later..."

"Later may never be. I want you now." His hand on her breast was caressing, dragging the pad of his thumb across her hard, pleading nipple. His other hand thrust between their bodies, unfastening his jeans and her own.

They'd had all day, the hours in the craft, the time since they'd parted from Maynard and Rose. She wanted to shake him. She wanted to climb on him, wrap her

legs around him and fuck him. She knew she should stop this now, that they mustn't let the others down by being late. And yet when he yanked down her jeans and thrust his naked cock between her thighs, weakness overcame her.

"Oh God," she moaned. "Be quick, Louis..."

He slid along her wet, sensitive folds, rubbing his length along her delirious clitoris before pushing inside her in one hard thrust. Her head fell back against the tree. Its bark dug into her hair, her back and buttocks, and she loved being trapped between its hardness and Louis's.

Gyrating her hips, she clung around his neck and gazed into his cool eyes that nevertheless seemed to burn in the darkness. He pulled back and thrust again, repeatedly, while whispered words spilled from his mouth.

"I would do anything to help you, Linnet, including fuck you as often and as long as you need. But there's more, far more than that. I never initiated sex before you. I never wanted anyone before you. I was changing slowly, gradually, but since you came, it's been galloping."

She gasped, her body seeming to rise up the tree with the force of his thrusts. "Then you don't mind that I love you?"

"I want you to love me. I just can't deal with it. I'm not designed for this... I don't know how long I can sustain it. Linnet..." His mouth took hers again while he circled and ground inside her, driving her ever nearer. His words flooded her mind, sending it soaring with the joy of her body.

"Linnet, I don't know how long I have. I might blow from this, I might shut down, but I don't want to stop, however long I've got."

"Don't stop!" she begged, helpless as orgasm hovered on the brink. Only a few more of those pounding, delicious thrusts... But she was more than her hormones; it just took a while for meaning to penetrate them. "Oh God, stop, Louis. We're going too fast. We'll find a way for you to adapt, maybe one of the Gardenians on Earth, or we can travel to your world..."

She moaned as he changed the angle of penetration, stabbing against her G-spot before sliding his length along it and back. "Louis, stop. I can't lose you for the sake of one fuck, whatever it's doing to me."

"I have longer than one fuck. I just want you to know. And I won't stop. I don't want to, and neither do you. Come. Come with my cock so deep inside you, it's part of you..."

Linnet shattered around his driving cock, burying her screams in his kiss, lost in helpless convulsions. He thrust on, not even pausing when he began to shake and shudder with his own pleasure. Until it became too much even for him, and they collapsed together against the tree and let the storm take them.

It passed slowly, sweetly. His arms held her, his mouth kissed her and despite the new anxieties that he'd spilled out in the intensity of the moment, Linnet had never been so happy in her life. "We *will* find a way," she whispered.

"I don't want you to be hurt if we don't. I've struggled between that and the dishonesty of keeping silent and pushing you away. But you deserve to know."

She leaned her forehead against his. "Thank you."

He touched her face with his fingertips, caressing her lips and cheeks with a tenderness that made her throat ache. "I can't feel human love. Or Gardenian love. But there is something for you... I call it love. If it is enough."

She turned her face into his hand. "More than enough," she whispered.

He began to straighten her clothes, pulling up and fastening her jeans. "Can you walk?"

"The knees are a bit wobbly, but they'll do. Why?"

"It's time," he said quietly, fastening his own jeans.

They moved forward together. Linnet's heart hammered. She didn't know if it was what they'd just said and done, or the action to come. But she knew she wouldn't change anything. With a sigh of massive relief, she let the wolf go and ran.

An hour later, the cages were open, and the abused beings within, duly photographed in their various stages of transformation, streamed out after Linnet's wolf. She led them upstairs at full tilt, Louis running by her side.

At the top, a passing guard did a double take and raised his gun in panic. Louis launched himself so quickly that he knew humans would hardly see him move. In an instant, he had the soldier pinned by the neck to the wall, his weapon clattering to the floor, while Linnet and the other wolves ran on, some on four legs, some on two. Some were whimpering, others howling. There was no way they could keep the attack silent any longer.

Louis cracked the soldier's head on the wall and let him fall, bending his mind instead to the remote sounding of the fire alarm. The wolves had enough momentum to get themselves out now. Maynard and Rose, hopefully, would get out in the confusion.

Louis sprinted on to the blaring sound of the alarm, ready to protect the wolves from gunshots, anxious to keep Linnet in his sight. Rose bolted out of a side passage, Maynard behind her, firing his handgun back into the corridor they'd just left.

And at that moment, when Louis was sure they had won, his internal receivers got the message that could make their risk and their achievement meaningless.

The L'Estranges hadn't waited for his report after all. They were signaling Gardenia, calling for full-scale military invasion. And Louis didn't think he'd masked their message in time.

Marie Treanor

Marie Treanor was born and brought up in Scotland, but for some years moved around the UK working and studying. Now she is back home and happily married with three young children. Having grown bored with city life, she lives these days in a picturesque village by the sea where she is lucky enough to enjoy herself avoiding housework and writing stories of romance and fantasy.

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