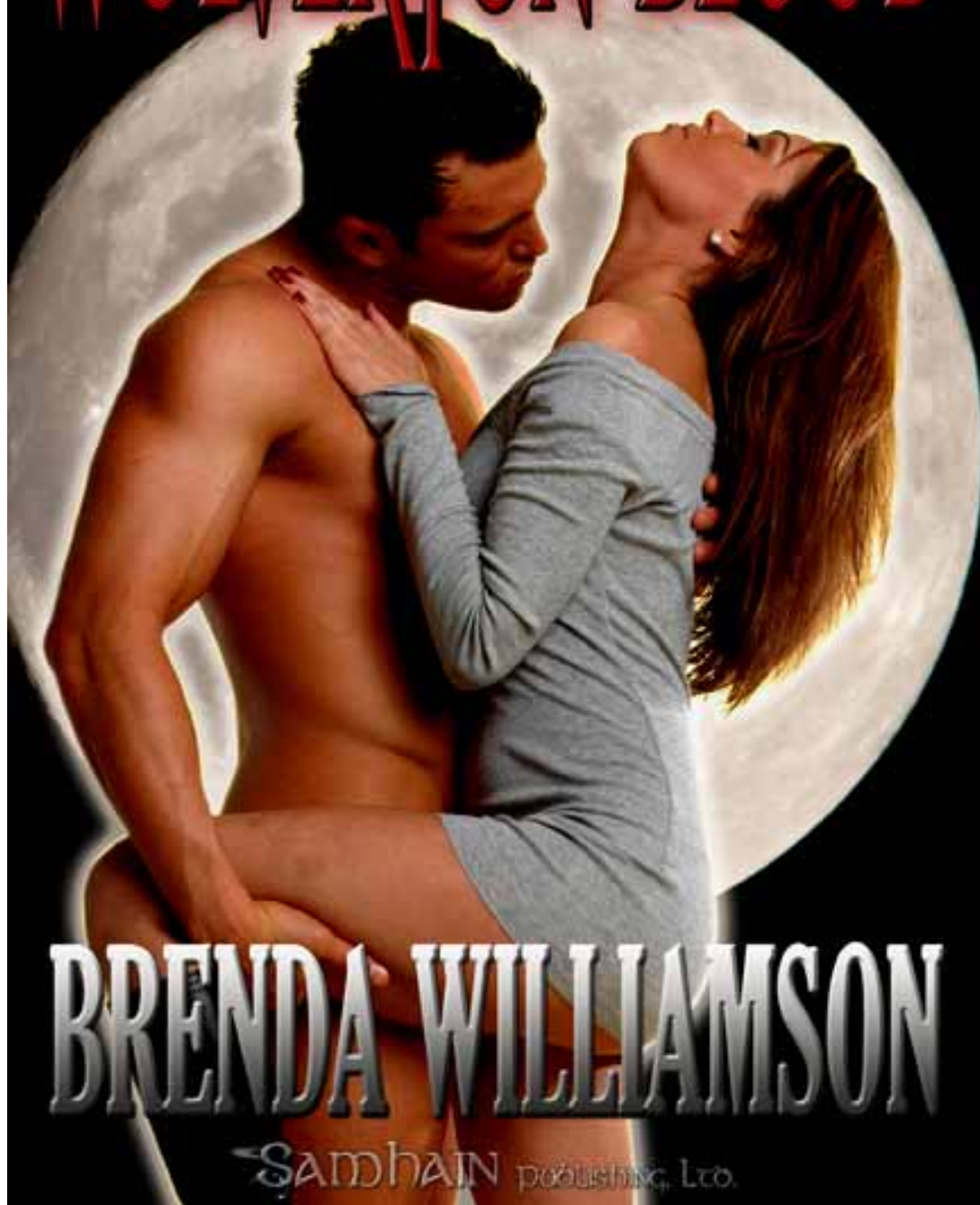


# WOLVERTON BLOOD



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# *Wolverton Blood*

**Wolverton Shifter Series**

*Brenda Williamson*

## *Chapter One*

The old, gray motor coach rolled to a sluggish stop. Timber stared out the grime-covered glass window to see the town of Wolverton. Her stomach knotted with a tangle of unsettled emotions. She never thought she'd be this excited or equally scared. There were questions she had about her life and the answers were about to unfold.

"All out for Wolverton, Montana," the bus driver announced.

Timber looked forward and rose slowly from the sticky, black-vinyl seat. Numb from sitting too long, her limbs tingled with a prickly pins and needles sensation. She rubbed her bottom and stretched her arms. Everyone on the bus appeared to do a similar routine to work the kinks free from their protesting muscles.

"Here, let me help." The man in the seat behind her stood to get her bag from the overhead compartment.

"Thank you." She smiled.

There seemed no reason to tell him she wasn't reaching for the bag. While he did the fetching, she continued to twist and turn to loosen her knotted muscles.

She watched him struggle to free her small tapestry satchel from the smaller space she had crammed it in. Her life's possessions amounted to next to nothing, yet filled the bag. A dress, another pair of shorts, a decent bra, a shirt, and a couple pairs of panties were wound with toothbrush, deodorant, and a comb.

"Whoops." The man stumbled forward and bumped into her.

Sharply, her lungs filled with her gasp of surprise. Not from the bag that hit her foot, but from the shock of where the man's hands landed. One hand gripped her bottom, while the other wedged in her crotch. Instinct curled her lips and a growl burred in her throat. No accidental faltering could put his hands exactly where he did.

The obscene man nudged closer. She tried stepping back, but another man, getting his bag down from the overhead compartment, blocked her retreat.

"Maybe I should get off here," the first man whispered close to her face.

His untamed fingers rubbed her zipper. Repulsion churned the bile in her gut. She had run all her life from such men.

Fat fingers covered her heaving breast when his hand moved from her denim shorts to cop a feel in other territories. A familiar heat wormed through her expanding veins and the feral pulse had no link to anything sexual.

"You should remove your hands," she warned.

The tremors built from primitive embers of survival. She fought to control the rising rage of her not-so-pretty nature.

"You need to get away from me before I bite you," she said through gritted teeth.

"I can bite, too, cream puff." He pinched her nipple.

The strong waft of onion from his breath was too potent for her empty stomach. She gagged and crinkled her nose to stop the next inhale. No one around saw how he abused her and she couldn't ask for help. She had to stay focused to protect her inner identity.

"Let go of me or you'll know what it's like to miss your fingers."

"Hey," a man behind her said. "Are you bothering the young lady?"

The hands fondling more than her clothing jerked away. She stooped and plucked her bag off the floor. She didn't like that she stood trapped between two men and her skin quivered with a nervous tension. She squeezed past her momentary hero, trotted down the bus steps, and took hurried strides to get away.

Her anxiety had escalated during the course of her bus trip. She'd had many things on her mind over the long hours of confinement. The last thing she wanted was to face a critical and dangerous level of stress.

Glancing back, Timber noted the lecher didn't get off the bus. But it didn't soothe the turbulent strain on her shocked nerves, and suddenly, her vision blurred. She closed her heavy eyelids and took deliberate deep breaths. An inferno continued to sear through her blood. The stale summer air, permeated with the exhaust of the bus fumes, made her sick. She felt faint. Every intake of the carbon-monoxide-laced oxygen pushed her toward a looming darkness in her thoughts.

"Are you all right, miss?"

Timber jerked at the light touch on her shoulder. Fear swelled instantly and went beyond her control. The world spun haphazardly while she fixated on the change her body strived for without permission.

"Nooo!" she cried, having the disparaging knowledge of what came next.

"Did he hurt you?"

The man's voice became background noise. It blended into the scenery of all normal sounds so she didn't listen. Nothing could be more in the forefront of her mind than the grasping quest of a safety line.

Her blood pounded and streamed through all her vessels. It rushed adrenaline to a volatile sort of high. She opened her eyes to focus, and if she could faint, she would. Dropping to the cement walk seemed better than the alternative.

Timber ran into the bus station. She looked around at the few doors and tried to make out the signs on them. She grasped the word “restroom” with partial clarity and bolted inside the small room. Leaning against the cold ceramic tile for support, she let the duffel bag slip from her fingers. She turned and pressed her cheek to the chilly, disinfectant-scented wall. Her hot skin absorbed the relief with gratitude and the tremors subsided.

Panic attacks were a burden Timber carried everywhere she went. This one came on fast, yet was mild compared to other times when her body shook with violent spasms.

With the focus returning to her vision, she gazed around the white room. Urinals lined a wall. The door opened and became her new focal point.

“Well, I knew I had your attention.” The pervert from the bus sauntered into the men’s restroom. A terribly evil grin curled the corners of his lips, exposing yellowing teeth. The stench of rotting onions wafted on the air in front of her face.

“Stay away from me,” she demanded.

“Come on, you know I can’t think of another reason for you to be in here other than to get a good fucking.” He cupped the front of his pants and rubbed his crotch in a lewd gesture.

“I made a mistake. I thought this was the ladies’ room.” She looked for another way out, and there wasn’t a window or door in sight, except the one he came through.

Timber put her hand up to stop the man's advance. He grabbed her arms, not securely enough, and she broke free. She backed into a stall and pushed the door shut. He didn’t allow her time to slide the latch, not that she could manage to get her fingers to work right anyway. When he pushed the hollow steel inward, he met a surprise—her snarling teeth.

“What the hell?” His glazed eyes looked at her with unbelievable fear.

Timber was unable to prevent the full transformation of her body from human to wolf. She bit the man’s outstretched hand and gave a violent shake. Her incisors went deeper into his flesh, and blood sprayed the graffiti-scarred walls of the stall.

When she unhinged her jaw and freed her teeth from the sickly sweetness of his torn flesh, she watched him slump to the floor in shock. Immediately, she leapt over him. The energy it took to change from human to beast didn’t exhaust her nearly as much as the adrenaline rush she got from the attack.

For a few seconds, she stared at the man in pain, writhing on the filthy tile. Shivering at the sight of blood, the nauseated upset to her stomach weakened her further. She needed to move away, and from four paws she shifted upward onto two feet and stumbled away.

In a panic, Timber knew she needed to escape. No one would believe her if she claimed to be the victim. No one ever believed her.

“You crazy bitch!” the man yelled.

Timber’s eyes adjusted to the surroundings. She barely glanced in the mirror to check her face for traces of blood. She bent, looped a finger in her duffel bag, and scooted out the door. It was a good thing for her Wolverton was a small town and the men’s restroom had no men.

She reached the outside of the station and hurried away from the old building. Her acute sense of hearing picked up the agonized shouting of the man needing help. Calmly, she looked around, deciding on a direction before the cretin’s screeching brought someone. Though, she doubted anyone would listen to his rant about a woman changing into a wolf.

For all practical purposes, the town appeared prosperous and pleasant. The kind of place anyone would like to settle down in to raise a



family. Quaint historical buildings lined the old, reddish-brown brick walks. Dozens of small shops sat neatly picturesque, with window boxes containing bright flowers and frilly curtains framing the displays behind glass.

An impending rain freshened the stirring air with a clean dampness. The fragrance of pine filtered through her nostrils, and the scent drew her attention to the hills. Given the moments before, a smile should have been the last thing to tug her lips. However, storm or not, she had arrived at a place mysteriously bearing her name.

The lecher in the men's room couldn't destroy the thrill racing through her blood. She'd fight an army of perverted souls to face her unknown past.

Overhead, large, ominous clouds shadowed the charming streets. The old-fashioned lampposts, with their arms raised, created spooky outlines along the road. She felt watched as if someone spied on her, maybe from behind the innocent, lace-covered windows.

A chill, as cold as the tile wall in the men's room, shuddered through her limbs. Her smile faded. Amidst it all, she fought the trepidation pounding inside her lungs.

Timber closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She was right where she aimed all her life, and she couldn't let anything dampen her spirits.

*Fight the panic*, she prayed for strength.

Though, not a firm believer in God, she didn't think it hurt to try and get some outside guidance.

Timber took her sunglass out of her bag and sat them on top of her head in case she had another bout of the wild eyes. Whenever possible, she avoided letting anyone see her irises change colors. It brought questions, and she didn't like the feeble excuses she made up to divert

them. The glasses slipped forward. She caught them and pushed them back in place.

When the fine hairs on her neck prickled, she listened with an intense sense of forewarning and waited. The panic rose slower than when the man grabbed her. It gave her the time to look around and focus on landmarks. More importantly, she hunted out the niches in which she could hide.

The colors she saw blurred and distorted with a swift flicker of different shades. As easily as the summer leaves turned to the yellows and reds of fall, her irises dilated into dark pinpoints, giving her better vision. Things began to dull to gray tones.

Her nostrils flared, accepting the change in the wind.

*Damn*, she mutely muttered.

Unprepared to look directly at anyone, she lowered her thick lashes when footsteps approached. Her insides flip-flopped like a fish out of water. Her jumbled nerves prevented her from venturing a peek.

“Ma’am, do you need help with your luggage?” a man asked.

The unfamiliar voice lowered her defenses. She cracked open an eyelid and looked at his black shoes. Navy-blue work pants sheathed his legs. He stood ready in the bus depot with a willingness to assist because it was his job, she determined. His fingers touched her hand with an attempt to take the bag from her. He already expected she would say yes.

“I don’t need any help.” She yanked her bag away from his grasp.

Her head lifted and his wide-eyed gaze amplified his shock. She remembered the sunglasses sitting on top her head and quickly pulled them down to her nose, covering her eyes. She had seen his sort of look all through life. It brought back the familiar taunts from her childhood and the cruelty still haunting her sleep. It took years before she accepted

she couldn't make her eyes stop changing colors. It took self-therapy to resign herself to the total abnormality of her existence.

Timber hurried away from the man and went to the far end of the building. She went around the corner and stopped abruptly.

"Good day, miss." A short, jolly fellow with a twisted moustache smiled.

"Hello." Her eyes stabilized. The gray shades went away, but she kept the glasses in place. "Are you from Wolverton Manor?"

"No, miss, and you shouldn't be wanting to go to that place." His cheerful smile vanished. "Those folks don't like visitors."

"But I'm expected." She looked about, feeling the strange, wary sensation returning. "I thought someone might meet me here. I sent a telegram of my arrival."

"I don't know your business with the Wolvertons, but my advice would be to get back on a bus and leave. People around here don't take to them folks and their odd ways."

His jolliness vanished and before she could ask anything else, he walked off, leaving her to wonder about the family she never knew existed. The invitation-style letter made it sound like she'd be welcomed. Disappointment settled in her bones. She should have known things were too good to be true. She grew up in foster homes. She moved so many times, from family to family, and town to town, she lived in confusion and frustration all the time.

Timber stepped from the curb onto the narrow street. She started to cross near the intersection and stopped. Looking up at the hill, she saw a paved road disappear into the dense stand of trees. Above the forest, the skyline displayed a series of attached roofs of an obscured mansion. She studied the silhouette against the smoky afternoon sky.

Something inexplicably electrifying captivated her about the massive structure. Her invitation didn't give directions, other than to take the bus. She saw why. She felt the magnetism of the place beckoning her to the wrought iron gates. What she would learn about the Wolvertons would come firsthand.

When Timber first received the letter, hope welled in a whirl of fantastical imaginings. Like some kidnapped princess, she thought she would finally return to the folds of her real family. She'd meet a whole slew of overfriendly people who searched for her since her disappearance.

She would belong.

She would be loved.

She would finally have a real home.

Gawking like a tourist, Timber reached in her bag for a camera. The impact of someone plowing into her knocked the air from her lungs. Tires screeched on the pavement and drowned out the terrified squeal she made.

She struggled to free herself from the massive weight pinning her to the street.

"Mustn't stand in the road," a strange man said while lying on her like some overweight bear. "It's a rule, mustn't stand in the road."

Her vision began dancing in the familiar rainbow of colors. She resisted her fears, not wanting to attack anyone again.

"Mustn't stand in the road," he repeated, getting up slowly.

A mediocre amount of relief relaxed her muscles. Her distorted vision returned to normal. The fact the man appeared mentally handicapped helped tranquilize her adrenaline-laced veins, but it did not curb her rising anger. As of late, the only emotions she had were fear and resentment. The letter gave her the profound surge of happiness she needed.

"I was crossing the road, you moron," she groaned, crawling to her knees. "Look what you've done!"

Blood dripped from her scraped hands and arms. The grit from the surface of the road was embedded in her raw flesh. She wanted to cry. At the same time, she needed to blame someone and he seemed the wrong one to direct her irritation toward.

"Mustn't stand in the road. It's a—"

"I know, I know, it's a rule," she finished with agitation.

Timber looked at his crooked face. The nerves apparently not working on one side gave him a gruesome appearance as if he were an image in a funhouse mirror. His one eye drooped and the other resembled a large blue shooter marble.

"Mustn't..."

"I know, now please calm down." She stroked his arm, feeling pity for his condition.

If she should feel akin to anyone, it was this deformed soul.

"Buckeye!" a man yelled. "Get away from her."

Timber turned toward the loud, approaching threat.

The root of her irritation appeared from the sporty red car that almost skidded into her. The cretin strutted regally en route for her. Long legs, wrapped tight in jeans, took long strides in a determined gait. Her gaze locked onto the bulge against his pant's zipper. She gulped and looked at the rest of him. Narrow-hipped and wide-shouldered, the heartthrob made her heart thump harder inside her ribcage. Her nipples tightened with an ache of desire of which she had limited knowledge.

He brushed back his wavy, charcoal-black hair with one hand. A gust of air ruffled it and his long fingers raked through the locks again. He handsomely began removing all her thunderous fury and she was taken

aback by the warmth of his gaze. His obvious look at her chest made it impossible to ignore the ripple of heat feathering over her breasts.

When his tongue eased out and ran a slow lick over his full lips, images jumped to mind of licking him. Her mouth watered as if she could already taste him. She watched the corner of his mouth twist up with a grin and it made her cringe at how horribly misplaced her thoughts were.

## *Chapter Two*

Kane could hardly believe the vision standing before him. Beauty stood next to the beast. No one except family went near Buckeye, especially not a pretty girl.

“You almost ran me over!” Her unbridled vehemence left him with a momentary lapse in thought.

She held her scraped, bleeding hands suspended in the air. A surge of guilt rendered him mentally impotent. Her long, sable hair, gathered in a ponytail, swung over her shoulder. The tip danced with the swiveling turn of her head.

“You have some nerve driving like that!” Her hands fastened to her curvaceous hips as she glared at him.

Her emerald gaze locked with his and he met a danger to his swaggering coolness in the devastating beauty standing before him. From all points of his body, blood crashed through his arteries, making his pulse beat faster. He was the Wolverton’s lothario. No woman possessed the passionate heat to make his past sexual exploits seem tame—no one until now.

“If it weren’t for this gentleman, I’d be a smudge on the pavement.” Her lips pinched with aggravation and her eyes narrowed on him with a feral madness. He shook his head just enough to break free of the spell binding him to silence.

“More like a speed bump.” He chuckled.

“I don’t find you funny.”

Kane eyed her slender frame with an appreciation. Her shirt hid nothing. Her eager nipples poked the cloth, appearing hungry for his rapacious suckling.

“I was serious.”

She made a small sound, a grunt to let him know his humor didn’t impress her.

“Do you always drive so recklessly?” She folded her arms together, covering over the point of his gaze.

“Streets are for cars, not people.” He licked his lips again unable to venture from the idea of pouncing on the pretty thing.

“People have to cross them.”

“Why?” He put a hand to his crotch and adjusted his tight pants before common sense flew completely out of his head. Actually humping her right there in the street would be bad sport, and perceivably rude. He assumed she’d not be open to the suggestion of fucking quite yet.

“There’s no talking to you.”

He took a longer assessment of the lovely, inexplicably delicious, heart-shaped face and wondered why he hadn’t seen her before. A quick glance at the bag on the ground gave him the clue he needed. She just arrived.

“Mustn’t stand in the road, it’s a rule,” Buckeye reiterated. “Mustn’t stand...”

“You remember that, do you?” Kane turned his attention to Buckeye’s emphatic nod.

“It’s a rule,” Buckeye answered, appearing quite pleased with himself.

“If that’s true, then why the hell are you standing in the road?” Kane glared at the man.



Buckeye rotated, not once, but twice. A human top, spinning in confusion, he looked one way and then another.

“*Oh!* Oh no, mustn’t stand in the road.” He ran off, repeating the phrase. “It’s a rule, mustn’t...” His voice faded once he vanished behind a building.

“You weren’t very nice to him,” the lady criticized. “Just because he’s a little slow, you didn’t need to speak to him like he’s an idiot.”

“I think your word for him was moron.”

“It was spoken in the heat of the moment and it certainly did not compare to your condescending tone,” she hissed sharply.

Her breath misted the warm air in front of him. It gave him a better taste of her scent.

Kane circled the woman. He looked for flaws to her perfect body. He tried to push away the strangeness he felt around her, while attempting to reason what he could get out of knowing her for a little while.

“I still think you were very harsh. He obviously has enough trouble without you humiliating him.”

Usually, he didn’t give much thought when it came to eyeing the pretty ladies. This one had something strangely familiar about her. It mixed with his sixth sense and gave a glaring warning to be wary. His muscles twitched, veins pulsed, and he clenched his jaw to halt his thoughts. He took command of the beast in him and directed his gaze at her wickedly gorgeous and totally mesmerizing eyes.

Rigid in her stance, she stood like a hunter instead of his prey. He liked the wariness she observed him with as he stalked a circling pace around her. He summed up the details to her finely crafted structure as if assessing a work of art. The lines and curves to her nose and jaw were well-designed. He inhaled and her tantalizing scent stuck inside his nostrils. The blood on her palms gave off a special fragrance, stirring a

rumble low in his throat. Abruptly he stopped, put his hands on his hips, and eyed her as a threat instead of a pleasure.

“Buckeye won’t take it personally,” he finally replied to her outburst with a cool tone.

She swallowed and his gaze dallied on the ivory line of her neck.

“He’s got about as much sense as fly,” he added. “He won’t dwell on anything long enough to feel hurt.”

She didn’t say anything.

Kane bent down and picked up her sunglasses as a distraction from her penetrating stare.

“These don’t look none the worse for wear from your dawdling in the street.”

She snatched the glasses and held them up to the light. “They’re scratched,” she proclaimed, obnoxiously loud.

She set the glasses on top her head.

“Maybe, but I don’t think as much as you are.”

He tried to touch her arm where the blood crusted to her elbow and she flinched. When he looked at her hypnotizing green eyes, he experienced a calm familiarity. It gave him a desire to help her.

“If you’re done sightseeing, I’ll give you a ride to wherever it is you’re staying. You need to wash up.”

His initial plan to ravage the beauty went by the wayside. He decided to let the lady get away unscathed. Something in her manner bothered him. It unsettled his stomach. Desire hung in the background of his cautious nature.

“I think I’ll walk.” She lowered her glasses to the bridge of her small nose.

“When I’ve offered you the luxury of a ride?” Kane took offense to her refusal. “I guarantee the bucket seats in my car are far more comfortable than the bus.”

“Hardly, and besides that, you’re a menace in that...that thing.” She pointed to his car.

Her steps away from him helped clear his head of the urges he had to kiss her. From the hardness of his cock to the tumble of nerves beneath his skin, she worried him with the way she evoked such primitive passion in his loins. She challenged him and every step she took away from his grasp manipulated his senses.

The distance demanded he catch her before she got away.

“I said to get in my car.”

“And I said no.” She looked over her shoulder.

Her fear, evident in the crystal green of her irises, softened him and hardened him at the same time. She had his emotions mixed up and he didn’t even know her name.

“There’s nothing that way,” he called. “Wolverton Manor ain’t no touristy place.”

“I’m not a tourist.”

She continued to parade up the road with her haughty chin tilted in a fashion that unhinged him more. No woman he knew would dare use arrogance against him.

Lust coiled around the fibers of his body.

“And it’s going to rain so you don’t need to go wearing sunglasses today!” he yelled at her for no apparent reason.

Her defiant attitude continued pushing him to crave her in an indecent way, and he took the necessary paces back to get in his car.

Revving the engine, he spun-out and left a scar of black rubber on the old pavement. He drove up alongside her at the Wolverton estate gates just as she pushed the button on the call box.

“Yes?” A feminine voice came quickly from the box.

“I told you, this is no place for you.” Kane grabbed her arm to prevent her from speaking into the intercom.

“Excuse me?” She twisted her wrist from his grasp and pressed the button again. “This is Timber Wolverton,” she announced.

Kane gripped her shoulders and spun her to face him. He plucked the sunglasses from her pretty nose to look over the features he thought should have given him the most obvious of clues. Everything he saw was beautifully refined, each curve flawless, and too faultless. He didn’t see an imperfection anywhere on the visible parts of her...until he returned his look at her green eyes. All high-blood Wolvertons had blue eyes. Only the mutants, the products of his grandfather’s experiments had deformities such as eye color. The eyes were not the only problem either. Every single one had genetic upsets making them more monsters than werewolves.

“Let go of me.” She kicked his shin.

“What? No kiss for a cousin?” He gripped her jaw and turned her face toward him. “Are your eyes your only flaw?”

“What are you talking about?” She swatted his hand away. “Who are you and what do you mean cousin?”

Her eyes widened. In the backdrop of her escalating pants of fear, Kane heard the tall, ornate gates opening. The rusty hinges creaked in protest of the heavy wrought iron. The sound cut his thoughts with razor sharpness.

The duffel bag dropped from her twitching fingers. Her facial features contorted with surprise, shock, and alarm. Her lovely irises danced and

changed erratically, giving him a clear sign of her shifting. He couldn't have it in the open streets of Wolverton. It brought the wrong types of people. It attracted impossible questions he didn't like to answer.

Kane grabbed her arm and the bag from the ground. He towed her quickly toward the car.

"My arm," she whimpered.

"Control yourself, damn it."

No amount of forewarning could prepare him for what he did next.

Timber melted into the snug embrace of his strong arms surrounding her. She never had anybody hug her with such gentle understanding. She actually never had anyone hold her for any reason. His fingers stroked in all the perfect places to help reverse the agitating flesh beneath flesh. She didn't care how much he kept muttering curses as long as he didn't let go.

"Get in the car, damn it"

Suddenly, her plan to walk changed.

He opened the car door, pushed her to get in, and she did. He tossed her bag to the floor.

"You can't shift here in the open," he said, leaning on the doorframe. "Are you stupid?"

She gulped, trying to relieve the dryness in her throat. "No and I'm—I'm not change—changing," she stammered.

He slammed the door shut and hurried around the front of the car to the opposite side. His gaze never drifted from hers until he slid in behind the steering wheel.

"How did you know... Why did you say... Who are you?" She stumbled through the questions in her already muddled brain.

He knew what she was and he didn't like it. It scared her as to what he'd do to her, and yet he had held her like someone cradled a fragile porcelain doll.

Timber grabbed the door handle to get out. She needed to get free. She couldn't find the small lever with the duffel bag on her legs and feet.

"Stay!" he ordered, putting an arm across her chest to restrain her arms. "You will stay in the car until I get you behind the gates. Do you understand me?"

Timber nodded. She turned her head to see him and her vision blurred in the shifting of her molecular turmoil. He was a watercolor picture gone bad. The muddy shades ran together in a kaleidoscope array of blacks and grays.

She made out the silhouette of his fingers. Long, thick spikes, both featureless and distinctive moved toward her. She flinched in fear of him striking her.

"Hold still," he ordered.

She tried and found it wasn't quite as hard as she suspected. His masculine scent intoxicated her heart. When his touch reached her face, it brought an instant calming. The back of his knuckles stroked her cheek gently. The exceptional soothing choked up her emotions and a sob broke from her throat.

"Easy does it," he cooed.

The pressure lulled the quake to her insides and her vision cleared. He brushed under her chin repeatedly while she stared. Her breathing slowed, but retained some force, leaving her floundering in a tranquil stimulation.

"A little unbalanced in the control department, aren't you?" His sarcasm didn't fit with his caressing tenderness.

“Don’t look at me like that, please.” Her blood pressure rose. A fiery heat singed her cheeks at his remark. His dark gaze remained locked with hers and prevented her from looking away. The moment blended fear and uncertainty with her resilience.

His brows jerked up and defiance glittered like stardust in his blue eyes. It was what she needed to dispel the heat from her inflamed skin. She lowered her lashes and allowed the turbulent emotions to retreat behind the shades of her soul.

“Like what?” His voice came out low and raspy.

Timber didn’t answer. It was a mistake to have said anything in the first place. She didn’t want him to take his hand away. She wanted to indulge in the fantasy of a man loving her for everything she was, no matter what. The flight of the imagination had soared in those brief moments of his kindness. She had no clue the beast in her could be quashed with someone’s gentle touch. No one had ever come near her, let alone touched her, when she went through her periods of unrest. The adrenaline rush left her in shivers.

“Please, no more.” She couldn’t let him hear the purr of contentment rumble from her. Though she appreciated the way his strokes quelled the emergence of the beast in her.

“Who are you?” She longed to have him holding her again.

“A Wolverton,” he answered. “Kane Wolverton, to be precise.”

His fingers reached for the stick shift between the seats. She watched his hand tremble as if he were fighting off her affliction. When his long, tanned fingers blanched for a moment, grasping the silver ball of the shifter, she pet the back of his hand. His care came swift and free as if it didn’t matter there was something wrong with her, and she wanted to offer him the same kindness.

He went still.

She swallowed unable to comprehend what she witnessed or how she felt. If he wished to hide his unbalance, it seemed best if she didn't comment on it.

"We're related?" Her voice rattled.

"Maybe."

Within her mind, the list of questions grew rapidly in two groups. Those to ask directly and those she was afraid to ask.

"You said we were cousins as if you knew the answer."

"I might. Tell me about your parents."

He shifted gears and the car sped through the gates.

"I don't have parents. I never knew them and I was raised in foster homes." A fact she resented along with the strange creature she became.

"A throw-away," he grumbled.

Timber didn't know what he meant. It didn't sound good. However, she did know being different made life hard and her existence lonely.

Kane swerved the car to avoid something darting across their path.

"What was that?" She twisted in the seat and stared out the rear window.

Her hand rested on Kane's thigh. A muscle twitched, sparking a series of hot, scintillating spasms burning through her nervous system. She tried to withdraw her fingers from the pulse, only his hand clamped over it. His breathing accelerated along with hers.

"A worse version of you." He pet her fingers, pushing them tighter into a throbbing pulse on his leg.

Timber pulled her bottom lip between her teeth. He talked, but she didn't listen. Curious, she leaned toward him and inched her fingers deeper between his legs. The wondrous generation of heat aroused her. She tipped her head down and watched her hand. With a will of its own,



her touch glided smoothly over the taut denim. Her thumb bumped the roll of fabric where the zipper hid and she stopped.

Kane tried to hide his moan beneath a cough. She considered backing off until his hand squeezed hers and forced her fingers to grip the bulge of his pants.

Her chest sunk in with each deep exhale she released. She lifted her gaze and watched him breathing in sync with hers. His wide shoulders seemed to expand with each intake of air. Beneath the smooth black T-shirt, the muscled contours of his body flexed. His nipples were hard beads. Her gaze rolled up shyly to look at the outline of Kane's face. Her hand left his lap and snaked up his waist. The edge of sexual desire had them waiting, anticipating, and lingering with a drawn-out foreplay.

He opened his mouth to speak. Timber didn't want him to ask her to stop and she scraped a fingernail over one nipple. The car slowed, his arm reached out to downshift. She saw him bite the inside of his cheek.

What he said about the shadow whisking past them gathered her attention to a lone detail. If there were others like her and they were allowed to stay, then it was possible they'd make room for her. She settled into the soft leather at the warm idea. Her hand came off Kane and she gave him a small embarrassed smile. In the five seconds their gazes locked, the car lurched. Timber grabbed for the dash as the car wheels screeched on the black pavement.

He brought the car to an abrupt halt in the middle of the drive. The house loomed ahead at least another thousand feet. The closer she came to the house, the grounds, and the people, something she couldn't put a finger on tried to make her change. She thought of Kane's word for it—shifting. It fit more appealingly than saying she changed. The biggest news of all—there were others like her. Maybe not exactly, since she

didn't look like Buckeye, but she'd found the place she'd searched for in her prayers. She'd found home.

"A bit far from the front door, aren't we?" She stared straight ahead at her destination. The place held all the answers. With fear ebbing away, tenacity returned.

"Get out!" Kane turned off the car and opened his door. "Go on, get out," he demanded, coming around to her side of the car.

Fear swelled, but Timber remained seated, not understanding what went wrong.

"You are a testy fellow," she snapped.

He opened her door and yanked her off the sticky, black-leather seat.

"Not enough red meat in your diet to stabilize your system? First you force me into the car and then you jerk me out of it."

Her shield of sarcastic wit had returned. Kane's generosity, or maybe his weakness, gave her a modicum of instinctive trust. She slammed the car door harder than need be, hoping for damage. She hadn't appreciated his callous reference to her being a throwaway. She wanted something to take the muscle-head down a peg or two, yet nothing came to mind.

"Don't tell me you get girls with the charm you ooze like some dreadful fungus," she quipped.

"Shift." He grabbed her arms and shook her slightly.

She shook her head in shock of what he asked her to do.

"Go on, shift." He thrust her away.

She stumbled back a few paces and thought how best to ignore the brute crossing his arms over his broad chest. She pivoted to study all the sights filling her eyes. She turned in a complete circle and included him in her survey of her surroundings.

Timber took a quick inventory of bulging muscles. The rolled ridge in his pants remained prominent and she examined the area a bit more discreetly.

“I want you to shift,” he growled.

He seized her by the upper part of her slender arms. His fingers, long enough to almost connect like a band of steel, clamped tight to her skin.

“I will not!”

She held her breath, trying not to inhale his arousing scent. It permeated her nostrils like sweets for the soul. His stare melted all her free will. His blue eyes hypnotized, and not in the magical sense. They were a mesmerizing blue-gray, challenging her emotions. She sized him up from a lust-driven mentality. A strange concept she only knew from what she saw on television or read in books. Passion, affection, and intimacy eluded her.

“I want you to shift into whatever it is you are inside,” he demanded, shoving her away again.

His fingers stretched open like flames were going to shoot from the hot tips. She shook her head in defiance and fear.

## *Chapter Three*

Kane took a threatening step toward Timber. His hungering lust wanted to be sated. His inquiring mind required answers. He had to find out if the rush of blood ripping through his veins might all be for naught. He needed to know if the woman he desired shifted into a creature remotely tolerable. Outward appearances weren't enough, not in her case. He couldn't take the chance the genetic mutant he fucked was a toad in her altered form.

He'd had enough normal girls to last a lifetime. As for his kind, highborn, blue-blooded werewolves were far from available. They scattered the country like rare gems. It was extremely infrequent he had any contact with them. When he did, they hadn't warranted his return visit.

Timber looked promising, all but for the unknown. Her sass and mettle turned him on. The way she looked at him gave away her attraction, even though she feared it. It didn't take words to express what her eyes, her body movements, or the beat of her heart put forth. If he closed his eyes, he heard the thump of her pulse and all the fevered liquid racing through her veins.

"Shift," he growled.

As much as she tried to oppose his command, he saw her weaken. She didn't have the control to resist. He'd seen it before at the gated

entrance to the estate. Her cheeks heated red and every pore in her began to glisten.

*Damn, she's beautiful.* He wiped sweat from his brow.

Her quivering bottom lip triggered an emotion he rarely experienced. Empathy surfaced and wrenched his heart. Her humiliated stare hurt him. The harshness of his request upset more than her molecular stability, it brought her a mortified grief.

When her panicked eyes danced and changed colors erratically, he lifted a hand to stop her from shifting. But his guilt emerged too late and she turned away before he could put a soothing finger to slow her pulse.

Timber ran. She headed for the shadowed patterns spread by the gnarled limbs of the oaks. The deep primordial beast he wanted to see materialized. Each step she stretched her legs, gracefully met with her transformation from an exquisite woman into a creature as uniquely stunning. Half wolf, part panther, she blended body and spirit into another shape with the same soul.

While he hungered to taste the moist recesses of her tight cunt, his mind snapped with a brutal clarity.

"Damn," he breathed, silently containing his other curses.

The one time he seriously gave a thought to mating and breeding, he got a kick in the gut.

"Half-breed outcast!" he yelled, as if she were to blame. "You're part cat and no kin to me!"

Kane regretted the words the moment they came out. His mind and heart were in dire conflict. How could he resist the ebony sleek frame? On four slender legs, fitted with big paws and deadly sharp claws, she loped majestically across the lawn.

For years he lived with some of his grandfather's experimental mistakes. For a split second, he thought maybe, Hezekiah Wolverton had

gotten one genetically engineered child to come out right. With a different eye color, Timber could have resembled their breed in every other way. She could have been something wonderfully perfect.

Timber stopped fleeing. Her neck folded and brought her head around to glare at him. Her body wheeled about as well and she charged him.

His comment insulted her and his awe rained quicker than a spring storm. Thunderstruck by her graceful pirouette, he watched the elegant, lithe form twist and flow like wind. Her body, wolf in design, had a coat of short, smooth black hair. Before he could move from her attack, she reached him. However, her eyes, shimmering in shades of blues and greens, gave away her reversion and she shifted into her human form. He held up his hands to fend off her swinging arms.

"You'll not call me names." She hit at him. "I won't let you humiliate me."

"Easy there, puss, you'll wear out those claws." Kane grabbed the flailing limbs. He forced her arms behind her back, pressing her heaving body to his, and squelching her struggles.

Her ability to rapidly shift impressed him. It was swifter than he could do for himself.

"Let go of me." She wrenched from side to side in the vise of his hold.

"Just calm down."

Everything about her made his senses vault and his stomach tumble in anticipation of torturing himself with her sweet-scented sex. She gave him reasons to appreciate what his grandfather did with his genetic experiments.

"I won't calm down until you let me go." She wiggled again.

It didn't surprise him when his palpitations matched and melded to hers, lulling her frenzy. Males were always dominantly in control of the bitchiest of females.

She panted heavily and stared at him with her confusion.

"That hot temper only makes your eyes prettier," he whispered low.

He nuzzled his face into the side of her neck, inhaling her opulent scent. She held completely still while he teased her skin with his breath. Her throat muscles worked over the gulp she took, and then, they too froze.

"Half-breed, you're like a poison masked by a pinch of sugar."

"Unhand me, you brute." She turned her face away,

His senses lingered on the presence of the hard nipples pressing against his chest. She'd have dark, exotic nipples, chocolate-rich areolas tipping the plump white of her full breasts. He had no doubt she'd be as tasty as any treat he could imagine.

Kane kept his grip firm with one hand, locking her wrists together behind her back. His other hand drifted to her unbound hair. Whatever she had fastened it with earlier had disappeared. The silky tresses were a shawl over her shoulders. He fingered the mantle of dark, luxurious sable. The tendrils were very soft, exceptional, and meant for only her. He sniffed at her neck, pulling her head to the side to kiss the quaking pulse of her jugular. There was nothing more sensual than an angry woman. It produced a fleshy perfume. Sweet on pheromones and sex, intoxicatingly strong, it drove him crazy.

"I want you out of these clothes," He brushed a whispered kiss under her ear. "I need a drink, and that sweet cream I can smell dripping from your cunt will hit the spot just right, sweet puss."

Her head shook no and he chuckled, already having the upper hand.

"After I have savored every ounce and lapped up your honeyed center, I'll not leave you empty inside, I promise. I can fill every orifice so you'll drown from my juices."

She squirmed and he took the rub of her body as a maybe.

"Once I've satisfied your ache and you've slaked mine, I think we'll have a better understanding of our attraction, don't you?" He licked the delicate shell of her ear.

"Let me go," she whimpered.

Kane jerked his head back to look at her closed eyes. She had him wanting her with an unexplainable passion.

He used the hand holding her wrists to press her into his throbbing erection. Each squirming gyration of her hips deepened his need of her. He took a fistful of the hair and wrapped his fingers in it tightly.

"Look at me."

Long, dark lashes fluttered off her rose-tinted cheeks.

"Kiss me." He leaned for her mouth.

The slightly parted lips closed in defiance.

"I know you want to be kissed." He brushed his cheek against hers. "Don't fight it so much."

He dragged his lips across her silky skin and covered her mouth. She didn't fight, but she didn't cooperate. Regardless, he moiled to taste every drop of her saliva. His tongue pushed between her lips and swirled hers. He swiped her teeth and the roof of her mouth, and her rigid lips became pliable. The vibratory sound she made grew louder and he never thought there would come a day when a feline purr pleased him.

His lips parted from hers.

"You know, all my life I've despised half-breeds. I thought it was because they weren't worthy of the same opportunities I would have one day. I believed they should all be destroyed." His thumb made small



circles over her high cheekbone. “You sweet puss, I’d save, if for nothing more than sex.”

Timber gasped for air to fill her lungs. Shifting was always stressful in the best of circumstances. To have to come out fighting with riotous anger put the worst strain on her energy she had ever suffered.

Kane’s statement threw a completely new passel of problems into her collision with desire. Arrogant and domineering, he disrupted her independence. It waned in favor of his attention. She relished his kiss with love-starved eagerness and she hated his power over her because of an emotion. In a moment of total abandon, he became part of her soul. She didn’t understand the instant closeness she felt to him anymore than she comprehended her attraction to his inflated ego. But she couldn’t see herself giving up the affectionate attention, whether it was real or not.

His hold loosened on her hair and his mouth came free of hers. Every stolen moment she had with a boy in the dark corners of a school library was lost. Not one innocent kiss meant more to her than Kane’s. Her lips felt bruised and swollen from his delicious torture. As a stranger, he beat down her instinctive defenses with a mere ounce of warmth and she submissively opened her soul to his liberties.

His hand released her hair but held her head. His other hand raced up and down her back until he chose a grip on the seat of her shorts. The hot tips of his fingers curled beneath the denim hem and brushed the bottom curve of her ass. She opened her mouth to protest and his mouth covered hers again, sealing off all sound. His sweet-minted breath blended with her gasp. The tip of his tongue tickled hers while probing the cavern filled with her yearning hums.

She had wondered what it would be like to suck on his tongue and now with the opportunity, she ventured toward boldness. He groaned at her inspection.

“Geez, half-breed,” he growled against her panting breath. “I want to fuck you until I’m raw.”

Timber felt the panic circle as every thread of her being aimed for shifting. His body ground to hers, hip to hip as he squatted down to press his hardness to a sensitive area. He made clear his intentions.

His excruciatingly sensual kiss overpowered her. She slackened against his hard chest and her hands searched for a place to hold him. With a vivacious renewal of energy, she pressed her shrouded, wet cunt to his cock. In rapid strokes, she rubbed against him. Her clit tingled against the inside of her shorts. Try as she might, she couldn’t get in a position to squelch the sensitive ache.

“You shouldn’t have come here,” he told her.

“I was invited.”

With the guidance of his hands on her hips, Kane turned her around. She didn’t want to lose his kiss. She had no idea a kiss could tug at so many threaded sensations.

“You should have sensed no one would want you here.”

“Someone did or I wouldn’t have come.”

“That was a mistake.”

His nipping at her neck excited her. The pleasure formed a deep purring rumble from her lungs. It became an unbearable rapture when he licked up behind her ear.

“You like that, I see,” he hummed against a pulse behind her earlobe.

“Yes,” she breathed, her fervid gasps expounding the exhilaration.

His growl fluttered the fine wisps of hair from the narrow nape of her neck. He held her skin by the pressure of his fang teeth. Her hips wiggled

amid the stimulation and then stilled. The danger lowered and instead of her neck, she thought of his fingers. They rubbed the crotch of her shorts and stimulated nerves. She trembled as the sharp points of his teeth pressed her skin. His bestial dominance enthralled her. The stroke of his hand smoothly opened the zipper. His fingertips, scorching manipulators on her flesh, slid beneath the elastic band of her panties. The touch of his rough, calloused fingers on her skin startled her into a retreat and she placed a restrictive hand on his arm.

“You’ll like this more,” his voice rumbled hot on her skin as he continued to hold her in the deadly grip of his bite.

His fingers snaked above her mound, brushing, scratching, and swirling over her cunt. The touch scintillated every fiber of her being and opened her. Each deliberate outline he drew around the brim of her clit forced her to back into him.

“Please...oh please,” she begged, writhing as wetness leaked down her thighs.

Two fingers moved into place, spreading her pussy lips open. At first she thought her lace panties brushed over her clit. It wouldn’t be the first time she was hit with a spark of lightning tingling from the coarse fabric rubbing her. Except the sensation came again and she jerked her hips back into Kane’s thighs. It was his fingernail rasping over the receptive flesh. He repeated the move and she squirmed against his solid body behind her.

“Oh!” she gasped, straining to move from the trap of his teeth.

Kane’s probing finger glided into the drenched valley and bumped over her clit. It threw a violent shiver through her limbs before rendering her immobile. He brutally pleased the tender knot, continuously smoothing his finger over the wet folds of skin. She couldn’t move until he let go his severe grip on her throat. Experiencing an enthralling sort of

fear, she let her trust wrap her mind in the secure joy. His canines retracted and she waited in surrender.

His finger penetrated her aching center. He steadily thrust into the soaked channel. One, then another, and finally three fingers dipped into the well of her arousal. Spasms contracted muscles and her orgasm clenched.

“That’s it, puss, squeeze my fingers harder.” He licked the cord of her neck.

Timber remained locked against him. His throbbing cock ground tightly against her ass. His fingers plunged deeper. She twisted to the electrifying stimulus of heat.

“I want to fuck your tight cunt with my cock.” His snarling comment came more like a harsh threat than an enjoyable invitation to an erotic encounter.

Nevertheless, Timber nodded. Her agreement wasn’t for the proposition, but rather the willingness to do whatever he asked. Kane took charge of her emotions the moment he held her and now all her reactions would come as he desired. It was as if she were drugged.

With no will of her own, she floundered against his wide chest while he raked his hand over her breast. His hot breath puffed along her jaw.

“That’s it,” he praised, fingering her with a rhythm in which her hips drew back.

Beneath her top, his fingers squeezed her breast harder. He pinched and twisted her nipples.

“Stop.” Her voice made the statement sound like a suggestion.

His fingers withdrew and plunged deeper, making her insides burn from the friction. He rasped his calluses over the sensitive flesh. She thrashed to fight the rising sting traveling through all her veins. Heavily attached to his momentum, her body would have shifted if he hadn’t

been humming serenely alongside her head. It had a primitive, musical appeal, lulling the conflict within her soul. He churned the hunger of her affection-starved existence.

“Oh please,” she begged. “Please, don’t stop.”

Kane’s persistence needed no coaxing. Ribbons of sweltering flames licked within her inebriated thoughts, blistering her mind. She wrapped her arms around his to hold onto the moment, to embrace him.

If he were not supporting her, she would have melted into a puddle of goo. She curled in his arms as the tickling ascended from her vagina into all extremities. The astounding climax hit with severity. She rattled in his arms, and a volcano of liquid heat erupted.

Timber clung frantically to him. A male in season for her hunt and she had him captured. She had no wish to pursue any relationship with a man until she fell in his path. She hadn’t been trailing anything except happiness, and for the moment, he was it.

Kane moved to withdraw his hand and she cupped hers over it. She rubbed the soft hairs on the back of his knuckles.

“Wait.” She persuaded him with an insistent stroke. She leaned against him, taking into her lungs mouthfuls of the humid summer air.

His hand came away and she turned in his embrace. She heaved the leaden gasps into his neck until he pulled her mouth up to his. He kissed her once, holding her face in the cradle of his palms. He slid his hands down her neck, over her shoulders, and withdrew his lips from hers. She whimpered in disappointment and it brought him in close for another kiss.

Her purr escaped her kiss-puckered lips and she experienced a victorious feeling when he brushed his lips over hers lightly again.

“Sweet Sunday!” Kane suddenly snarled, prying free of her. “I must be losing my mind!”

Timber stood perplexed by his outburst. Kane's blue eyes darkened to a steely gray. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and it reeked with a flagrant display of his disgust.

She wanted to cry. Instead she presented her own out-of-control effrontery and she spit at his feet. The profuse gob landed in a frothy mound on target.

"You little..." he jumped back, "these boots cost more than your whole life."

Timber's nose wrinkled. Her brows crunched together and down. "You're a conceited son of a bitch all the time, aren't you?"

"At least I knew my mother." He stepped back to his car. "Get in and I'll take you up to the house so you can meet her."

Timber's throat closed on the lump stuck in the middle of her sob. No one had ever said anything meaner to her.

"No, thank you. I think I'd rather walk."

He could have called her every wicked name under the sun and she could hold up against it. For him to cruelly remind her she didn't have a mother brought quick painful tears to her eyes.

"Fine, walk," he grumbled.

He got in his car and left her like a bolt of lightning.

## *Chapter Four*

Through her watery gaze, Timber watched in alarm. She tried to assuage her anxiety by remembering egotistical beasts came with flaws. Besides, she need not throw herself at the man for the sheer need of love. Just because he couldn't handle his sexual desires, he had no right to blame her.

She wiped the escaping tear from her cheek. She zipped her shorts, still feeling the lingering flames warming her insides. Her alert clit continued to tingle from the brush of her panties. Her nipples felt sore at the touch of her bra she dragged back into place. Her lungs continued pressing her ribs, intensifying the sensitivities to all her limbs.

When hands grabbed her arms, she jumped.

"Have you come to apologize?"

Kane's breath was tinted with mint, his skin enhanced by cologne, and his flesh reeked of a feral, musky scent she liked. This person's odor didn't come close.

The surprise of someone having seen her sexual indulgence formed a scream low in her chest. The shriek she let out went high enough to hurt an animal's sensitive hearing. The person holding her reacted in such a manner as a wounded beast. She caught a glimpse of him as he threw her to the ground.

She tumbled down the small incline, and when she stopped, she looked at the creature howling from her scream.

Although she thought *creature*, he could be considered a man should anyone want to stretch the term for this hideously deformed person. His face and body were misshapen in such a way his clothes looked to be handmade. They were altered to conform to his one shoulder lumped up, and his short arm. She didn't want to think about his face. If she could have looked away, she would have been glad to accommodate him. A mouth too wide, eyes too small, and a nose too large made him clownish.

He grunted at her and she gave him a compassionate smile.

He snorted with confusion and then he came barreling down the slope, to attack she assumed.

At his movement, she scrambled to get up. Her feet slipped and she looked up. A large wolf raced toward her and she dropped flat, covering her head with her arms. He flew over her and landed on the humpbacked man.

The wolf snarled and growled in protection. She watched with wonder. Terror had worked her molecules up into a lather of anticipation. The heroic wolf backed them down. She sat spellbound by his vigilant warning to the attacker. With a powerful command over the deformed man, the wolf paced in front of her. Her defender circled and stood guard. He gave a final low bark, exhibiting his superiority and it sent the deformed man running away into the woods.

Timber reached up and touched the sting to her forehead. She'd hit something on the ground when she fell. When she took her fingers away, she looked at the bright red blood. She seemed on a perpetual path of destructive elements. Her other scrapes were mending with the regenerative speed she'd gotten use to. Each abrasion no more than a faint scarring that in time would also disappear.

The wolf made his approach cautiously. She didn't blame him for being leery. Strangers made her feel just as lacking in confidence. That is



unless they were as idiot prone as Kane Wolverton, and that made her feel a little more superior.

“Thank you,” she whispered, “I wouldn’t have hurt him. Hell, I wouldn’t have even bothered him.” She wiped at the remnant of tears on her face with the back of her hand.

The wolf advanced and circled in a slow, assessing gait. Timber sat still. He narrowed the ring of distance. She gave him a completely submissive allegiance and lay down on her back. The cool grass took the edge off her frazzled nerves. The close heat of his nostrils sent shivers up her leg.

She closed her eyes and giggled. It felt good to have the tension ease. She sat up sharply upon the first lick of the wolf’s tongue to the inside of her thigh.

“Don’t do that!”

She drew her legs up, squeezing her knees tightly together. He sniffed under her legs and she pushed at him. “Cut that out. Just because you...” her head cocked in wonder “...just because you protected me, don’t think I’ll be letting you do naughty things.”

He stepped back and stared at her.

From ecstasy to terror, she’d pushed the bounds to her sanity. She needed affection. To give or receive didn’t matter. She lifted her arm to touch his nose and stretched her fingers beyond, to the thick ruff of hair on his neck. Scratching the deep fringe of fur behind his ear, she encouraged him to move closer.

He licked her face with profuse laps of his silky tongue over her cheeks and nose. She giggled again and all the tension dissipated in his arduous attention.

“Ouch.” She shied from the sting to her forehead when his tongue hit the cut.

He nudged her hand away and finished cleaning her wound with care.

“You’re sweet.”

His attempt to duck when she lifted her arms to hug him failed and Timber buried her face in his fur.

“You’re so very sweet,” she purred.

He struggled until she kissed his muzzle.

“I’m sorry,” she sniffled, and let him go.

More tears came and she sat there, staring at the grass. She drew her knees up again and hugged her legs, wishing she hadn’t come. After getting the invitation, she had never imagined them not wanting her. She had desperately wanted a real home and never allowed for the idea she’d not be welcomed.

The wolf nudged her arm and slid his head under her chin. She smiled and wrapped her arms around his neck. While petting him, she sat for five minutes with her face burrowed in his fur. He gave her the comfort she needed to be strong.

Timber eventually released her hold and let him go.

She watched the wolf stalk away toward the mansion and she knew there could be no turning back for her. Wiping the tears away a final time, she got up off the ground. She brushed aside the bits of grass clinging to her clothes and headed for the house. It seemed almost every step she’d taken in her life aimed for this one place.

Kane’s car sat more than a hundred feet from the house. It had a hastily abandoned appearance, with the door hung wide open. She looked inside at her bag on the floor, but the wolf gave a nudge to the back of her legs.

Swiveling her head, she looked from the monstrous Wolverton Manor, to the car, and down to the wolf. He growled when she opened her mouth to make a comment.

The wolf walked Timber to the stone steps leading up to the front door. She reached to give him a pat but he quickly ran off. Shaking away the nervous jitters in her hand, she grasped the large brass knocker and gave it three firm raps with the resolve she had to face her destiny.

She waited, shuffled her feet anxiously, and glanced periodically over her shoulder when she thought someone might be watching. The windows were huge, intricate panes of stained glass. The walls appeared thick, old, and very cold as ivy clung tight to the rough stone.

Timber found herself holding her breath when the door slowly eased open. She let it out with a grateful eye on Kane.

"It took you long enough," he said, out of breath. "You have any problems coming up the road?" He looked over her head.

She looked too. Only her eyes took in his car and then him again. His forehead was damp from exertion. His hair a little less neat in styling. However, it was his blue-gray eyes, filled with a thousand different stories about him that were twitching in the throes of shifting.

A faint smile lifted her cheeks. "You left your car door open."

She had sensed he was the wolf. Not right away as she should have when he licked her face, but when she saw the car. Now she wouldn't have a problem mistaking his scent in either form.

"Oh, did I?" His gaze rolled down to hers for a second.

Kane came to her rescue the moment he heard her panicked shriek. His instincts transformed him into a beast with strengths beyond normal man. He became her protector and everything in her heart lurched with the prospects it held.

“Did you have to go somewhere in a hurry?” The weight of worry lifted as she reached her hand up to his granite-like face.

“What are you doing?” He caught her hand and studied it.

Kane held her fingers captive with a wariness of her intentions.

“You have something on your face,” she said.

He didn’t take his eyes from hers as a cool, finely textured finger swept across the dent just below his lip. It left a shock of electricity and he quickly grabbed her finger.

“I must have nicked myself...shaving.” His attraction to her seriously clouded his mind.

“Shaving, and that’s why you’re out of breath?” She coyly tipped her head sideways to examine his jaw.

“Yeah.” He licked the bright red spot of blood from her fingertip.

“In your rush to shave, you parked quite a ways from the door.” She lifted another hand to his cheek.

She rasped her palm over his bristly skin. It was all he could do to keep a straight face while the minx stroked him. The caress traveled his nerves and veins and led right to his cock.

“Explains everything so nicely, except for the fact you still have a day-old shadow.”

He didn’t know which was worse, her intoxicating beauty or her clever perception. The dangerous combo intrigued him, but the greatest allure was her natural innocence.

Kane bowed to her upturned face. His thumb wiped at another smudge of blood in her hairline. “You’re none the worse for wear, I reckon.”

“Like my sunglasses?”

He let her see his smile. "Come on, there are people for you to meet." He towed her toward the set of large, dark mahogany wood-paneled sliding doors.

When Willie emerged from the shadows, Timber balked at moving forward.

"You," she exclaimed. "You're the one that grabbed me outside."

Kane snagged her hand before she could flee. "He won't hurt you."

"Who is he?" she whispered over his shoulder.

"This is Willie. He won't ever bother you again." Kane motioned to Willie to open the doors.

"Why'd he attack me?"

"Willie thought you were a threat to me."

"Me?" she gulped.

He pushed her into the room and rested his hands on her shoulders. He leaned close to her ear. "I've set him straight. However, these vultures in here will be a bigger problem to you than Willie."

He felt her stiffen.

"You don't belong here and soon you'll understand why."

He eyed the sour, expressionless people he had to call his family. Timber's exuberance when she looked at his home on the drive up had a freshness that made him proud. To see her disappointed saddened him.

He massaged her waist while fighting his conflicting emotions. The fact he hung onto her like a leech was in such opposition of wanting her gone from there.

"Don't worry, puss, I'm not done with you yet. Until then, I'll be right behind you."

He placed his hands on her hips and steered her to his aunt.

"Timber, this is Minerva. She's eldest sister to Hezekiah Wolverton. He sent the note for you to come."

He tried to move her along to the next person except she didn't want to be hurried. He pushed again and she rooted her stance with determination.

"It's nice to meet you...Minerva." She held her hand out to their great aunt.

"You're nothing to this family." Minerva glowered evilly. "My brother should have killed every last one of you abominations. Take her out of my sight, boy."

Kane growled low at his aunt's insult at calling him boy. The thin, frail woman even upset his balance. She liked taunting people. She turned her cold and dark navy-blue-eyed stare on Timber and it did tempt him to leave Timber on her own.

He never liked the idea of half-breeds. Nevertheless, he visibly flaunted his claim to Timber and it should have drawn back the old woman's vehemence. They both were aware he'd not retreat from something he wanted.

Timber shivered and stepped back into him. Her bottom bumped his cock and all thoughts of leaving her to fend for herself were gone. His hands went to the top of her shoulders and drew her tighter against the ache she tortured with her curves. She hadn't been on the estate for more than thirty minutes and he sensed himself making room for her in his life. Yet it didn't stop him from trying to fight the feelings of obsession.

"None of them want you here, including me."

"Then why am I?" She spun and faced him. "This Hezekiah, if he sent the note, he must have wanted me to come."

"He's dead." Kane pulled her forward within inches of his face.

"He died several months ago and you're only here because of his will. Once it's determined what you get, you'll take it, and leave."

She shook her head.

“What do you mean no?”

“I want to stay. If the will allows me to do that, then I will.” She lifted her chin in rebellion of his glare. “I’m not a full-blood, but I’m not a little girl you can trample on because you think you’re so big and bad.”

“Oh?”

“I’m not afraid of you, I’m not afraid of any of you!” she said louder.

“So, puss, you’ve a little more spunk than I first saw.” He smiled and rubbed a finger over her bottom lip. “It will make things interesting.”

She turned from him, but it came as no surprise when she didn’t move away. The glimmer of uncertainty lingered in her pretty eyes. When he dared a touch to her shoulder, she didn’t protest. He rubbed a lock of her hair between his fingers.

“Come on, puss, Minerva’s your harshest critic.” He walked her to the group of three.

Her nervous shiver made him pull her closer to his side. For the moment, he’d resigned himself to the fact she wouldn’t be free of him until he tired of her succulent body. Something he hadn’t yet got started on in all the decadent ways he could enjoy.

“This is my Uncle Morley, his wife Marianne, and their son, Colby.” He circled his arm possessively around her waist.

“Hello,” Timber said.

Kane scowled at his obese cousin, Colby, to make his point clear—Timber belonged to him. He hadn’t ever had worries where girls were concerned, but there was always the chance Timber would truly have the fault of poor judgment.

Morley’s brow rose and he grudgingly gave a nod to Timber’s existence. Marianne only stared, as usual for the quiet woman. Colby, on

the other hand, licked his lips hungrily and looked Timber up and down as if he had a chance against Kane.

Colby's smile lifted his nose, and if any Wolverton was born to be a half-breed, it was him. The man was a pig. On cue, he lifted a hand and bit into a thick cookie. Crumbs tumbled down his shirt and he left them to lie on the shelf of his protruding belly.

"What's going on?" Kane's sister, Heather, entered the room.

"Nothing," he answered. "This is Timber."

"Timber? What an odd name. I'm Heather."

"It's nice to meet you," Timber replied quietly.

Kane gripped Heather's jaw between his thumb and forefinger. "Heather has the finest blood there is," he proudly commented.

Immediately he turned to Timber's almost inaudible hiss. His actions sparked jealousy in the wolf-cat and he liked it. He cupped the angelic face of Heather in both hands and brushed a kiss over her cheek. Again the invidious action wormed its way to the jealous blood of his new playmate. He sensed the beat of Timber's heart quickening. He watched for the unmanageable signs of her shifting. A vicious torment, to say the least, when all he had to do was gather Timber into his arms and coo over her beauty.

"So, Timber, tell us, what kind of blood do you have in your veins?" Heather chirped as if she were giving a cheerleader demonstration.

At one time Kane would have laughed with Heather's cruel taunt. Timber's crestfallen expression crushed his lungs, and he turned to do as he wished. He gathered her to his side and gave Heather a frown of disapproval. Timber's mood elevated and he squeezed her around the middle.

"I'll show you to your room." He pressed his fingers into her back to move her along.



He didn't want her to be humiliated any longer. It had upset her before and he had other plans requiring her cooperation.

"I'm not ready to go to my room," she growled. "So stop pushing me like some mother hen.

"Very well, then you can come to mine."

He took her hand and chose a route through the unoccupied kitchen to the back staircase.

"My, your room is...small." She laughed when he stopped her on the landing halfway up and pressed her into the shadowy corner.

Kane cut off her humor with a kiss to her parted lips. He couldn't wait any longer to touch her. Indecency required privacy. He gripped her trim waist and waited for her attack or her compliance. He didn't know what possessed him to be out of control when he had her alone. Her scent had a mild flavor he could still taste on his fingers. Her softness bore touching, with delicacy as well as verve. Her mouth needed kissing. She thirsted for him with the naiveté of someone inexperienced. The untested aspects required a dark corner.

"You're a detestable creature to everyone in that room," he whispered over her pliant lips. "I should scour myself with a wire brush for ever touching you."

"But you won't, if you have any hopes to make this work again."

He groaned in agony for the torturous way she boldly pressed the palm of her hand to his crotch. He hadn't planned on taking things so far until she rubbed his erection.

"A stiff wire brush might render this useless," she warned.

He captured her mouth to prevent her from speaking, although she didn't need words to seduce him. The hum and purr of her body did enough damage. His deep, untamed growl echoed in the tight stairwell. He kissed her fiercely, wishing to restrain himself, but losing the battle to

her caress. His cock grew hard and ready. It put him in a complete, immobilized trance. He forgot the original plan he had of scaring her away from Wolverton. The idea dissolved in the thrill of her hands touching him with reserved, yet eager exploration. He hated the power she gained over him in such a short space of time. The nether regions of his body took control along with her and overpowered his free will. When a sweet purr escaped her rosy kiss-puckered lips, he brushed them lightly with a quivering kiss.

“Kane.” The sweet ruffle of sound, the delicious expelling breath, mingled with his.

Timber Wolverton seduced him with her enchanting rareness.

## *Chapter Five*

Timber lacked all experience. She hadn't ever been deeply kissed, caressed, or cuddled by a man. A teenage boy in school giving her a few brief pecks didn't count.

She longed for the education she'd get from Kane. Under her palm, throbbing with urgency, lay the heart of not only a man, but a beast. She would have no limits with Kane and already felt an enthralling bond to him.

Each attack he made to her sanity, she prepared to meet with a kindness. It confused and confounded her. Nevertheless, in it all, a void filled. She had a kindred connection to him and yearned to know more about their kind. How did she fit in with these Wolvertons? Kane's individual magnetism had a strange mix of likable and unpleasant personality traits. It drew her to him like some irresistible candy her sweet tooth couldn't resist and he swiftly became an addiction.

He slid his hands down over her hips and under her bottom. His strong fingers squeezed her against his hard body. She stretched to kiss the dimple in his chin. The cute attraction matched the ones in his cheeks with perfection.

"You are a wicked, little puss," he growled, mischievously. "Wrap your legs around me."

Kane squeezed her ass harder and hoisted her up. She folded her legs behind him and locked her ankles against his back.

“Now what do you plan on doing with me?” She looped her arms behind his head and looked at the sinful smile with fascination.

“Eat you.” He nipped at her bottom lip.

It stung and Timber dug her fingers into his muscled back.

“Play,” he hummed, nuzzling her throat with his lips. “It’s only play, sweet puss.”

He chuckled and the puffs of air tickled the skin beneath her ear. She moved her hands to his shoulders so she could push him away if he persisted in teasing her. His kisses traveled from the sensitive spot and moved over her jaw to her cheek. His hips forced her tighter to the wall. With his possessive assertion, she felt wary of all he did. Still, she couldn’t deny the power he gained, grinding his denim-shrouded cock against her hungry pussy, and she relented to the idea he wouldn’t hurt her.

She slid her arms over Kane’s thickly muscled shoulders. She held the back of his head and her fingers delved into his thick black hair. Wet, fervid kisses splashed around her throat. His moist lips slid across her collarbone.

Raking her fingers down the back of his head, she tightened her grip on his silky locks. The handsome, ultra-virile man had her trapped between him and the wall. While she didn’t trust his pretense of affection, she relied on the fact he’d know all the details to having sex. Her sixth sense gave her confidence he’d be kind and gentle. Beneath Kane’s gruff exterior lurked a compassionate man. He’d been harsh with Buckeye, but the fact he seemed to be the one to teach the mentally challenged man to stay out of the road showed thoughtfulness. A heartless bastard wouldn’t have cared in the least to admonish the man for the dangerous mistake.

“You are delicious, puss.”

“Am I?” she hummed.

“An exquisite delicacy I’ll thoroughly enjoy.”

Kane’s soft, full lips invited her thoughts to the other places he could put them. Her cunt pulsed in hopes of him kissing her there. Her clit tingled excitedly for the caress of his tongue. She’d read books, watched TV, and relished the moment she would experience the sublime way writers could describe an orgasm against a man’s mouth.

“Then taste me,” she begged with impatience.

She hated how proficiently he chased away all emotions except the one he attracted with ferocious persistence. As a victim to the carnal instincts of their deep-rooted animal blood, she connected wantonly to him with a ravenous hunger.

“Yes.” The trill of her purr echoed inside his mouth when he kissed her again.

Clutching at his shirt, her fingers traveled the muscles in his back. His strength forced its way upon her with his hips securing her to the wall. His hands remained free to roam.

Kane pushed her shirt up. A breeze wafted between them and tickled her bare belly making her giggle. In seconds, her bra was jerked down and her laughter stopped cold. She turned her head to the side, not wanting to look at him examining her partial nudity. The serious intentions of her ravisher were clear to her the moment he forced her breasts up from the binds. His hands glided over her aching, hard nipples. Coarse, calloused fingertips raked a stimulating inspection over her flesh. She tried not to breathe hard. With each exaggerated pinch and twist, her nipples burned from the glorious abuse. The vivacious heat spun her thoughts out of control while the vise of his hands kneaded her breasts. He continued to squeeze and pull the tips. His cock fit against her even more as he rolled his hips.

Timber didn't want to suggest the obvious. A bedroom and a bed would be a better place for what they both wanted. However, as she'd never been a backseat girl getting fucked by some jock, she had to take her thrills where she could. The back staircase seemed to be secluded.

Kane's hands flattened on the wall on each side of her head. He continued to grind into her hard. The first tremors of her orgasm dulled in comparison to his plundering kiss. His breath swirled inside her mouth as he panted. His tongue whipped over hers and she licked back when given a chance.

Kane lifted his head.

"You've not tasted all of me," she said boldly.

She didn't understand his faraway look, but dazed would accurately describe her sensation of euphoria.

He stared at her. His chest, rising and falling rapidly, pressed against the ache in her breasts. She thought they were finished kissing until he swooped back in for another lock on her breath. It became a combustible fervor. His arms jerked back from the wall and snaked around her.

"I didn't meet your mother," she breathed heavily when he gave her mouth leave to speak.

"You will. She'll wait to hear everyone's input before she looks you over."

He sniffed along the edge of her jaw, licked a trail down her neck, and kissed beneath her chin. The heat built between them, and she discovered the route of his travels came with intuitive signals she understood. She manipulated his progress with the tilt of her head.

"Then she doesn't want me here either." She sighed.

His kiss sizzled over her lips. When he lifted his head, she saw he didn't want to talk, and she could recognize some of her chatter as nervousness.

“You’re getting the idea quickly.” He angled his mouth over hers.

Squeezing the seat of her Levi’s, his fingers lodged a firm hold. He sucked at her mouth in long, drawn-out pulls of her lips and tongue where they caught in his teeth. Nibbling bites prickled her with his zealous play. He buried his face under her hair along the warm regions below her earlobe. Clothes hindered the sensations of their flesh mating.

“I’m going to fuck you so hard, puss, you’ll be sore for a week,” he warned.

He unfastened her shorts. A noise resounded close by and added to her agitation. Kane yanked on the back of her shorts, exposing her bottom. Everything moved too fast. He kept her on a rollercoaster ride of emotions, and she needed to come up for air. Her level-headed brain needed space.

“Kane, stop.” She tore her mouth free of his.

“There’s no stopping.” He nipped at her jaw while his body compressed her tighter in the corner. His hand fit into the back of her shorts so his finger could rub in the crack of her ass and massage her clenching anus.

“Please,” she begged, even though the new stimulation demanded she stay quiet.

He pushed the tip of his finger into her. Not far, not rough, but in, nonetheless. She never had anything inserted in her bottom before and she could neither say liked nor disliked liked it. Holding onto him, she rested her chin on his shoulder while she debated if she’d get pleasure from his finger wiggling and working deeper into her.

He pulled it out for a second and reached under to her wet cunt. She jockeyed up against him at the swipe through her folds. She wanted to ease down, except his finger rubbed her anus again. The lubricated digit glided in with the new slickness. He pumped in and out. Deeper and

deeper, he stabbed. She couldn't hold herself up, but when she lowered, the pressure intensified, and made her whimper.

Soon Kane jammed two fingers into the tight ring and she nearly leapt over him.

"Easy, puss." He thrust faster.

She followed the momentum with a slight bounce that brought her a painful pleasure. Her cunt oozed with another spending that helped grease the gap he finger-fucked.

The climax came strong.

"Kane," she gasped.

She dug her fingers into his hair and the back of his shirt.

"I'm going to take extra delight in fucking your ass." His raspy voice pushed hair around her ear. "You've never been fucked in this tight hole before, have you?"

She shook her head unable to render coherent words. A few moans, eerily appropriate for the dark stairwell, echoed.

She panted like a dog.

Kane loved the way her sweet breath rode his with passion. He wanted to kiss her more than he ever had before. Each minute stitched over the gap of their differences. Soon all the threads of want, need, and demand would place him in a precarious position. He didn't get emotionally involved with women—ever.

He pushed her firmly against the wall, bathing all available points of her face with desperately hungry kisses. He assailed her neck and lingered on the rapid palpitations. Her body surged against him so his cock ached with an incredible pain.

A low growl rumbled from her throat. He grabbed her jaw and held her face up, watching the erratic twinkling colors change in her eyes.



“Please,” she whimpered a plea for help.

He turned his hand over beneath her chin and stroked her neck. He felt the muscles move up and down with her rapid swallows of air. Indulging a woman’s peculiarities was natural. For Timber, petting her neck was necessary to avoid fighting off the wolf-cat in her. The curl of one finger brushed slow and gentle, and in return, her tranquil purr riffled the air.

“Better?” He put a hand behind her head and pulled it down on his shoulder.

Her arms were a wreath of affection around him. He deeply yearned to become a part of Timber’s intensity, through sex. Carrying her up the stairs in the framework of his arms, he felt stronger than usual with her lightweight limbs wrapping him with her appreciative hug. He also felt vulnerable as he fought some of those sensations locking him into adoring her.

She buried her face against his neck. With the heat of her sweet breath, Timber pressed a scorching kiss to his throat. In a swallowed excitement, his Adam’s apple bumped over her lips and she planted more tiny kisses along his neck.

“Are you still taking me to your room?” Her lips nibbled at his ear.

“Yes, and to my bed, and then you’ll leave Wolverton and never return.” He backed up against his bedroom door. “You don’t belong here.”

With a quick and easy turn, the door snapped open.

“What if I don’t want to go? This is my home.”

“No, this is *my* home. I have enough of Hezekiah’s mistakes wandering about. They leave the estate and cause me a great deal of trouble with the townspeople.” He saw the upset of his words in her misty-green eyes.

He really didn't want her there, because he didn't think he could ever trust himself not to need her again as he did now. It would be awkward to have the half-breed around. He would take liberties and she'd get possessive. His life would be miserable.

"I'm not a mistake." She tensed in his arms.

"There's only one way Wolvertons should be brought into this world and it has nothing to do with a laboratory."

"You're right, it shouldn't, but it doesn't make me a mistake." Her voice shook, hinting at the pain she suffered because of his words.

"Then what does it make you?"

Kane angled over the bed, thinking to drop her there. Dump her immediately and disappear from the room. Every thought he had about her leaving, twisted like an anxious knot in his gut. Instinct demanded he shake her until she understood he'd never let her leave. It couldn't have been any worse than if he were drawn between two horses.

"Is this the subject you really wish to go over now?" Her tone mellowed drastically from her defensive one.

When he believed he had things figured out, her temperament abruptly changed. The surprise rekindled the lust of his wavering libido. Her heart thumped against his, and resisting the precious minx appeared out of the question.

"No, it's not." He lowered her onto the comforter and held himself over her, propped on his elbows.

Her hot limbs remained ensconced around him. Her sultry purr brought him to a willing surrender.

Timber wove her fingers into his hair as his head moved closer. He kissed her face, her jaw, and downwards. She stretched her neck to give him access where he slurped over her silky skin. He had the impression she examined the room. His sanctuary held no secrets. The lair of

seduction had no trace of another woman because he'd never brought any to his bed.

Awed by the purrs of contentment, he lapped up the harmonious sounds of her encouragement. Her arms entwined behind his and up his back like honeysuckle on a mission to devour him. Her head dropped back letting him kiss along the strained cord of her long white neck. The delicate arch left open a hollow at the base in which he pressed a kiss. Her breathless pants of excitement wove to his.

"You are scrumptious, half-breed."

"Scrumptious." She laughed. "I like the sound of that."

He licked over her pulsing jugular, readying her with his canines, scratching at the nerves hidden below the delicate flesh.

"If you bite me, I'll kill you," she snarled, the amusement gone from her voice.

Kane's jaw tightened for a second. The pressure of his heart held fast. He sighed heavily and rose up from her arms.

Timber watched Kane amble over to the large arched window. His hand brushed away the gold drapery as if he needed to see something. It had to be important for him to leave her on the bed. He stood quietly. His head down, his shoulders slumped, and she thought he dealt with some mental battle.

She sat up and put her feet firmly on the floor, not knowing what to do. She suspected his withdrawal would come eventually, because he seemed unwilling to accept commitment to his emotions. From the moment he circled her in the street, he denied his feelings, telling her to go away. She didn't want to be pushed away. The more he fought the thrilling way they gravitated toward each other, the stronger her attraction became toward him. Maybe it was the age old *can't have him*—

*want him* syndrome, except she knew they had to explore the realm of *maybe* with thoroughness.

“Your room is the next one on the left,” he finally said.

He smoothed his hair back with one stroke over his head. His hand held at the back as if he had a headache.

“You mean to dismiss me, I think not.” Timber strolled around the room and fingered objects of interest.

She became the aggressor. Kane was a means to the end of her virginity. Not to mention she desired the touch of his hands caressing her for the pure exhilaration she expected.

He had sweetly drawn her into an unknown world of passion, and she couldn’t race fast enough into the worthwhile adoration he showed her. She couldn’t let him abandon her with his sudden change of heart.

“You’ve not told me why I was invited here.”

“My grandfather, Hezekiah Wolverton, secretly left letters to be sent to all his throwaways on the moment of his death. He actually went to a town lawyer so I wouldn’t know. We didn’t learn of this until the first mutant arrived.”

Timber gulped She didn't like the word mutant. It made her sound like a vulgarity to their race.

“Everyone gets a lawyer if they have things to leave to people.” She pretended she hadn’t heard him refer to her like unwanted mud.

“I’m a lawyer.” Kane replied, with a hint of resentment in his tone.

“And what difference would it have made if you knew?”

“I would have made sure none of those letters were sent.”

“Maybe that’s why he didn’t use you as his lawyer.”

He narrowed his glare on her.

She folded her arms across her chest to bind the ache in her breasts. Filaments of desire manifested another tingling throb. He made her insides drip and clench while her breath came in short, shallow gasps.

When Kane turned away, she studied him and his delectable stature. If a man could be compared to a dessert, then Kane Wolverton was a savory cherry.

He pushed the curtain further away and leaned toward the glass, pretending to look below. She knew nothing had his attention other than the heavy air of tension in the room.

“Someone else came because of a letter?” She stopped her quiet study of his ass in the tight-fitting jeans and resumed her curious exam of everything in his room. “And which of the happy faces downstairs was that? I have no guess as to which sour face wasn’t bred and born in this mansion.”

“He’s dead.”

The cold, sinister statement made her shiver. She’d rather keep her thoughts on his rounded bottom or the flavor of his bronzed skin on the flat of her tongue. Anything fun, carefree, and void of sadness would be better than having the mood of the room change.

Forging ahead with the torture it entailed to get information about her family, she asked. “How’d he die?”

As stubborn and closed-mouthed as anybody she’d ever met, he didn’t answer.

“Was it an accident?” She picked up his comb from the dresser.

“He had the misfortune to touch something that didn’t belong to him.” He left the window and took the comb from her.

Her breath caught at his underlying threat. She didn’t want to believe what he insinuated. The macabre joke was his way of provoking her.

Albeit cruelly it would seem, but teasing nonetheless. She forced a lighthearted response, refusing to succumb to his sport of baiting her with snippets of odium. They shared a primitive, carnal passion. They were both disturbed by the power of their attraction. He fought it and she welcomed it. She didn't care what his reasons were for trying so hard to dislike her. They were chased away by an invisible force beneath their banter.

"Oh, what'd he do, touch your nightstand?" She swiped a finger over it and laughed. "Maybe he touched your shirt." She poked his chest.

Kane caught her fingers and squeezed them tight.

"Ouch, let go." Timber tried to free her hand. "I was just joking."

"I wasn't," he grumbled, tossing her hand away. "He dared to touch Heather."

"Like you've touched me?" Timber sank to the edge of the bed, wiggling her fingers, checking to be sure the brute hadn't broken them. "You killed someone because they touched your pretty, little tart downstairs?"

Timber gulped as Kane came at her. A murderous look darkened his blue eyes to burnished steel. He held her gaze for a second and then she turned her face away from the intentional provocation. Her eyes flashed in response to the threat, her heart hammered with an intensity she couldn't reverse.

"I hate you!" she seethed.

Not all of him, but the part that brought about the change in her. He toyed with her inabilities like a game, exercising his dominance.

She inhaled the potent scent of his masculinity spiked with a sexual pheromone, beckoning her reticence to melt.

His aggressive hands jerked one strap of her tank top to the side.

"Let go of me." She struggled.

He bit her shoulder with a love-hate force. His teeth didn't pierce the skin but they dented into the nerves, making her feel the intensity.

"Stop!" she wailed.

His kisses over the mark soothed the irritation and he didn't stop licking her skin until she calmed.

His head lifted and he gave her a strange look.

"I hate you," she whimpered again, unable to see his eyes through the distortion of hers.

He pressed his forehead to hers. "I'll never injure you, sweet puss."

He brushed his nose alongside hers, nudging her cheek with kisses. Across her lips, he moved to the other side, giving her another nuzzle of feathery sweeps over her skin.

A sob burped from her lips.

"Shhh... You needn't change for fear's sake, my delightful half-breed. I'd rather die than ever harm you." His words whispered over her skin with a swipe of his tongue at her jaw.

She wished for him to repeat everything. Over and over she wanted him to say he would never do another thing to scare her. She sought the love-spiked words he spoke. Each slurp of his thick, wet tongue heightened her awareness. Kane, the charmer, aimed to control his world. Whether this passionate man could be burdened by his own insecurities or not, left her little room to trust he'd *never* hurt her. His fervent kisses for the moment did offer her a temporary shelter.

He lowered and all his weight pressed her into his mattress.

"Oh Kane, Kane please," she whined, with the titillation of his hands raking over her body.

She would have liked it fine if there were no clothes hindering his advances. She grabbed at his shoulders to confirm her consenting plea

for him not to stop. His roughness heightened her delights with a new adventure she could relate to with an eager aggression.

“Oh yes!” She touched every contour of Kane she could reach.

She worked to drag his black T-shirt up his torso. He rid himself of the thing by jerking it over his head. Her fingers dipped into the mat of coarse hair on his chest. It had a soft thickness to it and she giggled, recalling him licking her face as the wolf.

“You protected me from Willie.” She lifted her chin to have him kiss the hollow of her throat. “Why?”

“I was protecting Willie from you,” he groaned.

“Oh.” In a moment of lustful weakness, she thought maybe he would admit to liking her enough to keep her safe.



## *Chapter Six*

Kane didn't ever want Timber to suffer a moment of pain. It was the greatest revelation of his life. Spilling out any affection for his bed partners was not part of his genetic makeup. That he never had it in him to express his feelings for women was his flaw.

It felt natural to hate what his grandfather created—until now.

Captivated by one of the mutants, the wild sensations he experienced felt right. However, before the night was over, he would mate the half-breed if for nothing else than to get her out of his senses.

Kane slipped the strap of her shirt over the rim of her shoulder. The creamy flesh was as smooth, sleek, and glossy like her animal coat. The vivacious temptress knew the craft of seduction well. Her innocent act had enough rawness to be believable.

He pulled her arms up and pinned them on the pillow next to her head. She lay in submissive surrender. Tears welled in her eyes and he let go to prop himself on his hands. Hanging over her, wanting to be a part of the wolf-cat, he looked into the watery-green pools.

A knock at the door took both their gazes to it. Neither said anything. Kane dipped down and kissed the cool, unmoving lips before he got up.

Timber sat up and pulled her shirt strap back into place. He watched her fingers comb over her mop of gorgeous, dark hair.

"Yes?" he finally answered, when another rap echoed in the room.

“Kane, Mother wants you to bring Timber down to dinner.” Heather tapped again. “She says, now.”

“I need ten minutes.”

He pushed Timber back on the bed and scooped an arm beneath her, holding her in the cradle of his embrace.

“We should go downstairs.” She squirmed.

“We will, eventually.”

“No, I want to go now.”

He kissed along her jaw, her neck, and moved to her shoulder. “Tell me no again, half-breed.” He skimmed his fingers lightly over the sliver of her belly showing. “Tell me to stop, sweet puss.”

“Kane, let go.”

“Fight me, little hell-cat.”

“Kane, please.”

“Show me that unbridled passion you had outside when you shifted into your animal form.” He watched her eyes.

She rebelliously shook her head.

“Then you’ll give into me now?”

“Yes.”

“We’ll play rough later, then.” He grinned, raising her shirt up and over her head.

Timber arched, allowing him to unfasten her bra. He slipped it slowly down her arms and tossed it across the room. He took a lick at her nipple and swirled his tongue around the hard nub, repeatedly.

“Hmmm, you’re sweet.” He sucked the tip of her succulent breast into his mouth.

He pressed kisses all around the pert bead, fat and luscious. She moaned, drawing him back to laving the erect nipple until it formed a soft, mountainous peak. Her feline purrs triggered a release of tiny

flames in all his pores. The fettered rumble was low, locked in her chest below the valley of her breasts. He pressed a row of kisses down to her belly, and the vibration echoed. It ignited a hunger to devour her inch by inch in every sexual position he could turn the evocative puss.

Kane made her blue-jean shorts his next target. He unzipped them slowly. Her tits jiggled when he looped his fingers in the waistband to work the denim down over her hips. He didn't need her shorts off if he fucked her right then between the valley of her ripe ivory breasts. He could get off just thinking about riding against the vibratory purr. His cock head would glide up and kiss her beautiful lips before she sucked him into the moist cavern of her mouth.

His chest heaved in and out as he felt the sensations as if they were real. His gaze went back to her shorts and he stood to take off her shoes with them. The white lace panties concealed only the recesses of her cunt. The swirls of tatted material let little black hairs stick through the cloth and he brushed a finger over them. She squirmed as he traced the elastic edges across the top and around her thighs. Her bikini shaped panties told him much as he strummed a finger in the crevice of her leg where she shaved some of her pussy hair off.

"I like this." He rubbed his finger up the front of the panties.

She didn't answer. Her gaze followed his and broke away as he curled his finger under the elastic leg hole of the panty, touching the short dark swatch she'd left. She turned her head. Purrs filled the room as if a hundred cats surrounded him. It raised his hackles. Inclinations to back away from her were overruled. The vibratory sound soothed the ache in his chest. Desire intensified. He tugged the panties. She lifted her supple ass off the bed and he swiftly removed the last remaining fabric in his path. From head to toe, she blushed. The warm, self-conscious pink

sensuously sped up his heartbeat. He gazed down and almost couldn't find words to describe such a glorious sight.

"Exquisite," he murmured.

She reached for him and he held her arms. Their fingers twined together. He leaned and kissed her thigh. The skin quivered beneath his mouth and he slid his tongue to her knee before traveling upward. Her fingers clenched at his as he pushed them to the bed.

"Kane," she hummed his name.

He let her hands go and stretched his arms up over her belly to touch her full, velveteen-textured breasts. Round, supple globes were his for the taking. He folded his fingers around her plumpness to mold her skin to his liking.

If she were a moth, she would have felt like a butterfly under his ardent inspection of every inch of her naked body. If she were a rosebud, he would have forced her to bloom as no other could.

She traced her fingers along the intricate grooves of his muscles. Kane's complicated, reserved, and hard-edged nature intrigued her. She needed to learn what he liked and what he'd want from her. He liked to be in charge and so did she, most of the time, but she wondered if it would lead to difficulties between them.

"Are you in heat?" he asked, sniffing over her skin.

Timber giggled.

He glared sternly at her. She had the distinct impression he didn't like her laughing for whatever reason.

"That tickles," she announced, almost apologetically when she giggled again.

"Well, are you in heat?" He pushed up and unzipped his pants.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

“Are you in season to be bred?”

“I’m not an animal.”

“Part of you is.”

“Do you plan on stopping?”

“No, but I prefer not to use a condom.” He stepped off the bed and dropped his pants.

His hands spread her legs and a cool breeze touched her hot center. Her vaginal walls squeezed together, closing off the chill, but opened to the warmth of Kane’s knee. He knelt close and she involuntarily rocked her hips. The pulsations of her clit commanded her to scoot and brush the ache against the hair on his leg.

He fell forward on his hands and hung over her, one knee on the outside of her thigh and the other on the inside.

“Rub it again,” he told her.

She did just the once. His smile was wicked. His long, stiff cock rode up over her hipbone.

“Damn, I want to play with you, but we can’t make this an all-day thing.” He righted himself on his knees.

He lifted his leg over hers, positioning both knees on the mattress between her thighs.

Timber stared at his erection. Her pulse pushed the blood through her veins too fast and left her dizzily gawking at his long, shimmering cock. He moved and the gorgeous intimate extremity swung over her belly.

An odd sound sang from her lungs when the hypnotizing metronome of flesh bounced. The thing came alive and put her in a trance. The obelisk jutted out from his body more a weapon than an instrument of lovemaking. Aimed as if it watched her, his cock swayed.

Timber inhaled deeply while excitement and anxiety teased her senses.

She moved her gaze to his face and back to his cock. Both were arrogant. The intimidating moment forced her to rethink her situation. "Maybe this isn't a good idea." She tried to scoot up, away from him, but his grip went firmly on her hips.

"Oh I know this ain't a good idea. Unfortunate though it may be for you, this is going to happen."

"Kane." she whimpered.

He leaned down and held her jaw in the "V" of his thumb and forefinger.

"You've been given your chance to say no." He reminded her with a harsh kiss, bruising her lips.

"Get off me." Timber pushed hard enough to throw him off balance and she scrambled to get off the bed. "I'm sure this isn't going to happen."

Kane's eyes darkened and she shifted at the same time he did. Kane the wolf stalked the exit, preventing her from leaving. His thick, black hair stood on end and his lips rolled to show razor-sharp teeth. The gleaming white fangs were deadly, ferocious, and proposed a dominance Timber would not bow down to easily. She attacked first, throwing her sleek feline body at him. Her paws caught him unaware, knocking him down by swift action, instead of physical force.

Kane didn't let Timber's boldness surprise him when he crashed to the floor. Her on top gave him other ideas and fighting had nothing to do with what he wanted. He desired to make love to the woman trapping his soul in her lovely sight. Slender and agile, Timber had all the succinct moves of a lioness, but her attributes of a wolf were features Kane

hungered for. He'd never met a she-wolf with such a pronounced determination. Reverting to his human form, he stroked beneath her chin.

"You win this round, puss, only because I don't want to hurt you." He buried his fingers into her fur.

He pet her head until she shifted and then his fingers were gliding down the back of her silky hair over her shoulders. He didn't end his touch at the middle of her back. He stopped when he had her bare ass in the grip of his fingers.

"You know I like you, so why fight it?" He swept his hands over the silky cheeks of her bottom.

"Because...I don't think I like you."

"I don't think that's quite the truth." He knew she couldn't put much verity into the statement as she lie naked on him, panting.

"Well, I'm trying not to like you."

Kane laughed and expected her vehemence to come full blast at him.

She managed to catch him off guard with an unexpected and acceptable surprise. Her head dipped down and her lips met his. Her delicious kiss devoured his breath. He held her face and consumed every morsel of her sweet saliva. His tongue licked over her teeth, fought with her tongue, and won the right to bathe the roof of her mouth. Her mewls were soft, provocative, and bewitching. He didn't want her once or even twice. He wanted her always to be available to his vagarious lusts.

"You're not trying very hard, are you?"

"Not right now I'm not." She lifted her chin letting him kiss beneath her jaw.

Her fingers scratched the side of his head, stroking the locks curled to the rim of his ear. Steaming heat rubbed between their entwining bodies. Kane pushed to sit up while Timber's legs circled his waist and

fastened ankle to ankle. She hung onto his neck as he put a hand to the floor and pushed to get them to the bed.

The ice of Kane's heart melted. The chill he felt warmed with Timber's tongue caressing the swirls of his ear. She nuzzled her silk-tipped nose under his chin and the delightful soft purr rolling against his neck engaged his heart.

"You're so very different, Timber."

He massaged her lithe bottom, dragging her up and down against his erection.

"Do I say thank you?" She leaned back from him and smiled with a trace of uncertainty at his sincerity.

"It's a very, very good kind of different."

A whimpered gasp spurt from her lips and Kane's mouth covered hers. Pure and passionate, he bent over the bed and carefully deposited her in the rumpled covers. He raised his head and looked for a long time into her alluring green eyes.

"You're not going to say anything mean, are you?" Her fingers fretted up and down his sides, waiting for his answer.

He shook his head and an enchanting smile spread from her soft, moist lips to his. He kissed gently over her face. Every angle, from the slope of her small nose to the recess of her eyes, he missed nothing.

Licking over one delicious breast, he circled the peak of her other with the pad of his thumb. The plump, dark tip rolled in the directions he pushed it. He licked one and fingered the other. Timber writhed beneath him. Her whole body floated up and pressed tight to his, hip to hip. His aching cock wedged into the parted, damp folds of her warm pussy.

His stiff erection vibrated between them. More than wanting her, he sought to be a part of her endearing soul. Her heady scent, rich with the



feminine secretions, enhanced her shifter's sweet pheromone. Energetic dew filled her pores, bathing her skin in a dazzling shimmer. He licked her glossy skin and sipped the sweet, salty moisture from her luscious curves.

They alternated kissing, caressing, and lapping up the moments where nothing mattered other than the pleasure they gave and the joy they received. Kane ran the back of his hand over her jaw and her cheek. A wondrous mystery attracted him. She was a part of him, his bloodline, and he couldn't deny the threads were strong. They shared something profound and he had the urge to fight the feelings, except, he had a greater one to make love to her.

"Kane," Timber murmured, nuzzling her face to his stubble-covered jaw.

"Hummm?"

"I'm new at this," she whispered.

"New?" He lifted his head and stared at her. "How new?"

"Extremely, like no experience, never been with a man, virgin sort of new."

Her fingers kept brushing over his shoulders. She averted her eyes with a bashful innocence.

"Is it a problem?" she asked.

"That you've not been mated?" He wanted to laugh, to whoop with some primordial joy. Instead, he lifted her chin and smiled. "I can't say any man would have a qualm about you being a virgin."

Kane traced her parted lips with a finger. Her eyes glistened like rare gems. She'd have no comparison to put him up against, naturally a plus in his favor. That she'd feel the mushy infatuation for her first lover was a minus since the clingy creatures thought carnal lust and gratification were a commitment to forever.

Then, as he deliberated his next move, *what was wrong with forever* rattled around in his head like a dare.

She adjusted her position. The electricity generated by the simple touch of her hard nipples sliding on his chest pushed away rash thoughts. Not mating the delicious minx had no place in his consideration. He delayed far too long in burying his cock in her hot cunt. No amount of future problems would stop the pleasures at hand.

## *Chapter Seven*

Timber giggled and bit her bottom lip, afraid he'd get mad, except this time, he laughed as well. When his face went solemn, she found her body arching to the dip of his fingers. They passed the tickling stage and stimulated a highly sensitive part of her. She levitated up with the help of Kane's arm under her. His fervent fondling of her clit was the start, and end, of all her being.

She ached inside and out. He had to have known as he plunged two fingers into her. She cried out at the sudden intrusion and the pressure he placed in his thrusts. She'd never done so much to herself. The satisfying orgasms she had from brushing her clit had seemed enough.

Timber lifted her hips and sought the deep penetration. She forced her breasts up for the pleasure he gave by pulling her nipple. When he squeezed her nipple hard and pulled it, she thought her back would break. Everything she knew of pain vanished from all but the tip of her tormented bosom. His teeth clenched her nipple and gave it unrelenting tugs of pleasure. She bucked against his hand, fighting and twisting from the spasms.

"That's it, puss." He released her and bent to lick her clit.

His fingers were still pumping with an incessant rhythm her body seemed intent on keeping pace with.

"K—a—n—e!" she whined in a long, strained cry.

Her body tensed and his fingers came away, leaving her momentarily wanting.

“Relax, puss.” He rubbed a hand over her hip and the cheek of her ass.

“I can’t.”

The prominently distended part of him pressed her entrance.

“This can be as easy as shifting into that sexy wolf-cat I saw today.”

While his words were nice, it didn’t calm her tense muscles.

“That’s it puss.” He hummed.

His cock burrowed into her slick, primed channel. The foreign sensation, not wholly rejected by her mind, left her fraught with an unknowing agitation and apprehension.

“Just loosen up a little more.” His words kissed over her trembling lips.

Timber tried to relax. She wanted to please him.

“Ah, puss, you’re tight.” He made several short thrusts.

She focused on how wonderful it would be to have a lover. It helped shed tension from her aching muscles. As she welcomed him in her arms, into her heart, and into her body, his cock tore threw the barrier and shred the diaphanous veil of her chastity in one deep plunge.

Her caterwauling scream threatened to take the roof off the mansion. Kane held her face framed in his hands as he leaned on his elbows. Her eyes blurred and she feared nothing would prevent her from shifting into an animal. Not even Kane’s fervent strokes under her chin.

“Resist, Timber, you don’t have to be afraid.” he insisted, kissing her brow. “Don’t shift.”

Kane continued whispering a long line of other mushy sentiments not right for the kind of man he portrayed. The heartfelt words endeared him to her and she found tremendous comfort in his arms.

“You’re so beautiful, puss. I can’t help myself when you’re near me.”

She silently cried and hugged him. His voice became her serenity.

“Don’t go shifting into a wolf now.”

“I won’t.” She assured him with a kiss to his cheek.

The sting dissipated and she found it a help to move, grinding her hips to his. Instincts took over. Their sexual sensations were heightened by the aggressive frolic, leaving them breathlessly clinging to the other.

Timber’s toes curled. They raked along Kane’s hairy legs and nestled below his buttocks. He had a good solid ass she fastened her heels to for leverage. She snaked her arms under his, holding onto the fury, pounding and pleasing her aches with a fervid passion. His kisses were unlike anything she’d ever known. When he buried his cock into her, his pubic hairs tickled her mound. His fiery breath rushed into her lungs.

“Oh yes, harder,” she urged.

His cock reamed her insides sore in the most joyous way. The stimulation of his large balls slapping her ass had its own amount of rousing effects.

“That’s it, my sweet puss,” Kane groaned.

Her intuitive movements, her inbred artistry in capturing his hips in her slender fingers, led him further into the carnal escapade.

The bed moved, the room shook, the earth vibrated. He propelled his cock into the abyss of wanton delights. He reveled in the honor and fortuity of her chaste vessel. She squirmed and shuddered beneath him. He felt close to knowing everything about her as if they were one.

Their sweat-slick bodies, clung and slapped, slipped and stuck. Quietly sublime, Kane swiftly lapped up her mewls with kisses and licks to her damp cheeks.

“Kane, oh Kane,” she gasped as he filled her with each plunge.

Sparks like a firework display of colors burst in sudden rainbows behind his closed eyes. The orgasm fueled his shudders and locked up his muscles.

"It's too big," she complained as the head of his cock expanded and flared.

"You must...damn!" He groaned and pulled back slightly. "You must be coming into heat."

"I didn't...I didn't know...I didn't," she stammered. "What does it mean?"

His howl, deafening to them both, rushed from his lungs. It repeated and his neck muscles strained with his upturned chin. He'd thought she was loud, together they would surely send everyone in the house up to his room.

Timber's legs clamped his hips and she thrashed violently. He pounded into her repeatedly to release the way she caught him in the vise of her vaginal muscles. He collapsed on her with enough weight to pin her down.

Her hand shook when she still put it to his face. He jerked and the head of his cock pressed the walls of her womb. He filled every part of her, stretching her insides. Another short burst of liquid heat soaked his cock, and she twisted frantically. It pained him nearly as much as it hurt her.

"Hold still" he demanded.

"It hurts." She started to cry. "Please stop."

He groaned as another series of her spasms pulsed on his cock's shaft, pumping the veins, making his erection extend further into her. Her insides became a manacle on his shaft, tightening and working like a tourniquet, stopping the flow of blood.

"It'll be all right." He brushed a hand over her head. "Look at me."

"It hurts," she whimpered.

"It won't if you relax and let your contractions ease off, it'll be better."

"How would you know?"

He didn't. It was a guess, instinct, something his mother most certainly never told him. For the first time in his life, he was actually breeding a werewolf. It was different from what he knew firsthand. A girl not in heat didn't make his cock swell as if it were a balloon. A condom controlled the flow and cut off the blood. It made him understand why he never felt as if he was coming apart.

"Come on, puss, don't cry." He nuzzled her face, brushing kisses over her wet cheeks.

"You don't know what it feels like inside me. You're going to tear me apart."

"That very well...oh God!" Another surge of sperm shot out and she jerked on his cock. "Damn, half-breed. Hold still."

"I can't," she sobbed, bucking to get rid him.

If it were up to him, he would have been gentler during her first time having sex. Since she was in heat, he wanted to do nothing to hurt her or endanger himself. Only the more she bucked, the more he wanted to ram himself into her beyond what he could reach.

His whole body tensed, trying to hold back. He thrust in short, solid strokes, drawing her hips up and forcing her back down against the mattress. Repeatedly, he pressed her back with the surge of his weight crashing like a stormy wave into her shores.

Timber's stuttered whines gained strength like a musical staccato laced by his climax. Her orgasm came fierce. She shook with the tremors and he gathered her against him as she panted, bursts of hot air wheezing in and out with a dying sound. Without warning, she cried with a euphorically profound tone he lapped up.

He couldn't see her eyes, but her skin palpitated.

"No shifting, it'll get easier, I promise, puss." He brushed his kisses over her head. "Shush now, don't cry, my sweet puss."

The earthquake between them ended and he rolled to his side bringing her with him. She had captured something close to his heart and he willed all his strength into her.

"It'll take awhile for our coupling to complete," he explained tenderly. "The more you fight it, the more I'll swell to keep locked inside you."

"I won't fight, so please make it stop."

"Ah, my wonderfully sweet puss, you definitely are brand new at this." He held her face. "It'll be all right. I'll be right here through this with you. I'll tell you something you may or may not believe, but this is the first time I've been stuck."

"Really?"

He caressed her face and petted the length of her neck. "Yeah, really, I've been a careful man up until you."

Kane felt the entrapment of his cock close in on his freedom. His erection began a slow process of softening. While he considered twisting her face up to kiss her back into another round of sexual exploration, he decided to wait until he could withdraw.

Timber looked at Kane's watery eyes and felt the compliment in his statement.

He pulled her face to his and pressed his forehead against hers.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

She sniffed, realizing the severe pain had vanished. Kane's concern quieted her as nothing else could and she snuggled against him.

"It's not so bad, I guess."

"I didn't mean for this to happen, puss, and I'd never, ever hurt you."



"That's not what you tried to make me believe when we met a couple hours ago." Kissing under his chin, she folded her hand behind his neck. His hair hung damp on his nape.

"I never said or did anything to physically hurt you."

It didn't take away the fact that some of his comments were cruel.

"Timber?" His head cocked and he gave her a look of regret.

"Let's forget about it. I don't want to talk about anything bad." She wiggled against him.

"Hold back, puss, we wouldn't want to start my cock up again without thinking this through."

"You don't...you didn't like..." Her eyes watered.

"Don't go crying, puss. Tears won't have any affect on me even though you were perfect. I'd just like to make sure I can get out before you arrange to trap me inside you."

He smiled and she nodded.

"Kane, there's something very unique about you."

"How so?"

"I don't think I should say."

"Oh, now I'm thinking unique isn't all that great."

"I've met men, but none that...that are as considerate as you."

"Hmmm, I don't know that I'm exactly considerate, puss."

She felt his face heat beneath her palm. His embarrassment amused her, but also drew her closer to knowing him.

"I have so many questions about who I am. Will you answer them for me?"

"I'm not sure I have answers, but go ahead."

"Tell me about you."

"Me? I thought you wanted to know stuff about you."

“Later. I’m lying naked for the first time with a man I’ve just met and his cock is stuck inside me. Don’t you think I might be interested in something besides myself at this very minute?” She laid her head on his chest. “I think whatever you tell me about you might help me know more about me. Why I’m like this? Why I feel as if...never mind why, please tell me something.”

The muscles in Kane's arms tensed. She didn't want to scare him with sappy love talk. She already had one snippet about his personality—a macho male who acted as if he did everything for his own gratification.

“You think knowing me will fill in all those gaps?” He chuckled.

She laughed as well.

“Damn, half-breed, you want to break my cock.”

He surprised her with an immediate hug.

“I don’t like when you call me that.”

“I know.” His hand drifted down her back.

“But you won’t stop calling me it, will you?”

“Probably not, but don’t take it to heart. I’m not an easy man to get along with.” He kissed her nose. “You want to leave Wolverton now?”

She shook her head.

“You will.”

“You still haven’t told me about you.”

“There’s nothing special in that department. I manage the Wolverton estate, nothing else.” He caressed the side of her face.

“You’re a lawyer. I barely got out of high school. Too much moving around, I suppose.” She traced the dark brows over his eyes and smiled. “I was attending some night courses at a college to get my degree in teaching while I worked.”

“That’s interesting.”

“Not really, not as fascinating as what we’re doing right now.” She lowered her lashes. “I like this.”

“Oh?” The back of his hand smoothed over the heat of her flushed skin.

“I don’t mean the painful part. I meant this exact moment, where you’re quietly pensive and gentle. I can look at you and not see any of your meanness.”

She closed her eyes when he pressed his mouth on hers. His tongue snaked over and between her lips. He sucked on her breath and pulled her kiss into a pucker.

“Is everything feeling better?” He rubbed his hand up and down her back.

“It doesn’t hurt at all,” she lied.

He smiled knowingly.

She nuzzled her face to his unshaven cheek. She wiped his wet, dark locks back from his forehead. “This is...wonderful.” She snuggled to his damp body. “This is more than I could have ever imagined sex being like.”

“We better get downstairs or Heather will be back and, this time, bursting in here.” Kane let go and got up quickly.

Timber sighed heavily.

“What’s wrong?” He zipped his pants and glanced over at her.

A warm tingling swept over her skin. Did he think her provocative pose on the bed too trashy? Could he see the heated blush to her glistening naked flesh? She rolled to her side and waited for him to want her enough to come back to the bed.

## *Chapter Eight*

Kane couldn't avoid looking at the trim she-devil teasing him with her long legs. He wiped a hand over his mouth, thinking about licking through the strip of dark ringlets and eating the nectar of their sex. He rubbed a hand to smooth over the front of his pants and still his nerves.

He picked up Timber's clothes and tossed them on the bed. "Get dressed, will you?"

"You killed for Heather."

"Yes, but it was an accident." The fact slipped out.

"You said she was yours. How? Where does it put me in your life?"

She slid to the edge of the bed. Her glossy, wet cunt showing until she got down on her knees on the floor to retrieve her shorts. Her backside turned his hesitant erection into a steel rod.

"You're not in my life, puss, just my bed."

He wrinkled his forehead and thought about her baffling statement. Timber fogged up the process of clear reasoning. When he finally realized she didn't know Heather was his sister, he laughed with a shake of his head. He rather liked her jealousy. It made their time together special, and while he couldn't play the game, he did tease her with it.

"Heather is the dearest thing in my life and you'll do well to remember that."

He glanced over his shoulder and the seductive minx had gotten up from the floor. She bent over to put her shorts on without the panties

and her firm, rounded ass was up in the air for a moment. She sunk down to sit on the floor to get her shoes. She put one shoe on and tied it, but the other had a knot she couldn't get loose. She tugged and picked at it with frustration.

"Here, let me." He squatted down and took the shoe.

The scent of her sex haloed her. The knot held and his hand shook from the spells and charms the temptress possessed. With a knee to the floor, he leaned and caught her mouth up in his. He had a penchant to taste her lips, feel her breath, and listen to her sigh. Her proclivity to purr when content led him on the wicked chase.

Her fingers pet his cheek. Her reserve forced him to kiss her desperately in search of the sweet trill from her lungs. It began a low hum and he pulled back before the purr escalated.

"You can't fight it so hard," he said.

"I wasn't fighting it at all."

"I meant the shoe." He unknotted it in seconds with a determination to get out of the room as soon as possible.

"I know."

His head came up and her captivating smile teased him to the very core.

"Puss, you're flirting with danger."

She batted her thick dark lashes at him. "I know."

They both laughed as he slipped her shoe on her foot and tied the laces. He remembered doing the same for Heather once, when she was very little. He never imagined he'd find anyone he'd relate fondness with. He stood and brought her with him.

"Thank you." She smiled and turned to look in the mirror.

After a quick whip of the comb over his head, he reached to put it back on the nightstand. Instead, he turned and handed it to Timber.

“Hurry up.” He opened the door and looked both ways in the corridor for an attack of family.

Generally no one said two words to him about what he was up to and he hoped today would be no different. Heather could be bothersome and his aunt would not hold her tongue if Heather got on the bandwagon.

Timber combed over her hair and placed his comb in its usual spot on the dresser. He motioned with his hand for her to hurry up, and a second later, he had her cool slender fingers in his palm.

“Your mother, should I call her aunt?”

“Absolutely not!” Kane tugged her close and kissed her to smooth over his abrupt tone. “First, she’s not as appreciative as I am to having a half-breed join us for dinner. Second, she...”

“Don’t Willie and Buckeye eat with the family?”

“No, they don’t and you wouldn’t either if you were...well, just come on and we’ll discuss it later.”

“I wouldn’t if what? If I were handicapped like them?” A frown wrinkled her face. “I think that’s mean and I’d prefer to join them instead of...”

“They hunt their meals in the woods because that’s what instinct tells them. You want to go running off and kill a rat, a mole or...or a cat like they do? Then be my guest.”

She said no more and he led her downstairs where everyone already waited in the dining room. The glare of the very unsettling blue-eyed family gave even him a shiver.

There were two empty chairs at the table, high-backed, tufted seats not remotely together. Kane yanked out the closest one and motioned for her to sit. Then moving to the chair next to hers, he growled low, with a succinct purpose. Colby evacuated the place and Kane slid onto the warmed wood.

He heard Timber's nervous snicker. He didn't know what possessed him to trail her like some love-starved wolf-pup, but there he sat, hoping his presence would keep her from shifting when his family began their abusive, verbal interrogation.

She leaned slightly, closing the space between them. He put his hand on the table and opened it, palm up. Hers slipped comfortably into his.

"You're late," his mother said.

"Obviously not late enough to miss dinner." He squeezed Timber's hand and let go.

She put her hand down in her lap as he snapped a napkin off the table and placed it in his lap.

"Oh, by the way, this is Timber." He reached for the glass of water near his plate. "Timber, this is my mother, Victoria Wolverton."

"So they come home to roost. Of my father's little projects, so far you look normal enough," his mother said to Timber.

"I change into..."

"Please..." His mother held her hand up. "I do not wish to know details of your normalcy or oddity. We're to have our dinner and I'd just as soon not have an upset stomach. Besides, your feline heat is enough to make us all sick."

Kane clenched his jaw when he heard Timber suck in a sharp breath. He also took a discreet inhale, because he had yet to detect a scent of her in heat.

"So Kane, do tell us what has made you late to a meal. We don't like to be kept waiting and you rarely are last to the table," his mother said.

"It's my fault, Mrs....Mrs. Wolverton." Timber replied.

"Oh, how is that?" His mother's gaze shifted between him and Timber.

Kane looked to Timber as well with surprise and pride. She willing set herself up to take the blame. Something was highly wrong, or maybe highly right, as he smiled with a satisfaction he'd not experienced before. When had any woman wanted to throw herself in the fire-pit of his mother's wrath to protect him?

"I was in the middle of something important." He spoke before Timber could. "She was," he grinned, "helping me. You needn't have waited on us."

He carved a slice of meat off the bloody roast beef and dropped it on his plate. He cut another and tossed it to Timber's plate.

"Thank you," she murmured.

He gave a grunt and looked about the table, feeling everyone's eyes on him.

"What?" He held his knife and fork ready to cut his meat. "So I served her some food. It's not like I totally lack in manners. Geez, you'd think I'm fawning all over her because she's beautiful."

His mouth pinched at the garrulous way he blurted out his thoughts. He chopped at the meat on his plate and poked it in his mouth.

"When you're though *not* confessing to something, we have some news. We've had another," his mother said it simply, as if it would explain her irritation.

Kane's head snapped up and he looked around the table. "Did you turn him away or feed him to Willie?"

Timber's intake of breath turned his attention her way again.

"What? You still think every creature is civilized?" He reached over and picked up her hand from her lap. "Have no worries, nothing can happen to you as long as you're mine."

Kane's mouth cocked with a grin as he looked at her incensed expression. She was different, exciting, and wildly unlike anybody he had



mated before. Her fingers pinched his thigh with a warning she'd not be made his prize. Their odd play at stimulation heightened his desires. He seized the fingers before they could pull away and he rubbed them over his trapped erection to incite her more. The meat he stuffed in his mouth masked the moan of pleasure he got from her heated hand.

"It's a her and she's very pretty," Heather announced, all bubbly with excitement.

"Where's this new family member and what's her affliction?" He cut another piece of meat and chewed it quickly.

"She's gone to her room," Heather whispered. "She's not very cooperative."

"Seems you two should get along." Kane looked to Timber. "With that disobedient streak you share, you two could form an alliance."

She started to rise up from her chair and he saw by the way her eyes danced, he had pushed too far. The insulting tone hadn't been meant to anger her as much as irritate the rest of the family.

"Sit," he growled.

She gave him an angry glare.

"Please," he added under his breath, hoping to smooth over his ill-chosen words.

Timber wouldn't have obeyed, except he shocked her. How was she supposed to get angry now? The word *please* had to have been as foreign to him as the words *thank you*. She settled into her seat and began to eat, letting his remark slide.

"Where did you live, Timber?" Heather broke the tense silence. "I would love to travel and see the world."

"I was raised in a number of places."

“Oh, how very exciting, your parents moved around a lot then? How adventurous.”

“She didn’t have parents, Heather.” Kane pushed food about his plate, but never actually put anymore in his mouth.

“I lived with foster parents when I wasn’t in a group home or an orphanage,” Timber replied.

“But that’s for people who have no family. Why didn’t you come here where you belong?” Heather continued to poke around with a pitchfork at Timber’s life.

“She nor any of the others belong here,” Kane commented callously.

The chair almost tipped over with Timber’s sudden rise. It was all she could do to control her anger until she saw his smirk—his satisfaction at riling her with his inane stabs at her existence.

“Please finish your meal, Timber.” Morley spoke up for the first time. “We tend to ignore him when he gets like this. If it were Kane’s choice, he’d live here with only a pack of unrelated females to mate at his leisure.”

“Let her go.” Kane waved her away. “If we’re lucky, she’ll run right back down the drive and never be heard of again.”

“Like Neal?” Heather’s brow lifted.

Kane glared at Heather.

Timber wanted to ask who Neal was, but didn’t want to tug Kane’s attention back in her direction. Although, it wasn’t hard to guess, Neal was the half-breed Kane referred to when he said he killed someone. Instead of listening to anymore of the family’s interrogation and their ridicule of her existence, she took leave of the group.

“Excuse me,” she mumbled quietly, and made her way out of the room.

The girl prancing down the stairs stopped her and she waited. Timber's first instincts were to claw the girl's eyes out because they were too pretty and too blue. Kane would find her more desirable and it hurt knowing that.

"Hello, I'm Laurie." The girl bounced toward her. "You must be Timber. I was told I wasn't the first to arrive. Isn't this about the most exciting thing to happen to us? Poor little orphans growing up without a home or family, and suddenly, kaboom, the world spins in reverse and we're here where it all started."

Timber nodded her head in mild agreement.

"This house is scrumptious, don't you think?" Laurie picked up a glass dish. "I bet we're worth millions, no, billions by the looks of it."

*Scrumptious*, Timber thought. Kane's use of the word for describing her was special. Laurie's use suddenly turned it into just another word.

Laurie set the dish down and put a hand on Timber's shoulder. "If you ask me, I think they should pony up a caboodle of cash as back pay or something since we weren't here to reap the rewards of growing up privileged."

"Excuse me?" Kane leaned in the doorway.

Timber didn't turn around. She already knew his expression and his thoughts on the matter. He believed they had no rights to the family's fortune. A long time ago, they were tossed out like day-old trash, and no one expected them back.

"Laurie, this is Kane Wolverton." She turned, her gaze following Laurie's move toward Kane. "He doesn't believe either of us should even be here. We're second-class citizens instead of family to him."

"Well I hope the relationship isn't too close, handsome." Laurie ran a hand around Kane's chest, his arms, and his back.

She tried for lower as she examined him from all sides, and Timber clenched her jaw, holding back her jealousy.

Kane grinned and picked up Laurie's hand that was slithering down his abdomen. Timber moved further away. She didn't want to listen to the banter of sexual innuendo that would soon take place between them. She walked away and took a place, ironically on a loveseat, to the far side of the room. It didn't take the beast long to guide Laurie beyond her line of sight and Timber tried not to think what he was going to do. The man had an insatiable appetite for sex and she learned too quickly one woman would never satisfy him.

As all her choices as of late, the loveseat became the wrong place to be when Colby and the others ventured in to have drab conversations. He sat next to her and she found herself wedged between his girth and the arm of the piece of furniture.

He talked, she listened. Not really, but she thought she did a fair job of pretending and hoped he didn't ask for input from her. Colby went on about his prowess with women, his suave business dealings, but mostly how all his weight was muscle. She wanted to burst his balloon, only she needed every ally in the house and it left her to sit mute.

"It's time." Heather popped into the living room. "Everyone needs to come to the study to hear Grandfather's will."

Timber did not let the numbness in her feet slow her escape from the pitifully boring Colby. She'd rather have another row with Willie than suffer anymore of the man's infernal ramblings about his position in the family. None of which made sense, probably because she only half-listened. The other half of her thoughts wondered where Kane had snuck off to. Her immediate guess was not one in which she wanted to admit possible, yet she had no hold on an obvious and self-proclaimed womanizer.

Heather rushed off, and Timber en route, came to a complete halt along the side of the kitchen stairwell. The masculine voice was unmistakable. Kane's utterance of *half-breed* made her slowly move to look up as the tinkle of girlish laughter filtered down.

He had his hand on the banister and one up to Laurie's hair. The honey blonde made a stark contrast on his bronze fingers. Timber found a hate for his betrayal.

"You're funny." The girl giggled some more.

"Later, I want you to come to my room and shift for me," Kane told her.

Timber's jaw tightened. Her teeth ground together to hold back the low growl rumbling up her throat.

"There you are," Heather announced her presence too loudly, and it startled her.

Timber backed up so Kane might not see she'd been eavesdropping. The table behind her ruined her hasty plan. A small display of figurines came in contact with her leg, and the porcelain people danced and teetered on the verge of falling.

Her hand caught several and Heather grabbed the others. Timber's gaze drifted up and she watched Kane come down with Laurie.

"It's just like my brother to feel a need to personally welcome all the girls," Heather whispered.

The accusation upon Kane's character gave Timber a sudden influx of information. The relief Heather was Kane's sister mildly comforted. When he left the blonde, she let a small measure of satisfaction creep into her mind. He jogged down the staircase to her and offered his arm.

"So, you get acquainted better with Colby?" he snickered.

"I heard you call her a half-breed, just as you do with me." She turned her face away from his hot breath on her skin.

“No, I didn’t.”

“You did, too. I’m not deaf.”

He sniffed along her jaw and pressed her beneath the space under the stairs.

“She is one, but that’s not what we were talking about.”

“No, I suppose not, since you want her to come to your room.” She gulped, unable to push him away.

“Don’t get all sentimental, puss. I don’t like to be nagged or controlled, and most certainly not staked a claim to, however, I’m flattered you’re jealous.”

“I’m not jealous.”

“I think you are, because you’re thinking it would limit my time with you if I should choose to spend time with...with...”

“You don’t even know her name?” Her voice whined indignantly as if he insulted her personally.

“My, my, my...the rage you have mustered because I hesitated on recalling another woman’s name.” He slurped up her earlobe and tugged it between his teeth. “Your annoyances intrigue me. First Buckeye, then Willie, and now you’re upset over Laurie.”

“See, you do know her name.”

“You make me hot, puss.”

Timber whimpered when he traveled to the pulse in her neck. He sucked at the carotid artery hard enough to turn her thoughts into dizzy mush. She felt faint. Even the pulse of his growing need pressing her belly created a burning ache in her ravenous body. Her hands pushed again at his hard shoulders in defiance of her cravings.

The flush of heat boiled in her veins. She wanted to be his, but not once did she agree to be his as a possession. Did Kane believe she’d naturally be part of some pack he formed?

"I'll not be used by you."

"Yes, you will." He held tighter.

"No...no, I'll not be one of your...your bitches," she stammered. "I told you before I'd not become a trifle for your sometimes amusement."

"Oh sweet, sweet puss." He kissed her cheek. "You're much more important to me than you can imagine. I even told Laurie the same when she wanted to mate with me."

He tickled her brow with the tip of his tongue.

"No, you didn't. You'd never pass up such a covetous proposal. I could tell right off you thrive on women that bow down to you," she protested weakly.

Kane laughed. "I told her one half-breed at a time was enough for any man to mate. She'd have to wait her turn or seek another."

His words whispered over her collarbone and penetrated her heart like an arrow. She kissed him back when his lips met with hers. It was a hungry kiss. Her body wanted him and she tried to retell herself it had something to do with coming into the so-called heat everyone mentioned. She imagined it was like a dog by the way Kane's aggressiveness and Colby's dubious lurking about when his cousin wasn't near.

"Kane? Timber?" Heather called.

"Damn!" Kane pressed a hand to the wall. "Come on, we've got to go listen to that damnable will."

"I want a shower and change my clothes first. You go listen to the will." She pushed him away and trotted up the stairs.

"My mother will be furious," he said, tagging along behind.

"I don't care. It was a long trip and I'm all icky from you slobbering on me."

She looked at all the doors in the hall. Far too many for her to remember exactly which one he said was her room.

Kane opened a door. "I'll get your bag."

She looked into his room.

"Bathroom's over there." He pointed and left her.

Timber went straight for the door and peeked around the side. Kane's bathroom was large and amazingly neat. She touched his razor and thought of his lie about shaving. He was definitely different than other men. Then, he wasn't strictly a man. Just like her, he had a real beast inside and he was much better at controlling that side of himself. Actually, he was good at managing a lot of things.

"You're not undressed yet." Kane joined her in the room.

"I was wondering if you were going to shave...again." She giggled at the creep of his fingers under her shirt.

"No, because I think you rather like my whiskers on your velvet skin." He tugged at her shirt. "Now what do you say we get undressed quickly before the troops are sent for us?"

"I take it you're going to shower as well?" Her hands slid up his chest and worked over buttons before pushing the cloth from his shoulders.

"Eventually." He kissed her.

Together they let time slip from them while taking pleasure in caressing each other's body with fingers and lips.

When he knelt down before her, she held her breath.



## Chapter Nine

Kane went straight for the heart of her sex. His canines extended and his growl echoed in her body.

He tongued her clit until the hooded bud clung to his kisses.

“Oh please, please no more,” she wheezed in small catches.

His breath, hot with the taste of her, blew a cooling breeze over her inflamed flesh. The swollen tissue of her labia, dying for relief, drew his tongue out in a long sweep over the scorched redness.

She tried to push him away.

“Not yet, puss.” He rubbed his coarse, stubbly chin over the tender glow.

Her gasp was fevered with a loud *oh*. He wanted to watch her face contort in ecstasy. Her head dropped back, exposing the underside of her chin. The minx flexed, rubbing her swelling clit against his unshaven skin.

She gripped his arms tighter as he steadied her stance with his hands on her hips. She didn’t require his guidance or support. Fueled by a fiery fortitude, she fucked his chin. She rubbed her sweet pussy on his face and he ate it up with the greatest relish. Upon her climax, he found the puss had a streak of greed. She grabbed his hair and pulled him forward. His lips smashed to the lips of her cunt.

“Suck me,” she cried, forcing her way into his mouth.

“Mmmm...” He swirled his tongue into the sizzling restlessness of her orgasm.

“Don’t...oh God, don’t stop,” she pleaded.

He licked at the succulent center snapping like a Venus flytrap. The muscles closed over his tongue, catching it in the spasms. He drank every wet shudder until she puffed from exhaustion. Kissing his way around her hip, up her ribs, and under her breast, he reveled in the quiver of her skin and the quake of her body.

He stood and her fingers wrapped his stiff erection. It throbbed in the heart of her palm, it pulsed to her squeezing tease, and it responded hungrily.

“I want to feel you in me.” She moved closer and rubbed her pussy with his cock.

“In you, yes.” His voice made a strained sound. “But not how you think. We haven’t time to lie around with me trapped in you.”

She looked down at his fleshy cock with the fat blood vessel ridged right down to the mushroomed head. Her appreciative gaze almost made him come in her examining fingers.

“I want to come in your mouth,” he informed her.

Timber’s lips involuntarily pinched together. He understood her newness to these things. It also assured him of a mighty fantastic orgasm since her innocence really turned him on. His only worry lay in the absence of her voice. Would she refuse him?

When her knees bent and she lowered, he reached behind, flipping the toilet seat closed for her to sit.

“We don’t have all day,” he said irritably, finding a need to rush into her hot lips before he exploded over the front of her.

“Then maybe we should wait until later.”

He pressed his cock to her lips. “Open up, sweet puss.”

She opened and took the head of his cock in her mouth. At first she sucked on him like she savored a big lollipop. He groaned at the sensation of his racing blood, coursing full speed through narrow vessels. He gave her time to adjust to the experience and pumped slow and shallow into her mouth. The girth of his shaft wedged in her stretched lips. Each thrust went further into her mouth until his cock tickled the back of her throat and she gagged slightly.

“Suck it harder,” he instructed. “Yes, now lick it.”

He raked her hair into a cluster at the back of her head.

“That’s it, harder, puss.”

Her cheeks sucked in and he watched himself fucking her gorgeous face. He gave her room to come free and she flicked her tongue over the tip. It brought up the rush of heat lurking in his groin. It’d been several months since he last spilled himself into a woman’s mouth. Once inside her, he pumped faster, pushed deeper. He thought he could hold out for a slow decadence, except she forced the stimulation to come to a head. He jammed his cock into her throat. Her gag reflex constricted so he neared climax. With each thrust, her muscles contracted as she swallowed him deeper. This was indeed something no human girl could do. His balls slapped her chin and he continued to pump faster. Her choking sputter drew him to her teeth and she gulped as he shot into the engulfment.

“Oh God, yes,” he shouted. “Oh yes!” His body tensed while she milked the vein of the fluid ejaculating out of his hot cock and rasping beneath her canines.

In short, quick gulps, she took the spurting hot juice. Her fingernails dug into the cheeks of his ass to keep him from jerking. It didn’t work. He had to feel her throat muscles clenching on his cock head. It wasn’t

the same as when he drove his cock inside her cunt. This vise squeezed until he was dry.

He pulled free from the popping suction of her mouth on his loose skin. With a thumb, he massaged his creamy fluids into her lips. His cock, hardly soft, jolted into a readying stage of revival.

"I want more." He reached down and pushed his fingers into the wet ringlets. He'd be slower since his hot lust was out of the way. It wouldn't make it any less dangerous. The moment her purr started, it would trap him. The second he pushed into the creamy depths, he'd not have the will to pull out in time. He fingered her pleats of skin and teased her clit.

"I want you, puss. Unexplainable as it is to me, I want to feel myself locked inside you again." He held her head. "Do you understand me? I want to fuck your deliciously tight body and drink your rich juices. I want to enjoy the purring of your contentment and to hear the caterwauling shriek you let loose when I've made you climax. But after the will is read, take what you're offered and get far from this place. Nothing good ever happens here."

Timber didn't answer him. She didn't want to leave. He let go and turned on the shower. As he set the water temperature, she finished undressing and looked over Kane's nakedness. His firm buttocks were rounded and hard with muscle. She licked her lips, craving him like some rich dessert. He turned and she took the hand he held out to her. Everything in her mind was set. She'd stay and he couldn't ever make her go. She belonged in Wolverton and she belonged with him.

Timber kissed him. His arms were like ivy and twined around her. He hugged her to him and she liked the calm embrace and the outpouring of affection. If he wanted to carry her to the bed and screw her brains out, she'd welcome the plan.

“Why was I sent away?” She rubbed the soap over a white washcloth and scrubbed his chest.

“I suppose so you wouldn’t be corrupted by the full-bloods. You’re closer to normal than Willie and Buckeye. Hezekiah must have thought you could manage on your own.”

She hung her head and washed the rest of his front, teary-eyed. Since arriving in Wolverton, she had more reason to cry than ever. It was one thing to live with wishes and dreams. She learned to deal with what she didn’t have. To stand in the midst of her birthplace, where people knew she existed and did nothing, made her vulnerable. Animals, humans, even insects had a pecking order and a place on the food chain.

“I think you’re better for it, Timber.” He lifted her face.

Water splashed off his shoulders and she blinked at the droplets hitting her, hoping he couldn’t see her tears.

“If you grew up here, as my cousin, I wouldn’t have wanted you so much.” He bent and kissed her. “I know you feel the abandonment, but it really was for your own good.”

She relished the place in his arms. Calm, tranquil, and everything she liked. Her breasts pressed to his ribs and she put her head on his heartbeat while the water continued its drizzling splash over them.

“Your turn.” He grinned with a devilish smile.

He took the soap and cloth from her hand.

“I don’t think so.” She snatched it back. “You get too carried away and I’m worn out.”

“Give me that.”

She let him have the items. A man bathing her entire body seemed laced entirely by fantasy. His wonderfully strong hands rubbed her gently. And he didn’t get fresh, except once when he bit the cheek of her ass.

Afterwards, everything seemed different. They dried each other and went through the motions of grooming. He got out a blow-dryer and even helped get her hair dry. She squirted lotion in her hand and Kane took pleasure in helping her spread the vanilla-scented cream over her body. She raised her brow when he took exceptionally long in going over her breasts.

“I don’t usually do that part.”

“That’s why I’m doing it for you.”

The corners of his mouth turned up and she loved the dimples in his cheeks. They dented deep into the shadow of his unshaven face. He picked up his electric razor and slid it around his jaw.

Sorry to see the bristles gone, she brushed the back of her knuckles over his smooth, clean skin. She didn’t want to think about sex anymore.

She wanted love.

She wanted his love.

“Kane, I didn’t do so well on my own.” Her confession blurted out of nowhere.

“Yes, you did. It may not seem as if you did and I don’t pretend to know anything about your life, but we all had the same demands growing up. Humans can’t know of our existence because we’re a minority. It made it hard on...”

“On you?” she looked at him perplexed beyond reason. “You’re not going to tell me how you grew up in this fine house and had rough times. You don’t know the neglect I suffered or the abuse I endured.”

“Don’t you see, Timber? You did endure it and you rose above it to become the woman you are? Tell me how you think another from this house would fare tossed into the world alone today? Even Heather would not know how to deal with people unlike her.” His expression grew serious. “To coin a phrase, and a very bad one considering who we are,

Heather would be eaten by the wolves. She wouldn't last a minute outside of this town. You are much stronger in personality and self-preservation because you've learned how to live amongst humans."

She let a small laugh out and hugged him.

"What's this? First I get a chewing out and then gratitude?"

"You are a very complex man for the most part. Complicated to the core, I suspect. However, Kane Wolverton, you are a very intelligent and astute observer. I'm quite happy to have come here if for nothing more than to have met you."

"And here I thought you came for the money and the sex."

She didn't hold him longer. Some underlying agitation slowly crept between them and she stepped back. They dressed without further conversation. Kane seemed depressingly disturbed and she didn't want to start any argument with him now before they went down to the room full of family. The Wolvertons were enough of a problem to deal with, and letting go of Kane and his foibles seemed a sensible plan.

She shivered and rubbed her arms as they descended the stairs. Something was about to occur that would forever change her life. She sensed its coming before it took place. An advance premonition shook her and she lagged behind Kane. Something terrible would happen and there was no way to prevent the inevitability of the events.

On their way down to the study to hear the will of Hezekiah Wolverton, she grabbed his sleeve. "Kane, wait."

"What?" He looked oddly at her and then her neck.

"Do you sense something strange about today?"

"No." He tugged the collar of her dress closer to her jaw.

Her hand went up to touch the soreness she hadn't noticed until now. She pushed his fingers away, absently disturbed he would not focus on what she asked.

"I marked you," he grumbled, and turned her collar back down. "If you don't like it, too bad."

"I don't mind if you want people to know about us. Though, I'm guessing we made them quite aware. We were hardly quiet."

He stopped her and turned the white collar back up. He swept a hand around the hank of hair lying on her back and he placed it on her shoulder.

"You're not going to hide it like that." She flipped her hair back. "If you don't want anybody to see it, then too bad, you shouldn't have done it."

He put a hand to her back and started walking again.

"What were you asking me?"

"About sensing things yet to have happened. It's a feeling I get inside every time something affects me and I was wondering if you ever feel like that. It's usually never good and it comes regardless of whether I want it to or not?"

"You're telling me you're psychic?" Kane put his arm around her waist and guided her around the corner.

"No, not psychic. I don't know what is going to happen. I don't have visions or anything concrete to base my feelings on, it's just...oh, never mind."

He wouldn't understand. While she thought maybe it was a hereditary trait of werewolves, she really didn't believe the wild stretch.

"Intuition?" He tried to label what she described, and if she couldn't, no one could.

"Just forget it. I try to most times." She took a step and Kane pulled her back.

Her eyes widened in surprise at the forcefulness of his hold.

"What are you doing?"



Kane kissed her gently. His lips moved over hers and nothing could have been more comforting. He took her breath away with his tenderness and it became the best moment of their relationship. Each heartfelt deed he performed came with some zest of adoration.

“I needed to kiss you.” He did so again.

“You do it so well,” she said when their mouths broke free. “Practice, I would imagine.”

“You,” he whispered against her lips. “You are my inspiration.”

Her knees went weak.

At times, Kane could make her think the worst of possible outcomes for them. She worried the luster of his attraction would wear thin. Or the brilliance of their lust would diminish over the coming days when it ran its course. And then he showed her his tender side and her heart lurched with hope.

“They’re waiting for us.” He turned from her.

Timber forgave his immediate end to their kiss. More and more she grew to understand him. She took a couple of hurried steps and looped her arm around his. In the simple gesture of his biceps squeezing against her hand, she had her assurance he had no intention of shunning her any time soon.

In the study, the clan of Wolvertons, like vultures to a party of road kill, sat pensive and alert. Eyes turned on her and she lifted her chin.

Their cold glare hung for a minute in her direction and then they looked past her. Kane turned around to look and she followed the path of everyone’s gaze.

A young woman waltzed into the room and stood confidently in the doorway.

“Who is she?” Timber asked Kane.

“I don’t know.” He let go of her and trotted off after the wolf bitch’s short hem.

Timber waited several feet behind him and listened to Morley make introductions to Kailey Wolverton.

The presence of a new threat put a strain on her nerves. Her other rival, Laurie, compounded the aggravation by salivating over Kane with little regard to anyone in the room. Unabashedly, she licked her lips and made kissing noises at him.

Angry, warm blood spread from Timber’s center and radiated through her limbs. Hate fueled her instinct to shift, but she fought the fluctuations in her body's temperature.

## *Chapter Ten*

Kane had moved freely through the past five years of his life. He never gave a thought about loving a woman. With Timber he reflected on nothing else. He coveted the need of it, as well as the benefits. Yet, how could he even consider a half-breed for anything other than primal copulation? What grotesque, abnormalities would their children suffer? He cringed with the ache in his chest, believing in the end, something bad would happen.

The palpitations to Timber's skin, the color change to her eyes, Kane saw her transformation coming at the same time as his aunt.

"Control her now," Minerva growled, loud enough for everyone to look.

Kane went to Timber immediately. "Are you trying to create a war in our home?" he snarled under his breath, leaning forward, gripping her hand in his.

He wrapped his fingers around her slender throat and his thumb pressed her jugular. He swept it up and down to quell her jealous confusion. Once she blinked with her stable, shimmering green eyes, he circled his arm around her shoulders.

"I don't know what came over me," she apologized.

He smiled. "It's all right, puss. Hormones are playing havoc with you."

"Why?" She turned her head close to his shoulder.

"I don't know. I'm not a doctor, remember?"

"I feel so out of control, worse than usual."

He cupped her cheek and brushed a kiss alongside her head. "You're doing fine."

He felt her relax the grip she had of his shirt. Timber's wild, independent, and strong nature also came with a vulnerability that drew him to her emotionally. It forced him to entertain the idea of a serious commitment to the vivacious beauty.

Kailey approached them. He watched her stare narrow at Timber.

"Kailey, this is Timber." He tightened his grip on Timber's shoulder.

"You hold onto that half-breed bitch." Kailey cautioned. "If she turns on me, I'll tear her throat out."

Kailey spun away. Her strides took her to an unsuspecting Colby who entered the room. He'd get the next taste of the woman's sharp tongue.

Kane dropped his arm down Timber's back and surrounded her middle so his hand rested on her hip.

"Hot-blooded bitch, ain't she?" He let his gaze wander to Kailey's shapely bottom, regardless of his verbal assessment.

He could sense a lot about her. In heat, pure, she had to have been raised by another pack even though she was a member of the Wolverton clan. For what reason Hezekiah sent her away, he didn't know.

He licked his lips. All the right qualifications for a pure mating stood in the room with him. What he should have reached for stood yards away while he put his hand behind Timber to pull her close. He had something better than the standards of their breed. He had experienced emotions of warmth, affection, and innocence. Maybe a sliver of him did believe in love.

"Why did she verbally attack me like that?" Timber asked. "I wasn't exactly doing anything to her."

“She’s in heat like you and it makes her just as crazy.” He smiled and winked. “Don’t worry though, I’ll not take it personally when you want to rip out someone’s throat for looking me over.”

“You conceited son of a bitch,” she hissed. “One of these days you’re going to find your attractiveness wearing thin.”

“Will it?” He twisted her to him and licked along her jaw.

“I said one of these days,” she purred.

He nipped at her earlobe.

“Kane, please stop, everyone can see.”

“They know I’ve bred you. If they didn’t hear, then they can smell the scent. I smell it now, and I want in you. Every male in this room wants to hump you, puss, so be warned, this is one of the dangers I told you about.”

“Bred,” she gasped. “Not really? Not like a dog breeds. Tell me that’s not what you meant.”

“Unfortunately for me, yes, I’ve bred you.”

“I’ll get pregnant?”

“Not necessarily. I think it’s early in your heat, probably won’t take.”

His gaze went in hunt of Kailey.

“Oh, would you look. I’ve a run in my stockings already.” Her sugary voice crooned with sweetness loud enough to attract every Wolverton stud in the room.

Timber’s low growl did nothing to turn him back to his playful kisses on her neck. Instead of his heart beating for her, it thumped quicker for the new bitch.

Kailey’s hands slid high up her leg to smooth the fine transparent mesh over her supple limb and it extracted Kane’s breath in a long and torturous climax of steamy want of her. He couldn’t help smelling her sex, oozing like a strong perfume in the room. If Timber hadn’t come first

into the house he could well imagine sucking on Kailey's cunt until she produced the sweet drink he had a fondness for. Fucking her long and hard lodged in his list of fantasies.

When she lifted her head and slowly raised her lashes, his pulse quickened from her pretense of coy innocence. After dropping her gaze down flirtatiously and teasing him with her false shyness, he wished he could take her there in the middle of the study.

"Excuse me." Timber pried his fingers from her hands.

"Come on, puss, she's all fluff on the outside." He grabbed her hips and steered her to a grouping of furniture.

"What's that suppose to mean?"

He kissed her shoulder and propped his chin there to kiss her cheek.

"She's pretty. Her scent is a powerful aphrodisiac and it makes me want to hump the hell out of her."

"And you thought I needed to know this?" Her squeaky voice cracked.

"Want a lie, ask a liar. I'll only give you truth. I like women, the taste of them, the scent of them, and the feel of their silky skin upon mine."

"And the wolf?"

"Yeah, well, the wolf tends to have a narrow-minded course and I think you already know what part of me that is."

"So you'll do things with her?"

"No." His breath came hot into her ear. "I could. However, when I was done, she'd be too much a cold-hearted bitch like the other Wolverton women."

"I'm a Wolverton."

"I mean a full-blooded Wolverton, my sweet half-breed. I've got a full plate handling you."

She inhaled deeply as his hands skated up her belly and fastened tight under her breasts. She quickly folded her arms over her chest to avoid anybody noticing his brazen fondling.

“Besides, puss, I’ve got your scent in my blood and you’ve got mine on your breath.” He drew one hand out from under her arm and fingered her bottom lip. “When we’re done in this room, it’s you I want to dredge my cock in, not Kailey or Laurie Wolverton. Colby can have them both if he wants. What he can’t have is you.”

She turned in the circle of his arm. He stroked the pulse in her neck and watched her brilliant green eyes for a challenge to his declaration. If there were a hint of a smile, he couldn’t see it. It disarmed his wavering convictions the way she kept a straight face so well. He was of an old school where men ruled women. As leader of the pack, he had the divine right to make her his. Except he, like Timber, had lived beyond the bounds of everything werewolf in nature. He had a real liking for her and he feared his big mouth might chase her off before he could make her fully appreciate him. Timber’s presence captivated him on the street and only grew more potent in the few hours he’d known her.

“Everyone, would you please take a seat.”

Kane looked over at Hezekiah’s lawyer walking into the room with his briefcase.

“Who’s he?” Timber asked, settling into the fat, overstuffed chair.

Kane perched on one of the wide, flat arms, bent down to talk low. “Hezekiah’s lawyer.” He rubbed her hand between his and held it on his thigh.

“Is he a Wolverton?”

“No, he’s quite the typical human as a matter-of-fact...a real bloodsucker.

She laughed softly. “And that can’t be said of you, can it?”

“Oh and how do you figure I may be some lowdown skunk that leaches off people for money?”

“You did say you were the family lawyer. Aren’t you looking to inherit this place as some sort of payment for your loyalty?”

“Clever lady.” He tugged her arm and she put her other hand on his leg. “I am the legal counsel for the estate, but I earn a significant amount of my money from my personal investments. This place is more heritage than money. Though, the dollars that come with it aren’t to be frowned upon.”

“Does he know what we are?”

“Yes, but we’re careful not to flaunt our abilities in front of him or any human. That’s another reason I need you to stay in control of your naked impulse to shift helter-skelter.” He turned his head and looked in the direction of his mother. “They won’t like it one bit. I, on the other hand, can’t say a little feminine fight wouldn’t have been amusing.”

Timber wrenched her hand from his with a grunt. He liked that she had a little sass, but more, he liked the fire in her eyes she let him easily tease from her.

They were in the testing stages of their infatuation and he tested hers to all limits.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” the man spoke, gathering their attention. “I am Herbert Crass. I have not met most of you, so for those of you that haven’t been informed, I was Hezekiah’s lawyer for many years. He has videotaped his will for you to hear his plans. The control of the Wolverton estate will go into the hands of two of his ten grandchildren. The details as to how you will determine which two is also in his video.”

“Does this sound odd to you or am I the only one confused?” Timber whispered to Kane.



“Hezekiah wasn’t right in the head when it came to anything being done the conventional way. I was under the impression I would take control of Wolverton holdings since I already handled them when he was alive. I guess I was wrong to assume I meant anything to him.”

“Maybe you’ll still take over.” She pet his leg. “We’ve not heard the terms and well, maybe he wanted to make a big production of the whole thing for the family.”

“I’ll do what is needed to get this place,” he replied coldly. “It should be mine and if he thinks to use this venue to set some crazy contest or challenge, then he never knew me well at all.”

Timber watched Morley escort the lawyer from the room.

“Isn’t he staying?” She leaned toward Kane.

“I said he knew about us, but I didn’t say he wasn’t afraid of what we could do. No doubt, he feels his job is done for the time being and is hurrying off the estate.”

Morley came back to the center of the room and put the recording in the machine.

“Wolvertons!” the old man on the screen shouted. “This is your wake-up call. We are becoming extinct and it is because of my weak-blooded family. You have sat and fattened your pockets with my money. You have ventured into the world and back without little concern there are few like you. In essence, you have almost succeeded in exterminating the Wolverton clan of werewolves.”

Timber felt ashamed and she didn’t know why. She had no part of their past.

“So, you all want my money? Well then, you’ll have to prove worthy.” Hezekiah bellowed from the screen.

“Who’s he kidding?” Colby gave a short laugh. “He’s dead.”

Timber leaned forward to hear what Hezekiah said next. She took in his features. While he was old, he had the same twinkle in his blue eyes and the same dimples in his cheeks as Kane. She could tell right off, she would have liked the man.

“Kane, as eldest, I would think you saw the downfall to you and the others disliking my test-tube creations. I think you referred to them as half-breeds. Well by now, you have met the remaining four that will be known as your cousins until a marriage takes place. It will be the pure-blood and the half-breed procreating a new, stronger generation of Wolvertons.”

Kane stood and walked to the television. He pushed rewind and then play.

“It will be the pure-blood and the half-breed procreating a new, stronger generation of Wolvertons.” Hezekiah’s voice repeated.

“He’s crazy!” Kane stalked around the room as the tape continued.

“Kane, you are the forefront runner to accomplish this because you have the finest lineage. It’s a good solid line direct from our ancestors. It is also too refined and makes you high-strung, so don’t fight the passion you have for one of my half-breeds. I made her just for you.”

Kane spun to look at Timber.

“I’ve heard enough.” He pulled Timber from the chair.

“...and so, to all those of you left, I leave a yearly stipend for your support.” Hezekiah’s voice drifted. “Of course, you all have the house to live in so personal expenses should not be a problem on the sum set aside.”

“Kane, he’s not done,” Timber wailed, stumbling behind him.

He let go of her hand. “Fine, stay here then.”

“Kane, please.” She caught his sleeve.

He looked past her and she mistakenly turned to look as well. Kailey stood, preening like a spoiled beauty queen. She was happy about the will, and for the life of her, Timber didn't know why. Who would Kailey have a chance at being bred by? There were no half-breed males other than Willie and Buckeye. Hezekiah's preplanning left many of them on the sidelines.

Still, as Kane looked at Kailey adjusting her bra among other indecent displays, Timber wanted to kill the woman. Kailey called her a half-breed and spit it in her face as if it were a dirty word. She didn't like being rushed by another wave of loathing. Kane's use of the term half-breed had mellowed into an endearment. The longer he looked, the more she had to acknowledge she might have another problem heaped on her. Kane's wandering eyes steadily enforced he'd not be faithful.

Obsessed with him, she didn't like it. A roll in his bed did a number on her. When she turned to look at Kailey again, she really did have the urge to puncture the girl's throat with her fang teeth.

"Come with me." Kane's voice lowered.

He coaxed her by holding both her hands. It had a calming effect, preventing her from even considering a shift into the beast. His thumbs rubbed at her knuckles, making her move closer to him.

"Are you sure you wouldn't like to stay...just in case there's something more to hear?" she asked.

"I got the information I needed. Everything else will be the old man rambling on about his life."

She let him lead her from the room. It did her heart good to have him want her with him. He could have wanted to be alone. He could have tossed her aside and took Kailey away. Yet, she was the one he tugged.

Kane took her outside into a rose garden.

"This is beautiful." She turned to survey all the colorful, blooming roses.

"I thought you might like it." He pulled her up against him. "I want to taste your sweet cream, puss."

"You're like some sex-starved teenager." She pushed at him. "I wanted to hear the rest of the tape and you dragged me out here for another round of sex?"

"I'll play the entire tape for you later." He nuzzled her neck with his lips. "Right now I want to think of nothing else other than you."

"You can't just fuck me every time you've got the urge. It's distracting and...and..." she wheezed in a gasp of revelation, "...and you intend on breeding me like some prized pet."

His hand was on her thigh before she could even think what else she wanted to say. His mouth fit over hers. His tongue swirled inside once with a feral groan she swallowed. He drew back to look at her. After a short observance, his second kiss rushed at her with a mixture of want and need.

Timber didn't protest again.

He backed up to something solid and she noted the white-painted fence post. Extending from both sides were white rails with pink roses draped in heavy brambles of summer splendor. He slid down, kissing her body as he went. The heat of his lips burned through her dress. Her thighs trembled. He pushed the dress up and kissed deeper into the center of her legs. His hand skillfully tugged her pink thong to the side. Heat from his nostrils funneled up inside her. His hot breath closed the gap between thought and dream.

She hummed with satisfaction by the quick spark of white-hot lightning skittering beneath her flesh. The gentle vibration of Kane's tongue rasping over her clit made her jump in surprise. No matter how

ready she thought she could be, the sensation was incomparable. Her hips jerked forward to urge him inside. With her hips pivoting forward, Timber forced her greedy cunt to his mouth. Her stilted whines could not negotiate words. However, he knew precisely what she required. He nipped and tugged on her sensitive organ. She rocked her hips to the rhythm of his thrusting tongue. Her knees weakened and the sweet tremors threatened to make her fall.

"Put your leg up here." He lifted her foot and rested it on his bent knee.

"I can't keep standing."

His mouth suctioned over her cunt. Her muscles tried to clutch at his wet penetration each jab he made. She smelled her sex. He licked inside her and she wanted to taste him. She wanted his enormous cock filling her mouth with the delicious nectar of his body.

"Come for me again." He spread her pussy lips and the surrounding stir of summer air drifted deeper into her hot core.

He alternated lapping at her clit and working his fingers in her to make her experience the ultimate of orgasms. This wasn't the kind she got with his cock. He pushed his index finger and middle finger up high inside. With his thumb over her clit, he finger-fucked her inside and out until he maddened her.

The orgasm came almost immediately. Timber squeaked unable to catch her breath. Her hand landed in his hair and he lifted up, letting her foot drop back to the ground. The momentum of his pumping finger never stopped. She rocked into them and he gave her a third finger.

"Don't fight the sensations."

Timber clawed at his shirt. Her breasts ached painfully for him to suck them. Yet, there were no words she could form with the vaporous sounds puffing out of her. When she went taut in the circle of his arm,

he pulled his fingers out. He licked them first and then pressed them to her lips.

“Taste the cream, puss.” He pumped his wet fingers in her mouth as she sucked on them.

He kissed her hard. The smell of her sex infused her with a primordial lust he controlled. His pulse beat, her heart thumped. Fiery heat ran rampant through her vagina and the blaze was a wet thirst. Brutal tremors turned her knees wobbly-weak. She stretched to grab the old gate post behind Kane’s head.

“We’ll go to my room.” He smoothed a hand over her head and pulled her close. “I need to be inside you like before.”

“Me or any female in heat?” she asked, not liking that because of her scent, he was insatiable.

## *Chapter Eleven*

Kane studied Timber for the reason behind her hesitation.

“You’re right, of course. If you weren’t here, I’d breed any female under this roof to get what I wanted.”

Except, she was there and she was entrenched deep into his every thought. He wanted her without an end in sight. He longed to touch and skate over every contour she’d let him peruse. He sought to be on her, in her, and he had no reason for it to be other than animal lust. His fingers reached up and touched the steady, pulsing blue vein on her neck lying under the veil of milky flesh. His body trembled with the urgency to sate his hunger.

“You haven’t said much about the bequest you got.” He trailed a finger following the vein.

His lust didn't appear to frighten her as it did him. Her ripe body came alive under his tutelage. The sexual scent of her glistening skin pervaded his nose with a savage carnality.

“I didn’t get anything.”

“You can have all this and me if you were to have my child.” He slid his hand down to the bodice of her wispy thin dress, the back of his knuckles tracing the rim of the garment. His palm spread over her breast as he kneaded.

“I’m not going to have a baby for you to make money.”

She continued to hum with delight from the kisses he planted over her collarbone.

“Are you in full heat yet?” He moved over the tops of her breasts, inspected her cleavage.

“You’ve already asked me that not too long ago. I don’t know how to tell.” She pushed him away. “You knew Kailey was immediately. Why do you have to ask me, anyway?”

“Something in your mutant genetics doesn’t let me know by scent.”

“And so you think I would know.”

“Well, we know you’ve started and that’s good enough.”

“Good enough for what?” She backed away.

“To work at getting you pregnant and spawn a little half-breed.”

“I’ve gotten used to you calling me half-breed. But you’re crazy if you think for one minute I’ll have a baby with you so I can listen to you call an innocent child names.”

“If I hope to have the Wolverton estate in my sole control, we need a child.”

“No, you and a half-breed need to have a child. You may as well go sniffing up Laurie’s skirts. She’s as ready as I am and she’ll be more than willing to give you a baby I’m sure.”

“I want you.” He took a step forward.

“Only because I’m standing here.” She ducked around to dodge his grasp. “It would appear every female in this house is in heat. I’ll not be the one you ensnare into this little contest of your grandfather’s.”

“The only females in heat are you, Kailey, and Laurie. It happened because of your new environment I reckon. It was how Hezekiah worked it out.”



"You think we came in heat because it would be practical?" Her fingers wrapped around the doorknob. "Kailey's in heat. Go invite her to your bed."

"She's a pureblood so it can't be her." He lunged and caught her waist. "She'd have to breed with Willie or Buckeye and I don't see her doing that. The only one I'd have to worry over is Laurie and Colby, and we'll not worry over them this minute. I have a stronger need to slake with your sinful body."

"What about Heather? Your grandfather said any two of his grandchildren. Who would she have?"

"Same choices as Kailey. No worry there, she doesn't like Buckeye and Willie scares her."

"You killed him!" Timber hit at him. "You said you killed someone who dared to touch Heather."

"It's not because of who he was."

"Yes, it was. You killed your competition. Hezekiah said the four remaining. You said Willie and Buck-eye have always been here. So who are the four? There's me, Laurie, and the one that's dead. That still leaves another."

"I don't know. Maybe the fourth is dead, too."

"He could be late."

"You don't know it's a he."

"Okay then, she may have never gotten her letter."

"I'll hope for dead."

Timber didn't want to think Kane really meant to be so heartless.

"Well, I suggest you think on using Laurie for your sport and your choice in breeding, because I'm not going to be used as a baby machine for money. Nor will I even consider letting that pig Colby touch me." She twisted free and snatched at the door.

It opened and she flew out of his bedroom.

"I will have you, half-breed!" Kane yelled.

He smashed his hand against the back of the door she slammed shut between them. He heard her feet thumping on the hallway floor as she ran. He didn't chase after her, because she went in the direction of her room. Another door slamming closed echoed within the range of his hearing.



The stark brightness of everything, each piece of furniture, every fixture, and all ornamentation glared in some form of white. For such an old house and a drab family, Timber didn't expect the white purity to overwhelm even a corner of Wolverton Manor, let alone a whole room.

In frustration, she kicked off her shoes. She found it hard to separate Kane's insensitivity from her regret of not taking all she could from him. To have his baby meant money yes, however, it also meant to have him. She had one big problem. She hadn't learned all the details to being a werewolf. Until she did, she didn't want to go willy-nilly into a relationship that could end disastrously.

A door, which she had not given much consideration, opened. Kane filled the frame and his room lay behind him. He took several long strides and pulled her to him.

"I say when we're through, remember?" He kissed her hard.

"No." She twisted and managed to rotate in his arms but could not get free of his powerful strength circling her waist.

"Kane, don't," she pleaded.

She tried to get loose. He jerked her against him and bound her with his hold. His erection pounded at the small of her back.

"I want only you." He seized the front of her dress and, in one single tug, snatched it open. Buttons flew into the air and made tiny tapping pings about the room. His hands rubbed her flesh, making her hot, agitated, and longing for what he might do next. Her rage mellowed at the scent of his pheromone-damp body.

Timber reached back, giving into him. She laced her fingers into the black waves of hair. The seduction became hers with an urgent, thirst she had to quench. She wanted to run from him and his plans, yet her body begged to embrace the fire.

Kane dipped his fingers into the rim of her pink silk thong.

"Be warned, puss, I'm going to rape you of all your innocent wiles and ravish your body with kisses until you beg me not to stop. All times before were gentle. This time the wolf will have you and our coupling will be volatile."

She already felt faint as he kneaded her bare breasts and tortured her with the wait. His fingers pinched her nipples, pulled hard, lifting her breasts with each tug.

"You can't take what I'm willing to submit."

She tilted her head to the side to accept his sucking lips searing the side of her neck. The bruises marked his lust, his power, and his bond. He reaffirmed it by sucking the blood to the surface of her skin again.

She rose up on her toes. Her body begged for his fingers to touch deeper into her drenched folds. She tried to manage her actions, to hold a little something of herself back from him. Nothing worked in her favor. Her heartbeat increased. It thumped and knocked the ribcage trapping it. Air came scarce with her sobs to regain some sanity.

"I'll not give you a baby for money," she said, with as much adamancy as she could muster in her bared state.

For love and loyalty, yes, but she could never do it for power and prestige.

Timber couldn't get enough of his touch as long as she was still shrouded in the fabric of her dress. She needed the flesh of Kane's soul whispering over hers. He sensed her wants and tugged the dress down her arms until it freely puddled at her feet. He knelt before her, tugging her thong from her hips. One foot and then the other lifted until he removed the small bit of silk. She stood naked before him.

"I don't care what reasons you do or don't think you'd have my baby." He rose and swept her up in his commanding arms. "But I told you I'll do what it takes to get this estate."

Timber breathed heavily under his dangerous stare. She should have been afraid he was right, but hoped she was wrong. Security remained in place as long as he wanted her. She swept her hand over the shadow on his jaw as he put her on the bed. The clean face already showed signs of hair. His human bristles or maybe those fibers of wolf prickled his flesh. Regardless, she liked the coarseness.

Kane stripped off his clothes. He peeled them away swiftly. She watched his sculpted body move, twist, and bend. In seconds, the magnificently naked man stood before her. His cock seemed bigger at a distance. The erection, too long to maintain a rigid, straight-out position, bowed.

It wasn't as if she didn't know what it would feel like to have his long, thick cock wedged between her sore pussy lips. Memories weren't so old she had forgotten what he felt like buried in her. Changing her mind wasn't an option, nor did she want it to be. She tried to fight the attraction and discovered Kane Wolverton had always been her destiny. She heard that fact on a video.

His blue eyes were flecked with a gray-green in the blue. The color darkened as he lowered. She stared deep into him and picked out one of his million emotions flitting about inside the mirrors. She took passion and held on. Anything else would be like giving herself up to a demon. She smiled, not for him, but for the thought, because this Wolverton seemed closely related to the devil.

Kane leaned over her on the bed. He rubbed the coarse pad of his thumb over her bottom lip, pushing, prying, and shaping her mouth with his fevered fingers. He stuck his thumb in between her lower lip and teeth and drew the saliva out to paint her lips. He gripped her jaw and pressed his kiss to her mouth with severity, forcing her canines to cut into his lower lip.

The point punctured the skin, making him groan. Instinctively, she sucked the blood. With tender, feathery strokes, she licked the blood off his skin. Her tongue rasped over the new growth of whiskers peppering his jaw. He moaned deeply and gripped her hips, forcefully dragging her lower under him. Not in position for their ultimate goal, but so she could lick his throat.

She played at building his desire and felt one emotionally charged tremor upon another. Beneath her fingertips lay a volcano, an intemperate beast eager to enter her. But why? Had he known all along what Hezekiah Wolverton had in store for them?

“Yes!” he begged in a strangled voice. “Yes, my sweet puss.”

He had sought to torture her but she knew the beast in him and what tamed a beast-controlled man. Her tongue glided down his Adam’s apple and she felt him gulp hard as she pressed a kiss into the hollow at the base of his throat.

## *Chapter Twelve*

Like a hummingbird skipping over his collarbone, Timber took control of his senses. Her fingers raked at his chest, her tongue swirled his nipples. She pinched one between her teeth and tugged gently.

“You think you’re clever,” he growled, and yanked her arms up above her head and held them on the pillow.

“Did you lose yourself in my caresses?” she whispered with a harsh truth. “Or maybe you heard yourself begging for me not to stop kissing you.”

She teased his masculinity.

“We’ll see who whimpers when I’m done with you.” He bowed his head and bit her nipple hard. It didn’t draw blood, but burned bright red, and he regretted it instantly. Lapping over the bead, he soothed it back to a rosy pink cap.

He traveled her body as he had promised and she writhed beneath his touch. When their lips met, he melted down to the sweetness hanging there. His tongue speared and fenced hers within the cavern until their foreplay of kissing reduced them to the final act. The culmination of what brought them together in the snowy white bed.

Contraceptives were for the weak, he once told his father. He’d never take a she-wolf to his bed when many young ladies of another breed wanted his touch. His grandfather had always assumed he reamed them with an animal lusting.

He sat up, ready to make Timber another victim of his indiscriminate roguish ways, but something about the green eyes had him take stock in what he did. Her dark hair, once fastened up on her head, hung in a mass of black curls, lying on the white pillowcase. His finger swept around her jaw.

“Regrets or are you unable to perform?” she goaded.

“I’m debating how painful I can make this. For you seem to have a penchant for roughness. Why is that?”

His fingers went down her neck and he wrapped them on the slender column. He wanted her to struggle, to try to get away, so he squeezed.

“Let go of me,” she demanded.

Her eyes widened in shock when he did. He obeyed the command, leaving them both confused. He regrouped his obsession and placed fingers behind the back of her neck. Kneeling between her thighs, he jerked her up from the mattress. She sat with her hands weakly lying on the bed at her sides.

He captured her lips in a kiss, taking them beyond the harshness of what had led before. He dropped down with her and entered her with care. Why? He might never know. He made small, short strokes at first to reawaken the minx to that afternoon.

He had her on the verge of lowering all her defenses. She boldly put up a front of disinterest and he forgave her instantly, for he felt used by his grandfather as well. Nevertheless, this time together had nothing to do with fulfilling the terms of a will.

His cock glided inside the warm, loving tunnel. He didn’t like that his thoughts were not solely for Timber. His grandfather had made their time together a sudden business arrangement. He pulled free of her and stalked away from the bed.

“Kane?”

He came back from the bathroom a minute later. He wasn't sure he liked her smile for the condom he had sheathing his erection.

"You don't want a baby, right?" He crawled on the bed and felt the wash of love in her arms hugging him tightly. Her kisses pelted his face and he lowered down. Her gentle touch guided his cock into place. He lowered more, sinking back into her wet warmth.

"Change for me, puss. I want you as the creature you are inside." He nuzzled her face.

"Change now?"

"It's all right."

"You didn't want me to before when we were like this."

"You weren't ready and now you are. We both are." He hushed a calming sound over her face.

She fit him exquisitely in human form. He wanted all the experiences the two of them could share.

"I don't know if that's such a good idea."

"Shift!" he growled.

The sudden loudness provoked her immediately. The bed shook, pictures rattled, and Kane howled with a fierce expediency. Timber began shifting and he humped her hot cunt, contorting to meet her transformation.

"Now, Timber, change with me now."

"Kane? I'm...I'm afraid. What if I do something wrong? I can't control myself as you do."

"I'll teach you."

"No, please, no I can't."

Her eyes were already full of color. He lifted her leg and twisted her around so her ass hovered in the air. He shifted into the wolf.



“Oh God,” she cried at the brush of his cock against her dripping center.

Timber shifted instantly. She twisted away from Kane. He tackled her with a pounce and licked her muzzle. The affectionate laps of his tongue delighted her easily. She slid alongside his heavily furred body. The same powerhouse of muscles he possessed in human form moved beneath the thick skin. He nudged her into position, reared up, and threw his weight on her back.

He humped against her ass, cock to cunt. She struggled involuntarily from the weight. She had no control and he clamped his teeth into the folds of skin between her shoulders. Her whimper sent him off and he nuzzled her neck with affection before gripping a mouthful of the flesh again. His penetration drove accurately deep. Her caterwauling yowl made him loosen his grip on the folds of skin and she relaxed.

He rocked steadily against her back until their joined orgasms fused the bonding. Her shudders lasted long, and she couldn't stay still. Kane controlled her by biting down harder on her shoulder to keep her in place. He quaked inside her. He swelled, stretching and filling every spot as he locked in the depths of her warmth. She whimpered for ten minutes, while the tightness kept him fastened securely. Eventually his cock softened and he jerked free.

She couldn't think beyond the force that seemed to rip her insides apart. Her back paws kicked out and hit him. She fell to her side and thrashed wildly. Brutal spasms attacked her insides. Her whole body trembled.

Timber swung away from Kane when she began willing herself to shift back. Her eyelids squeezed tight. She didn't open them until the violence of her body subsided and she lay panting. Staring blankly at the full

moon outside the window, she heard Kane behind her on the bed breathing heavily with his reversal. His hairy, muscled leg brushed hers and she slid further from him. What would she say? They'd coupled roughly, expending a lot of energy on something ritualistically basic in nature.

"That was better than I had imagined, but I had the impression you didn't like it," he commented quietly.

"It doesn't seem right. We're people and... Well, maybe you are, I'm some abomination out of a glass tube." She slipped off the bed and picked up Kane's shirt to put on. "You knew all along I was...I am...a freak. The term half-breed is a kindness since I'm nothing more than an experiment. Doesn't it bother you to touch me?"

"Get back in this bed and I'll show you how much it doesn't bother me," he mused. "I find you truly exhilarating."

"I'm glad you enjoyed yourself." She neared the window to put distance between them.

He jumped out of the bed and grabbed her. His fingers dug into the fleshy upper parts of her arms before sliding to her shoulders and spinning her around. "You're special."

She looked at him, watery-eyed. He was smart and sharp-thinking. He needed her or Laurie to gain the control he coveted over all the other Wolvertons. He wanted to possess what he grew up believing was his, and right then, she didn't care. She bowed her head against his chest.

"Come back to bed, puss." He petted her head and led her to the disarray of white sheets.

The smudges of blood were severe, and she looked at her arms, her legs, and smoothed over the shirt covering her torso.

"It's mine." He sat and showed her the inside of his calf. "You're very agile and quick with those back claws."

“I’m sorry. I didn’t realize I hurt you.”

He pulled her down next to sit next to him. “It’s not your fault. You’re a strong female in heat and mating as wolves is rough and demanding. I could have explained it, I reckon, but I didn’t want you frightened by something unusual to what you’ve learned about sex.” He scooted over and patted the bed, encouraging her to lie with him. “You’ll like it better the next time.”

“Will I? How can you be sure?”

“Because you’ll understand it and know how to compensate for certain positioning.” He rubbed her arm. “Now close your eyes and get some sleep.”

“I thought you wanted to...”

“Later.” He kissed her forehead.

Exhaustion should have knocked Timber out. Anxiety kept her awake along with the storm outside. She knew the sky prepared all day to let down torrents of water. It pelted the window with sheets of rain, washing away any of the day’s dust. A loud thump somewhere, a door creaking, and thunder drowning out anything else made her wonder if someone was up.

She scooted to the side of the bed and padded softly to the bathroom to pee. The mirror caught her attention and she looked at the smear of blood on her chin. Kane’s blood from the overzealous way he liked roughness with their sex. It wasn’t violent or even so painful, but he was a powerhouse of pent-up nerves until they were done. She opened the medicine cabinet to snoop and the condom box sat center shelf.

Her breath shortened. With his arrogance, she couldn’t see how it was possible to be attracted to him, but she was, and she needed him—mentally maybe, physically definitely. She took a condom and headed back to the bed.

Timber stopped at the massive crack of thunder rattling the glass panes. They sounded as if they were going to break. The lightning came in sync with the next burst of thunder. Light flashed into the room. She looked at the bed with Kane spread out on his back. He twitched in his sleep. The continuous flashes of light glinted off his penis standing at attention. The man was beautiful. The stud was having a wet dream and Timber aimed to become a part of it. She didn't want anyone in his dreams other than her.

She crawled on the bed, leaving the condom on the nightstand next to the clock.

"About time," he said.

"You're awake."

"Uh-huh, couldn't sleep with you parading that pretty, full-moon-shaped ass of yours out of my bed."

"I had to pee."

"I figured as much." His hand rubbed over her pussy.

"Will you fuck me again?"

"Oh yeah. I ain't lying here with a hard-on for nothing." He tweaked the tip of her breast dangling near him. "Get on."

Timber's head snapped up at the flash of light and thunder.

"It's all right, puss. The house has been standing for a couple hundred years. It won't blow down." He soothed her with a gentle stroke over her hip.

"I know. Storms have a way of surprising me." She leaned over and kissed his taut abdomen while reaching for the condom.

"They can be havoc on the nerves at times, I know. I'm not fond of them either. Now come on and mount me, puss."

She couldn't see him other than when flashes of lightning brightened the room. She didn't want him angry about the condom, but she was

afraid. Not so much of having a baby. That would be the easy part. It was him. She wanted to trust Kane Wolverton with all her heart, yet he only proved to her that they had great sex together. Animal instinct was something she had never learned to deal with on a personal level. She sensed it was there and still she questioned if it weren't her sexual appetite that forced the issue.

"Do you mind?" She dropped the condom on his abdomen.

"What's this?"

She heard him rustle the wrapper examining the item.

"I don't like them, but I'll wear it if you insist," he breathed. "You do know it may already be too late?"

"I know."

She listened to him tear the packet.

"I want you to put it on me," he said, and found her hand to lay it in her palm.

"It's too dark and I..."

His fingers guided her. For a second, she was sorry she asked. The latex was snug and she thought of a rubber band she once put on her finger out of boredom in school. The way it cut the circulation off to trap what blood was in the tip until the pulse throbbed with more strength. The sensation numbed her from feeling anything with that finger.

"What are you doing?"

"I want to feel the silkiness of your cock caressing my insides and that can't happen with this on." She tossed the condom on the nightstand.

She expected Kane to say something horribly wrong since his arrogance often got the better of him. Instead, he sat up and responded with a kiss that curled her insides. Sweet, seductive, and matched with the sentiments she wanted to experience.

"You amaze me." He held her chin in his palm. "It would be wonderful to stroke the warm, wet velvet of your cunt, however, without the shield I'll be forced to breed you again."

"I know," "She kissed him lightly. "I think I can handle it."

"No, puss, I mean I'll really breed you. The further into heat you are the more likely you'll get pregnant."

"Oh."

"Where'd you put it?" He leaned away to find the condom. "Here it is."

A little disappointed he put it on and a little happy for his consideration, she faced the ugly truth. She wanted his baby and worried he had a change of heart.

Timber slid her leg over his muscled thighs. She lowered, guiding his cock into her tight pussy.

"Tomorrow will be soon enough for me to breed you," he suddenly disclosed, and smacked her ass.

"Ouch!"

Her outcry didn't stop him from giving her fleshy cheek another scorching thwack with the palm of his hand. Her body squeezed in response. It became clear it was exactly what he wanted when he groaned. He slapped the same spot a third time making her squeal with an excited pain.

"That's it, puss, ride me."

Each sting of his palm made her rise up and drop back down. Her pleasure intensified with the spanking. The punishment aroused them both. His scrotum met with her ass in the violent force so the pouch holding his testes tickled her anus.

She fell forward. Her mouth landed on his. Tears were ready in the wings as the intensity soared to wreak havoc on her emotions once more. They were abated by the fiery tingle of her clit.

“Ah...ah...,” she stuttered the climaxing sound.

Kane held her ass, forcing her to take all of his cock and she squirmed to open up more for him. He thrust it higher with each jerk of his hips, jouncing her up and down. Her hair caught under his shoulders at one point and yanked her head by the roots with each bounce. She tugged it free to flip it over her shoulder and Kane helped. He grasped the loose locks at the sides of her head and pushed them back.

Timber couldn't accept the position she lay in for another minute. She sat up to wiggle her cunt to his coarse black pubic hairs, tickling her clit. Her arms lifted and folded behind her head as she rocked on him. His hands cupped her breasts and held her tits from jiggling wildly about.

“Kane!” she gasped.

He rolled her over and whatever orgasm she thought she'd experience alone was intensified by his. The power of his hips drove her like a jackhammer. She swung her head from side to side as the air forced from her lungs and she struggled to breathe.

Kane sucked on the tip of one of Timber's swollen ripe breasts. Her shimmy on his cock declined when he stopped pumping her.

“Don't stop, please,” she begged.

“Mmmm,” he hummed, rolling his tongue over her dusky areola.

“Kane!” She smacked his ass.

“Yeah, puss, do that again.” He jerked into her when her fingers tapped the cheek again. “Harder, little hell-cat.”

She swatted him several more times and he gave her what she wanted. Each hit, he flexed up and drove into her. She chirped like a little bird.

“Fuck me,” she demanded. “Fuck me, hard.”

He bit her nipple and tugged it up. Her chest rose to press the creamy mound of flesh into his face.

“What if I just hang out here and let you do the work?”

“Kane, you son of a bitch,” she whined, pinching his nipple.

“I prefer we don’t discuss my mother right now.” He flung himself into her.

The pretty sparkle to her eyes mesmerized him in the continuous flashes of lightning. It hypnotized him to shove his cock into her until his balls were ready to explode. He held out for a delayed climax and the one coming, wickedly strong, stole control from him.

He coasted over Timber’s slick wet skin with each thrust. Her hands magically relieved tension in one area while creating a different kind in another. From the strain on his back muscles to the cheeks of his ass clenching beneath her nails, his orgasmic shudders rendered him immobile.

“Wait!” Timber pushed him up.

“No waiting, puss.” His body jerked hard, and he dropped on her like a lead weight.

“Oh!”

“Hold still.” He lifted up and pulled free. Carefully, he removed the condom and set it aside. “Relax for me a little, puss. I want to feel you without the rubber numbing my cock.”

“I told you, you didn’t have to wear it.” Her hips lifted to his hard shaft gliding in the slick tunnel.

“I told you tomorrow will be soon enough for me to breed you again.”

“You’re getting cocky.”

“Unfortunately, the cockiness doesn’t extend to my dick.” He slipped deeper and pulled up. “I won’t be ready for a while, but I know you can come a dozen times between now and then.”



“Mmmm, if you keep that up it won’t be long either.” She nipped at his chin.

Kane kissed her deeply while his cock massaged her vagina with tender long slides. Her whimpers came readily and he didn’t give up her mouth. Each expulsion of her breath he inhaled to catch the rapture of her orgasm. His cock shrank within that time. He was long even in the flaccid stage to give her insides something to hug. Of course he had to restrain himself with each vise-like twist her muscles gave to his limp shaft.

He stayed within her warm canal, wallowing in the hot spring of heated fluids. It gave him a reason to relax. It gave him a hard-on he ignored. Timber drifted off to sleep while he brushed her dark hair back from her face. He pulled her head to his shoulder and rolled to his side, bringing her into the comfortable position.

“Let me know when you’re ready,” she murmured dreamily.

“Yeah, well, I could use a little bit of sleep first.”

The storm died down. The lightning had distanced itself from illuminating the room. The rumble of weather had passed. All became silent. Timber slept soundly nestled to him even though he continued to finger her nipple and ponder what tomorrow would bring. Her hand dropped from his hip and landed smartly on his cock. The vibration of her purring stirred him. Sexually, he could fuck the sweet puss with as much vigor as all the other times. Mentally, he languished in the idea that he had created the contented riffle of sounds she made.

Kane relaxed to Timber’s calming breath gliding over his skin. If ever there were a long day of the year, it had to be this one with Timber. His brain skittered over the events. From a peaceful morning to meeting Timber, things were shook up. From the mating to the breeding, he was a changed man. What was real and what started as lies came together to

form one hard fact—Hezekiah made Timber for no one other than him. He knew it in the pit of his stomach. All these years, she had been out there in her stupor about whom she was and where she came from. She had a hard life and he an easy one. She wanted to be loved and he saw himself falling victim to the same fancies.

The woman had many facets to her personality. The genetic difference became less a discouragement and more of an enticement. He wanted to explore, delve into her past, and know everything about Timber. His once stale heart looped to her overeager one in lust and passion. Only as he looked over her with a quiet assessment, he couldn't be sure if he ever wanted to know the dark side lurking within her.

## *Chapter Thirteen*

Someone screaming from outside the room startled Timber awake in the morning. She sat to see herself alone in the bed. Her heart pounded as the piercing wail caused her to jump to her feet.

As quickly as she could move, she ran to the door and into the hall wearing only Kane's shirt.

She saw Heather.

"What is it? Heather, what's wrong?" Timber asked.

Kane's bedroom door opened and he ran down the hall to the open door where Heather stood. His hair dripped from a shower he had obviously taken recently. If she had never looked back, she would have missed Kailey's emergence from his room. The girl's half-dressed appearance immediately upset her. Timber turned to gather her thoughts.

Inhaling a deep breath, Timber walked to the room Kane went in. Blood covered the floor, spattering the white walls and drenching the navy blue curtains. The horrid, patriotic display made her sick with the good ol' USA colors splashed everywhere. In the midst of all the gruesome details, lay Laurie, her throat torn out, leaving her jugular ragged and empty. Every pulsing ounce of blood dripped in the room. The girl died violently thrashing on the bed. Her shredded blouse exposed her bare breasts, slashed in a hateful manner. Blood smeared everything in the color of her pain and death.

Kane stripped a sheet off the bed and draped it over Laurie. He turned his attention first to Heather. "Go to your room." When she left, he came to Timber and took her arm. "Go get Morley and don't tell anyone else why. We'll keep this as quiet as possible."

Timber hurried down the stairs. She went to the living room, the kitchen, the dining room, and found no one in the place. Where would she be if it were her house, she wondered? The day was bright and serene...outside came to mind.

She found a door in the kitchen and followed the voices. On a patio covered in white, wrought iron furniture, she found the clan of vultures. It wasn't an obvious place to find the group of acerbic-faced Wolvertons, yet there they were, staring at her with the open surprise.

"Really, Timber," Victoria exclaimed. "Have some decency before presenting yourself to the breakfast table."

Timber hadn't realized she still only wore Kane's shirt. She tried desperately to hide her blush behind a mask of indifference.

"Excuse me," she said to Morley, "Kane needs to see you upstairs. It's very important."

She kept her gaze down, unable to look at anyone. Afraid her lies wouldn't hold up under the scrutiny of this family.

Morley nodded and headed into the house. She trailed him like a naughty child. When they reached the stairs, he turned to look at her.

"I doubt this requires any more from you," he said.

If he meant to brush her aside, it didn't work.

"I doubt it, too, but nonetheless, Kane can tell me himself if he doesn't want me around. He's managed quite well on his own." She slid past him and jogged up the stairs.

She had no great need to see the room of blood, but Morley trying to dismiss her became her reason for her to go up to the room. She found Kane standing with hands on hips, staring at the sheet.

“Go to your room, Timber. You’ve done enough.”

“Enough? I’ve not done anything.” She looked back at Morley’s gasp. “You can’t think I...oh, but you do! You thought I was capable of it before and you still do. Or is it a need to blame someone else for your aggressions. What’s wrong, she speak too harshly to what you believe is another one of your possessions?”

“What’s going on in here?” Morley demanded, lifting the sheet. “Who killed Laurie?”

“Timber, please, go to your... No, go to Heather’s room and make sure she’s all right,” Kane said.

“Aren’t you afraid I’ll tear her throat out? You accuse me of murder and then conveniently decide it’s safe for me to go near your sister?”

“I’ll trust you to know if she’s hurt, you’ll die.” He wheeled back to the body and a muted conversation with Morley.

She wanted to hurt Kane with the same insensitive way he treated her. Unfortunately, she meant nothing to him.

Timber rushed to get away, to flee the dysfunctional family. She had thought the foster care system a cold place to live within and now she knew how wrong she was. There couldn’t be anything colder than the Wolvertons’ den filled with full-bloods. It made her glad only half their blood ran through her.

It didn’t take long to dress and pack what she had brought. She’d been there twenty-four hours and a lot happened that changed her outlook on life forever. She crammed all her belongings, what little of them there were, into the duffel bag.

Her steps were stealthy shuffles along the dark carpeted floor of the empty hall. Front stairs or back stairs, neither seemed to be used with frequency.

A door closed somewhere down the hall and she stood like a statue, concerned that if Kane knew her plans to leave, he would stop her. But, no one came and she moved on.

Her foot dropped to the first tread. She chose front because it would put her right at the exit in the large foyer. She turned her head to look over her shoulder. Regret deepened, determination pushed her forward.

"The egotistical brute thinks he runs everyone's lives," she grumbled. "Let's see him run mine if I'm not here."

"Timber?" Heather's voice floated out from the living room.

The big, sliding mahogany doors were open. She looked at Kane's sister and the room beyond. They had no right making her think for a minute she didn't belong, and at the same time, everything in her wanted to believe she did.

"Are you leaving?" Heather asked, coming out of the room.

"Yes." Timber saw the slight hint of a smile. The blonde, blue-eyed young woman was no saint. No matter what Kane had to say, Timber did not see perfection any more. She saw deceit and an ego as big as his.

"I just assumed now with the will read and Kane willing to make you his... Well, I assumed you'd be living here."

"Really?" Timber's sarcastic tone widened Heather's eyes.

"You two seemed such a perfect couple. That is when he's behaving himself."

"Yes, well, that doesn't seem often enough, now does it?"

Timber walked toward the exit and the heavy door made no noise as she pulled it open. The sunlight was not welcome and she'd just as soon have rain mark her departure.

She ran down the drive until the trees enveloped the house behind her. The curve in the road put her past anyone's sight. Walking along the thick grass, kicking at the pebbles on the edge of the paved drive, she cried.

At the sound of a car, she lifted her head up and wiped the tears from her face. She didn't look when Kane's car pulled up along side her.

"You're going to leave all the money behind, just like that?" Kane asked.

"I never had the money. I never wanted the money." She wiped more tears away from her cheeks. "I came here for family and I still have none. I have a tiny bit of DNA of one crazy old man and nothing more."

"It's Wolverton DNA! You have what we all have, a blood link to this clan."

"You don't understand," she shouted. "You'll never understand."

Kane would never comprehend what he gave and what he took away every time he spoke to her. It had turned into a freak show and not because everyone became some exceptionally unique creature. From the onset, the foundation had been there for a family and they wouldn't let her into the oddly knitted net. With a large, complicated web of lies and truths tangled together, it appeared she had to be there from the start to have a real place.

"Timber!" Kane stopped the car and hopped out. "Timber, it's been only one day and I...I want you to stay."

She glanced back. His statement surprised her and yet it didn't. Used to getting his way, the plans he had were for his benefit. The bestial way he reminded her she was part of the family wasn't enough. She didn't want only Wolverton DNA, she wanted him. She shook her head and kept walking.

“You said I didn’t know anything about you. How can I if you leave here...if you leave me?” The words came softly.

He may not have wanted to tell her straight out he needed her, still she heard the plea. It gave her another pause, longer because her heart stalled like some rusty engine. She didn’t want him to keep alluding to a life he pushed her from. The havoc in her mind drove her crazy from his confessions. She turned her head and stared at him with indecision. The same blank face met her with a kind of coldness she never understood. She had to dismiss what he said as another form of seduction. Sure, tell the girl what she wants to hear. Spin the idea of love. If there was one thing Kane had been very capable of, it had been to charm her.

Timber took longer strides. She’d made her choice. Actually, he made it for her. Her shoes smacked the pavement with determination. When the car’s tires squealed, she tried not to flinch. It stripped a puff of hot, white smoke off the black pavement. She coughed, believing he did it on purpose. The sportster flew by, out the gate, and down the road.

Ten minutes later, Timber stood in front of the bus depot, a little disappointed Kane hadn’t tried harder. The spark between them had a lot of lust with the possibility of a little love.

She opened the old door of the ticket office with the dread of going nowhere in particular. Years of searching for home were mindless meanderings of wasted time until she had received her invitation to Wolverton.

Stepping inside the well-lit room, she expected the desolate place to be void of people the same way it looked the day before. Yet, there in the dimly gray interior of the room, Kane waited. She held her breath in anticipation. Her heart fluttered with joy, something only he could provide.



He stood with his arms folded behind his back. The solemn expression shouldn't have given her the hope her foolish soul jumped to embrace. He could have been one of her many foster parents ready to mete out punishment for some bad behavior as he rocked back and forth on his shoes, toe to heel. The stern expression on his handsome face was no indication of his real mood. He often masked his disposition with the grumpy frown.

"It took you long enough," he complained.

"It only took me ten minutes and I had the disadvantage of walking."

Timber's heart pitter-pattered faster as Kane's blue-gray eyes appeared darkly distraught. It tugged at her conscience that her departure might have saddened him.

"You walked slow on purpose."

"Oh right. In my attempt to get far away from you, I dragged my feet."

She drew her shoulders back with resolve. Her hands shook. Not the vibration of the shifting, but a quieter transformation. She had gained strength in knowing who and what she was, so Kane's continued stare did not disturb her as much as when she first met him.

Timber worried every minute in his company he would say something just right to make her go back. He'd have some sweet words or nasty demands and she'd have no choice.

There were probably a dozen different ways to stop her departure. She didn't dwell on any, except the one he produced with the sweep of his arm from behind his back.

Her brain quit functioning. She stared, caught in the whirlwind obscuring everything outside the circle of her, Kane, and the bouquet of roses he held. They were thrust forward like a bunch of poisonous weeds. She knew this alpha male would have a great deal of difficulty in offering

mushy sentiments with ease. The flowers were a crack in his obstinately rigid character.

The glimmer of hope radiated. The lovely fragrance wafted under her nose and stole her common sense. Effortlessly, the thief managed to steal her heart. If she could have ran she would have, except her legs were rubbery extremities not able to perform the task of even walking.

## *Chapter Fourteen*

Kane watched Timber's eyes reveal the same confusion he suffered. He knew no more than she did about what he was doing. He thought she understood him. Damn, he thought she knew him enough to settle for what he offered her.

How did he ask her not to go? One day wasn't enough time to decide on something for a lifetime. Though he knew in his heart he committed himself to her. Once he had mated with the wolf-cat, he became hooked on her scent like an addict. Right in the middle of Main Street he had wanted to know her. Full-blood, half-breed, who cared how the beautiful, spirited, and loving creature was formed or born—she was meant for him.

When his arm came from behind his back, he did his best to make the offer seem like nothing important. He'd gone soft and he didn't like it. She had gotten her way and reduced him to some sappy pushover. Only, she hadn't whined and wailed, nor begged or pleaded for his affection. Timber caught him off guard by being herself.

"I assume you like flowers." He wagged them in front of her.

A couple pink petals couldn't handle his roughness. He barely gave notice to them swirling, floating, and landing to the floor. The flowers were not his interest. He watched Timber's reaction. A smile discreetly tugged at the corner of her lips and satisfied his angst over the choice.

"But not pink?" He looked at them in his hand when she didn't say anything.

He had never in his life bought flowers for a girl. What possessed him today was argumentative so he didn't debate his reasons. It was done and he couldn't change transpired details.

"Pink is a particularly favorite color of mine."

"I guessed right then. You had the pink thong and I assumed... Well, are you going to take them?"

He shook them at her, wishing she'd hurry and make up her mind.

"People are gawking and the woman at the flower store said they didn't have thorns." More petals broke loose and fluttered to the floor.

"How many are there?" She inched forward.

"Two dozen but I didn't count because if she cheated me, I'd get angry and then...well? Are you going to take them or do I toss them in the trash?" He swung his arm so the bouquet ended up suspended over a large tin garbage can.

"If I take them, what strings are attached?" She cocked her head and the dark curls swung around her shoulder.

God, she was beautiful. Losing her would be like losing part of himself.

"None, I just wanted you to..." His eyes misted and his throat felt like it swelled shut. "If no one else wants you to know, I mean, if they haven't shown or told you... Damnation, Timber. You are a Wolverton and I'll always think of you as a member of our family. I didn't want you leaving thinking you could never return." He moved his arm over a few inches and dropped the roses on the bench.

Everything about Timber made him want to fight to keep her. He wanted to drag her back to the manor. Even if she kicked, screamed, and

bit him. He needed her much more than she could ever need him. It made him irritable and tongue-tied.

The walk seemed excruciatingly long from the station to his car. He opened the passenger side door with a small hope and walked around to get in behind the steering wheel. He'd wait three seconds. She would come home or he'd never see her again.

"One," he whispered to himself.

His heart thumped hard, making his chest ache.

"Two." He swallowed the dryness of despair in his throat while moisture formed along the rim of his eyelids.

His skin palpitated with an onslaught of tremors leading him to an uncontrolled shifting.

"And three."

"Kane!" Timber yelled to him.

His eyes blurred and suddenly cleared. The smile may not have been on his face, but inside, it prepared to burst his heart.

Timber ran down the walk. Her slender legs extended, closing the gap. She tossed her satchel to the floorboards and she slid into the car. In her hand, she held tight to the bouquet.

Her fingers drifted up to his jaw and stroked lightly.

"You weren't thinking of leaving me here with these and not a vase to put them in now were you?"

He shivered as the last quiver of his flesh receded from shifting. Her gentle caress took away the reason to hide behind the beast. He pulled her palm to his lips and kissed the center.

"We'll go see to that vase right now."

Timber jerked the door closed and sniffed the flowers.

"You don't still think I killed Laurie, do you? If you do, tell me now and I'll just get on the bus and leave."

Kane shifted the car into another gear. "No."

"Why? You seemed so sure a half hour ago."

"You're wearing my shirt. You went to bed in it, and you have it on now. I don't think you would be... I don't think you did it." He sped up to the gate and punched in a code on the metal box.

"I'm not stupid, Kane. I could have stripped naked, killed her, and went back to my room. I could have washed up, put on your shirt, and waited for her to be found."

"I'm no slouch in the intelligence area either, puss. I checked your room. Shower was dry, no trace of blood in the room...well, except mine, and I had only been out of your bed for a half hour. You didn't have enough time."

"Oh, so it's not exactly you believe me, it's more you've ruled me out after an investigation."

"Something like that."

"How do I know it's not you? Maybe little Miss Hot Pants didn't want you for a romp. You tend to get pushy."

"I have an alibi. I was in bed with you."

"You left and I slept for four hours. How do I know you didn't get up right after I fell asleep?" she challenged.

"Then there's Kailey. She was in my room."

"Oh yes, the picture is becoming clearer. Laurie wouldn't spread her legs for you but Kailey would."

"Timber, she snuck in my room while I was taking a shower. Nothing happened."

"And, did you find a fascinating pet name for her?" she cracked. "What endearing little thing do you call her while fucking her, obviously not half-breed?"

"You know, you are very sexy when jealous." He chuckled.

A horrid noise escaped through her pinched lips.

“Don’t go fretting over Kailey. I turned her down and the bitch slapped me. She even threatened to contest the will and make public what we are. I told her to go ahead and do it if she wanted to be put out of the house and the comfort she could have just living here.”

“What did she say?”

“I didn’t get a chance to hear her answer. Heather’s scream broke up that conversation.”

“I know Kailey can’t fit in your plans, but did you consider Laurie before she was killed?”

“She shifted for me, and if I did have any consideration toward that one, it vanished immediately. The girl had feathers like a deranged duck. I don’t know what Hezekiah was thinking. It was all I could do not to laugh.”

“Why, it didn’t stop you from making fun of me?”

“I’ll tell you something and then I don’t want it mentioned again.” His gaze shifted to see if she were accepting of the terms.

“What is it?”

“Your beauty in both forms stunned me. I wasn’t prepared to be attracted to a half-breed and I didn’t handle it well.”

“You didn’t handle it at all.”

The car rolled to a slow stop in front of the house. He held her arm to indicate he wanted her to stay in the seat. He got out, walked around the car, and opened her door. He extended his arm and offered her his hand, palm side up. She covered it with the warmth of her own. The last time, she bolted from the car by his demand. Today he gently extracted her from the seat like a recovered treasure.

“You’ve improved upon your manners greatly.” She commented.

He cupped her face in his hands and stroked slowly, sensually over her skin to arouse her purr. She closed her eyes to his soothing caress along her hairline.

"So beautiful." He kissed the words to her parted lips. "So very, very beautiful."

Kane's ardor mesmerized her. She couldn't even lift her hands as she held the bouquet of roses between them. It made a gap she no longer wanted. Observing his intuitiveness, she breathlessly watched him reach down and take the flowers from her. The fragrance of roses drifted past her head, but she didn't let her gaze stray from that of Kane's. She knew he laid the bundle on the top of his car. He closed in, and with his body pressed to hers, his hands returned to hold her face possessively. It was how she liked him to be when he wanted her.

His thorough aggression sucked the very breath from her. He caught her up in the moment and the sentiments blended a renewal of their heated passion.

"Kane," she breathed his name out to ask to stop before she cried from the splash of his emotions tangling with hers.

"I'd miss you very much if you were to leave," he confessed, putting his forehead upon hers and closing his eyes. "I'd miss you very much," he repeated.

"Kane," she purred against the cheek nuzzling hers. "If it wasn't you and it wasn't me...who, why?"

"We're going to find out all the answers." He reached in the car and grabbed her bag. "Somebody is stepping over bounds in this house and I promise I will find out who."

He kept a hand on her hip as she retrieved her flowers. The smile it brought every time she sniffed the blooms was matched by his. He had



done something so right for her and he knew it. The pride sparkled in his blue eyes.

They went in the house. There was no crowd of spectators, no servants, no one to greet or question what went on between them. That seemed a plus since their love spat was over and she could resume pretending what they had together was real and forever.

“I’m hungry.” Timber put a hand to her middle.

“You should be. It’s been a long time since we ate last night and we expelled a terrific amount of energy.” He looked around the foyer. “Willie, come take Timber’s bag.”

The strange man emerged from the shadows and Kane handed him the bag.

“Oh, take her flowers as well. Put them in a vase with water and set them on the table by the window in her room. It’s the one that adjoins mine.” He nudged her to hand Willie the flowers.

“Be very careful with them.” Timber instructed. “A few petals have fallen off and I want to keep them as long as possible. See, if you don’t bump them and walk slow...”

“Sweetheart, he’ll be careful, if not, I’ll buy you more.”

The flowers practically fell from her hand. Willie saved the bundle and stepped away from her. She stared at Kane. He called her sweetheart and she couldn’t believe it. Her heart fluttered nervously, anxiously, and full of dangerous hope.

He waved Willie on to do his job.

“Timber?”

“Say it again, please.”

“Say what again?”

“Never mind.” She wrapped her arms around him and splashed kisses over his face.

“You’re getting me mighty wet.” He held her face, and then he smiled, adding, “Sweetheart.”

Tears fought to leak out and she refused to get sentimental. His smile teased her and she hugged him again. Her body ached to have him in her.

“What’s wrong, puss?” He gripped her ass and pulled her into his groin. “Do you need me?”

She hated when he had that knowing grin spreading his lips. The tips of his canines showed and it made her want him to do unspeakable things to her.

“Very much.” She nuzzled her face to his.

“I think we need to eat first. I can’t live on sex alone. While that don’t sound half bad, I need meat.” He weaved his fingers into hers. “And then I need you.”

Timber’s heart heard it as a declaration. The reasons were no longer important as long as they were together. Their shared intimacy clicked really well in the bedroom and they could learn to have a relationship with their initial problems out of the way.

“Kane, I heard what happened to Laurie.” Victoria stood in the kitchen. “Is there something I should know about Timber?”

Timber lifted her chin as her aunt waited for Kane to answer.

“Mother, there’s a lot you’ll need to learn about Timber. However, she didn’t kill Laurie and she also won’t be leaving here.”

“So, you’re staying.” Victoria circled. “You understand we do have some rules regarding residency on this estate and in this household?”

“I’m sure you’ll point them out if I should break any before Kane has a chance to make me aware of them.”

“They won’t be hard to remember and you look to be a very bright girl.” Victoria picked up a plate with cookies and held it out to them. “Very well, have a good evening.”

Kane took the plate.

Timber’s mouth fell open.

“She was almost nice to me,” she gushed excitedly. “Did you hear her wish us a good evening?”

“My mother can even surprise me,” he replied. “I don’t believe it, but yes, I did hear her and if you knew her like I do, then I’d say she was in a very good mood.”

He walked over to the refrigerator and opened the door.

“I think it was because of you.” Timber followed him.

“Probably.” He carried the butter and bread to the table. “She doesn’t like to argue with me because she knows I’ll win.”

“I can believe that. I haven’t once gotten you to...” She stopped when he raised a brow. “Okay, you came and got me, and I wanted you to. But that’s all. Every time I say no to some form of sex, you take that as a yes.”

“You’re hot, sexy and in heat, puss. Since breeding you, I now have rights and I plan on keeping them exclusive.”

“Oh you do, huh?” She leaned over the corner of the table. “I think you’re too sexy for your own good. Somewhere in your creation, God should have slapped a little ugly spot on you so you’d be a little humble.”

“You shouldn’t complain. I’ve never been this tame, puss.” He cut the ham and put slices over the buttered bread. “What else would you like?”

“That’s enough.” She carried the glasses of tea to the table. “Are we missing some sort of family lunch?”

"Dinner is the only meal Minerva is strict about. The rest of the day, we're on our own." He sat the plates down and went back for a jar of pickled eggs he brought to the table.

"What happens now with Laurie? You said you'd keep this hushed up, but how?"

"By now, Morley has instructed Willie and Buckeye to take her to the cemetery. She'll be buried without ceremony and everyone else will say she left." He covered her hand "Okay?"

"Yes, okay." She smiled weakly. "Tomorrow, do you think you can take me to town to do some shopping? Drop me off at some store so I can buy clothes. Somehow my one and only dress is no longer suitable and I haven't very many things in my bag to change into."

"So I've noticed since you were absconding with one of my shirts."

They both laughed.

"Kane?" Timber touched his hand and pointed behind him.

Willie stood in the doorway with a pretty girl.

"I guess the fourth and final isn't dead."

"Kane, please."

He gave Timber a wink and rose from the chair while wiping his mouth.

"Kane Wolverton." His hand went out to the woman.

A new jealousy formed in Timber, stronger than for the others. This girl got something completely different from Kane than when she met him. On her arrival, he was abrasive and short-tempered. Now he was cordial and polite.

"Beth Wolverton." The girl spoke softly. "When I got the letter I never dreamed this place would be this big."

"Beth, this is Timber Wolverton." He put his arm around her shoulders.

Presumptuous, possessive, and just what Timber needed to bolster confidence.

“Hello, Beth.” Timber took the girl’s arm. “How about I take you up to your room and tell you all the things you should know to prepare you for this pack of wolves. Forewarned is forearmed, so they say.”

“It’s the room across from mine.” Kane told her. “I’ll go check on the...” he rubbed a hand behind his neck, “...the things outside.” He took Timber’s hand and pressed a kiss in the palm before leaving.

“He’s cute.” Beth’s voice bubbled as he walked out the kitchen door. “You two make such a nice-looking couple.”

“Thank you.” Timber led her up the narrow backstairs to the room across from Kane’s.

Somewhat ordinary, it had dolls and stuffed animals almost as if it were a child’s room. The walls were yellow and the bed was covered in a dark green satin spread. The bare wood floor squeaked as they entered.

“You can settle in and I’ll come back later to introduce you to everyone. They’re peculiar, but for the most part you shouldn’t have too much concern. They don’t talk unless something ruffles their feathers.”

Timber quickly turned and strolled from the room before Beth told her she had feathers. It would be totally embarrassing and she’d rather leave well enough alone.

## *Chapter Fifteen*

Kane waited at the base of the stairs for Timber. He slid his arm around her waist and pulled her to him to kiss her temple.

“How about a walk?”

“A walk would be wonderful.” She cozily sank into the niche his arm made exclusively hers.

“We’ll be back late so don’t wait for us for dinner,” he announced to those sitting on the patio.

Timber swatted his hand circling her waist as they went down the walk into the garden.

“Don’t think I don’t know what you want to do after sniffing Beth.”

“Sometimes you think too much.” He scooped her up and kissed her. “Ready?”

“Ready for what?”

“To shift. I thought you might like to walk on all fours.” He touched her nose.

“Really, we can do that here? Who’ll see?”

“Only those who don’t care.” He stood her back on her feet.

Kissing her lightly, he went first.

Kane paced around her and stuck his snout between her legs to prod her to shift.

“Stop that.” She pushed him. “It tickles and you’re being fresh.” Her giggles faded into yips at him and she ran to let him chase.

Kane didn't rush to catch her. The beauty of her moves invited him to dream and recall when he mated the wolf-cat in his room. Her naiveté made her passion and desire more attractive. He'd grown up romping in the woods and hunting the wild game with the primitive instincts inherent in his nature. Today he wanted to test Timber's bite for real. She was good with a threat, but could she kill with the same ease? When he slowed, she slowed and waited for him. He barreled her over playfully and licked her face.

For hours, they chased each other or they shifted into their human forms and lounged on the green lawns, talking and laughing. His mind grew with information about her life, her feelings, and her fears. For once, he spent time listening to a woman.

After awhile, Kane led her along a path into a darker part of the estate. They shifted into wolves and he took her on a hunt. Each little critter that darted out from hidden holes stopped Timber, and he watched for the primitive instincts to grip her. When he gave chase to a rabbit, Timber followed. He caught the animal with the ease of practice. Holding the prize in his teeth, Kane carried the largest piece of rabbit to deposit at her feet. He dropped back on his haunches and waited. He got up, nudged the carcass to her and lay down to watch.

Timber sniffed the fresh blood, the raw meat, and picked up the rabbit. She growled at him and padded off to a patch of dirt. Her care at putting it down was no less than that for anything dead. She swiped her paws quickly at the dirt until a hole formed. She placed the piece of rabbit in the depression and looked back at him. He didn't move from his repose and she stalked across the space, passed him, and picked up the other pieces of death he created. It disturbed him the way she rebuked him with the nonconformity.

Once she had it in the hole, he felt sorrow for not seeing how the act hurt her. He walked over and scraped the loose dirt over the animal. When he reversed his transformation and stood as a man, Timber followed. He reached to take her hand but she shied away.

“You killed it for sport.” She stared at the grave.

“And you haven’t?”

“No and I don’t want to.” She brushed a tear from her lower lid. “I’ve not had the opportunities you have. This is the first time I’ve been in animal form for more than five minutes. This is the first chance I’ve ever had to walk as my other half for the fun of it.”

“It only gets better and I can teach you to hunt, to kill and to eat...”

“I don’t want to learn!” She marched away.

“Timber, wait!” He ran up and caught her arm. “You can’t hold back the beast all your life.”

“How do you know I can’t? Maybe it was what Hezekiah wanted for me. You have no idea what I’m like or how I feel about things. Is compassion and respect for life so foreign to you that you can’t see it might be wrong to kill anything?”

Kane’s fingers folded around the back of her neck and he pulled her tight into an embrace. “I know a little more every moment I spend with you, sweetheart.”

“We shouldn’t be late for dinner.” She twisted from him and headed home.

“I told them not to wait, remember?”

“Minerva likes everyone to be at dinner.” She bent over to pick up a bright yellow dandelion. “And your mother doesn’t like me so I haven’t a need to make it worse.”

“She likes you.”

“No, she doesn’t.



“Fine, we’ll go eat. Of course I killed a perfectly plump and succulent rabbit for your dinner and you buried it.” He shifted into his wolf form and ran for home.

Timber wished they could leisurely stroll back. The walk had started out wonderfully normal. She enjoyed, for once, being in animal form. It made her appreciate something she didn’t understand. There was nothing evil about her. Though, she did have some concern over her reaction to Kane’s hunt. She had thought it playful until he leapt at the tiny little bunny and bit down hard. It turned her stomach to see him rip the rabbit to pieces. She couldn’t tell him because she had the same urge to kill each time she stopped at the squirrel, the bird, and even the mole.

She looked about at the dark forest. The thick, gnarled limbs created a canopy of green leaves, dappling the ground with spots of sunlight. The storm from the night left everything freshly washed and steaming with the scent of leaves and bark. The place had a wonderful, calming tranquility.

When she heard the strange howl in the distance, it spooked her. She turned to look about with a strange feeling someone watched her. Then Kane emerged from behind a tree and she jumped.

“You scared me.” She smacked his arm.

“Did I?”

“Well, you startled me.” She spun around when the howl closed ground. “Who is it?”

“I don’t know.”

He looked in the same direction she had. His face wrinkled with concern.

“What is it?”

“Nothing.” He took her hand.

“Everyone should be at the house.”

“It could be Willie,” he said.

“Or Buckeye?”

“He can’t change or he doesn’t know how to. I never learned which.”

He lifted her hand and kissed the back. She shivered with the excitement he always stirred in her blood.

“Can we go now?” She moved closer to him as he looked around.

“Sure, sweetheart.”

“Kane.”

He turned his head. A thatch of black hair dropped to his forehead and he brushed it aside. “What?”

She whipped her arms around his neck and cried into his shoulder. The endearment, painfully hard to accept once, became her hope renewed. She wanted his trust and his love, and the word sweetheart promised those things.

“It’s all right, puss. No one would dare hurt you with me here.”

She couldn’t tell him how calling her sweetheart left a bittersweet sensation inside her.



Another day, another dinner. With the addition and depletion of guests, the arrangement of sitting positions made slight changes. Minerva always sat at the head and Kane’s mother sat at the opposite end. They were the matriarchs and supposed heads of household.

While Kane acted the heir from the start, Timber wondered what Morley’s opinion was on the matter at hand. Hezekiah left everyone befuddled by his conditions, everyone she thought, except her. If everyone went Kane’s route, then all the full-blood Wolvertons would die out. They’d die rich—and in Colby’s case, fat—and then they’d be

forgotten. This was the reasoning behind her supposed grandfather's elite plan, his quest for a better race of werewolves. With what she learned, Kane didn't want to see it or understand it. Sex, arrogance, and the thrill of the kill had been his life. Two outcasts died by the hands of the full-bloods. Two souls were lost to the savagery, practiced and performed as simple as their evening meal. Kane expressed anger about Laurie's death and Timber found a thread of hope that he'd finally seen something of his declining future.

"What do you think of our mission in life, Kailey?" Colby spoke with a full mouth and chewed like a cow. "Might I interest you in some nocturnal negotiations?"

"Hardly." She covered Kane's hand on the table and ruffed up the short hairs. "I have plans with a different stud."

Kane turned his hand over and held Kailey's fingers. "I've got my own plans, chickadee." He lifted her knuckles and kissed them. "However, I always keep my options open."

Timber had enough of her so-called relatives, including Kane's flirtatious conversation with Kailey.

"Excuse me." Timber rose and a fast flood of emotions wanted to knock her back in the chair when Kane got up in a courteous gesture and held her chair.

"Wait, I'll go with you." He stroked her arm.

"That's all right. I don't think I require as much attention as Kailey appears to need from you." Her gaze dropped to where he still held Kailey's hand.

She wanted to get madder than a rabid wolf, except to escape the stale room was the only thing on her mind. She needed time to think by herself. Kane hadn't given her much alone time.

She didn't head upstairs because Kane would come for her there. And since no one gave her a tour of the mansion, she opted for the self-guided one. Someone would surely come along and tell her where she shouldn't go, but until then, she wandered from room to room and through one door on to the next.

Behind one door, Timber found a staircase. The darkness of the stairwell looked eerily forbidden. She glided her hand over the wall, hoping for a light switch and found a fat candle on a plate. She continued the blind search of the shelf and came up with matches.

Voices approached and she hurried to light the little stub. The flame rose up brightly and faded to a small bubbled glow of yellow. It would do and she stepped down, closing the door to prevent anyone from seeing her.

She took each step cautiously. Her foot felt first before adding her weight as she considered the treads might be rotten. She ventured down the deep tunnel and, one step after another, she progressed. The air cooled and the dank staleness of musty particles made her nose itch. Only she couldn't scratch her nose while one hand held the plate with the candle and the other gripped the smooth metal railing. Her nose wiggled and she worked at controlling a sneeze, afraid she wasn't far enough away from someone hearing her.

Something touched her head and she hurried down instead of up. It seemed the quicker way to go, and she was right when two steps later she stood on a stone floor. She lifted her arm over her head and swirled it around until the string to a light dangled against her hand. It hadn't registered at first it would be a cord for a light bulb touching her and now with a tug, she no longer needed the candle.

An unused clutter of lab equipment filled the large basement room. She fingered the cold metal objects and curiously wondered what they

were for. The panel of light switches grabbed her eye and she flipped them up one at a time. Some lit the ceiling, some did nothing significant for her to tell what they were for, and others turned on machines.

She listened to the whirr and hum around her. It wasn't loud so she left them go while she looked closer at vials and jars on shelves. The ingredients were unfamiliar. She opened a cabinet and stepped back in horror. There, lined in rows of six, four high, were huge five-gallon glass containers with the most gruesome, contorted fetuses of creatures.

She moved closer and touched the one huge glass jug containing something almost human in form. She turned it slightly to get a better look and the contents swirled in the liquid. The face came about and she screamed at the hideous features. She stepped back and bumped into something. Before she looked, hands gripped her shoulders. If she didn't recognize his scent, Kane would have been one sorry person in the path of her terror.

"How did you find me and what is this place?" She spun around behind him, not wanting to look at the jars or even hear the answer.

"I followed your scent and this is Hezekiah's laboratory." He pushed the cabinet doors closed and turned around to face her. "It's where you were born."

"Tell me about him and all this." She wandered about the room, trying to soak up the place as some sort of link to her birth, to her mother. Only there would have been no mother because she was created in a sterile environment, probably in a glass test tube.

## *Chapter Sixteen*

“Like what?” Kane clasped his hands behind his back and followed her path. “It’s been a long time since I’ve been down here. I never could make sense of things. I don’t know what I could tell you.”

“Anything at all.” She picked up a beaker and wrinkled her nose at the contents.

“Where do I start? I know the mechanics, the theories, and I’ve seen the results. I don’t understand why Hezekiah thought he had to do all this.”

“You said there weren’t many of us around. Maybe he wanted to perpetuate a race of his making because you weren’t.”

“I would eventually breed with a werewolf, he knew that.”

“What if you didn’t? What if something happened to you and you couldn’t?”

“Well, it didn’t and he kept up with this elaborate project and it fell short of his goal each and every time. Buckeye and Willie could hardly be called successes.”

“Thank you very much. I suppose I’m just a better botched-up experiment.”

Kane grabbed her arm and spun her in against him. He hugged her tight and nestled his face into her fragrant silky hair. He liked the lotion she wore. The vanilla clung to her whole body.

“Hezekiah’s experiments failed miserably as far as I’m concerned. Each creature he made came out wrong...all but for the one I’m holding,” he murmured against the side of her head.

He kissed over her face, taking in the delicate curve of her jaw down to her throat. He gave her an exciting low growl, threatening her. She pressed herself tighter, knowing he’d never hurt her.

“Do you know how much I hunger for you, half-breed?” He held her face and rubbed his thumb over her bottom lip. “If I thought for a moment Hezekiah created a creature to tame me as you do, I would have killed him,” he growled along her jaw.

“If that was possible, you wouldn’t...” she bit his earlobe and tugged firmly, “...you wouldn’t have me.”

They shed their clothes in a flurry of fingers and tugs. The garments became their bed on the dusty floor. Kane drew her down with him and she straddled his legs. She leaned forward on his chest. His cock hardened and grew between them instantly.

She combed her quivering fingers through the hair on his chest. She petted over the area slowly and followed it to his middle. The whorl around his navel drew her down and she licked a slow spiral until her tongue flickered in the dent.

He managed to contain his voice, until she traced a line directly to his erection. Her breath heated the veins. Her instinctive responses couldn’t have been more delicate as she sucked his cock. She had the experience to know how he liked her to kiss and lick over the length until his toes curled. His fingers ached under the strain of the tight, fisted-up balls his hands made. His whole body tensed by her artful and genuinely shameless frolic over him.

Her hand covered his balls and massaged the aching pressure he felt. Her lips journeyed to the top of his shaft and then slid down, over his

arousal, taking him into the wet cavern of her mouth. He moaned again for the sheer joy rocking his senses.

And then she stopped.

He elevated his head. With a hand pushing back the mane hanging down tickling his chest, he looked at her with concern.

"What's wrong?"

She shook her head without answering. That didn't tell him anything he didn't already know, but maybe it did. He'd be the last to guess at how a woman thought, but he knew how she caused emotions in him to make him speechless at times.

"Come here." He gripped her jaw and drew her mouth to his.

The longer he remained fastened to her sensuous lips, the more she relaxed, calming his alarm. She kissed him back with the verve of raw passion. While his hands rubbed her flesh, he licked her face, and the image of her shifting into the elegance of all his desires returned. It frightened him how much his opinion of her changed in less than forty-eight hours.

Timber weaved her fingers into his hair and held his head cradled in her palms. Each time they came together, it started a beginning with no end, endearing her to him.

He traveled down her throat, bathing her with his tongue, sweetly torturing her luscious breasts. She whined an aria of pleasure with each lick he gave her hardened nipples. His face caressed her body like a beast in seduction of her sanity. He nipped her skin and nuzzled his nose under her hair. Behind her ear, he hummed with all the love he had for her.

"Timber." Yearning claimed his thoughts and the words on his lips were ready to tell her all his desires. Including the fact he wanted to breed her for who she was and not what she could do for him.



Kane wanted to have an offspring with the fire of her soul and the love of her heart. None of his intentions from this point on would be for money. Yet, how could he say such a thing right after learning it was what their grandfather had plotted and proposed? He hated Hezekiah for complicating what was naturally a good thing between him and Timber.

Kane lapped at the strip of short hair along the split of her cunt. He nipped at the folds of the perfect pink bud of her clit. He lifted her hips and jabbed his tongue in and out until she shuddered violently.

Once he awakened the scent in her and the guttural moans of ecstasy were infinite releases inside his own body, he stopped. He blew a cooling current of air over the enflamed entrance to her feminine depths while relishing the pain increasing in him for his want of her. He bathed the honeyed cream down her legs with his tongue and worked to remove his trousers at the same time. Realities of life were gone and he was in the netherworld of rapture. He couldn't control his own strength and when he penetrated her, she cried out. He cringed with the sting of her fingernails raking his back, trying to hold on and ride the storm of their coupling. Her slender legs wrapped his waist and he couldn't seem to get his cock into her as deep as he wanted. He rolled over to his back, taking her with him.

Timber whimpered with his emotional kisses on her breasts. His tongue licked repeatedly, making her wet from his saliva, more than the flush of her pores. Their limbs moved in directions best capable of accommodating the other. Kane pushed at her knees and opened her legs wide. He liked the blush of crimson, heating her from the inside out.

"Kane!" she gasped.

She clung to him as he lowered. Her breasts compressed to him and her knees locked to his hips. She kissed him hard and hugged him as the waves of rapture entwined them tighter.

“Kane.”

“Sweetheart, why the tears?” he groaned against her neck.

“I’m not crying.”

“You’re eyes are leaking.” He covered her quivering lips with his.

He sat. Then stood, and she put her head on his shoulder. His hands, gliding under her bottom, tickled, and she squirmed until he had her pressed against the old grey stone of a wall.

Kane came into her again. He didn’t stop and she began to slump in exhaustion. Her awakening came in a frenzied climax with gasping whines buried under his howls.

“Sweet, sweet puss.” He nuzzled her face.

He couldn’t believe the minx had him forget all their surroundings. It disturbed him.

Timber’s legs eased their lock around his waist and he held them in place. They suffered inevitable exhaustion and for ten minutes, they were once again fastened by the natural order of breeding.

Her arms hung onto his neck and she looked at him questioningly. “You’re being too quiet.” She put her head to his shoulder.

“I’m tired.” He turned and leaned on the wall while holding her. “Someone around here keeps me too busy.”

Kane flipped the switches down and started up the stairs.

“Our clothes!” She kicked her legs gently.

“We don’t need them,” he groaned. “You’re going to have to learn to stay still when I’m hooked to you half-breed.”

“You’re not going to carry me through this house naked.” She wiggled again. “Kane, please!”

“Ever the practical one.” He kissed her nose. “Hold on, puss, there’s no parting you from me yet.”

He leaned and she gathered up her clothes.

“Now what?” She held the bundle between them.

“Well put my shirt on and then you’ll be dressed enough for me to take you to my room.”

Kane’s initial plan had been for them to continue with their foray into the realm of carnal pleasures in the comfort of his bed.

“My room, please.” She caressed his cheek with the tip of her finger. “I’d like to get cleaned up.”

Kane carried her into her room.

“You know we can take a shower together.” He fondled the edge of her shirt and the bare flesh of her belly.

“Go get me something sweet to eat.” She pushed him back into the hallway. “I want something chocolatey and I want a bath—by myself.”

“You think I’m your errand boy, do you?” he teased.

“I think you’re a man that has designs on doing things to me in the middle of that bed behind me.” She jerked her head back. “I need sustenance and you need to remember you worship this half-breed for what you can get.”

She reached out and stroked his cheek.

His hand slipped up her arm and brought her closer.

“I’m only going because a large slice of chocolate cake does sound good.” He kissed her lightly. “You want a soda or milk with that?”

“Milk.”

“You know, I should have guessed that, puss,” he laughed.

## *Chapter Seventeen*

From the security of her bed, Timber was jerked awake and to her feet. She dozed off after her bath while waiting for Kane to bring the cake. Dressed in her panties and a shirt Kane had conveniently left in her room, she stumbled against a body behind her.

“What are you doing?” she grumbled. “Kane?”

Fingers pried her mouth open at the corners, and in one swish, liquid poured into her throat. It burned and choked off her vocal cords. She couldn’t scream. Fear swelled and she tried to shift. Nothing happened. What normally came easily, and sometimes at inopportune moments, she couldn’t make happen. Dizziness seized her ability to concentrate. Her legs, her arms, and even her neck went limp.

Her abductor lifted her roughly. He slung her over his shoulder like a sack of feathers. She wiggled and struggled, but nothing freed her from the tight hands holding her in place. Lethargic as a snail, her strength had vanished.

Timber hung loose, staring at objects upside down. The man carried her through the darkest parts of the house. Outside, the clouds dulled the light of the moon. She couldn’t focus on anything, not even direction.

For a long ways, she dangled painfully over the hard ball of the man’s shoulder before he stopped. She listened to the creak of a rusty gate, the clack of metal against metal. It meant nothing to her. In her woozy vision, she watched the flicker of shadows on a stone wall. The bounce of

his steps indicated they went downhill. He descended steep steps, but where?

He stopped, opened another rusty hinged door, and she shivered. Cool air skittered up her legs and under the tails of the shirt. A second later, she landed on her back on the hardness of stone.

Timber slowly lifted her head. She looked at the shadow of a man pushing a door shut. He turned and tipped his head down, appearing to look at her.

Her limbs wouldn't cooperate with her need to get up. Each try made her feel like a broken rag doll with her limbs flopping around in no defined sequence.

"I wasn't told you were beautiful," he spoke.

He bent his tall, lanky frame over her and scooped her off the chilling ground. She pushed at his shoulders for release—a pointless try. A limp dishcloth had a better chance.

"It is a fact that should never be withheld, but I understand why it might have been." He chuckled.

His riddles meant nothing to her.

"Who are you?" she rasped. "Why...why are you doing this to me?" She could barely get the whisper out. His features remained masked by shadows.

His black hair hung loosely around his face and on his collar. He appeared as normal as most, all but for the blue-black eyes. They had an inner evil she felt inside her shuddering soul.

"I didn't consider I might enjoy fucking you. It seemed unimportant for the job."

"What are you talking about?"

He walked around a stone table and put her on her feet. She would have slipped back to the floor if he hadn't bound her against him with a

supporting arm, holding her up. He glided his hand down, moved the shirt, and gripped one quivering cheek of her bottom.

“Please don’t.” Her weakness put hardly an ounce of real demand in the words.

She could tell the drug started to wear off, but not enough for her to fight his hold. The frightening part of her dilemma was her inability to shift. Fear usually worked for her, not against.

Helplessly, Timber lay at the mercy of his roaming touch. His graze over her flesh went no further than her ass. He squeezed and kneaded each cheek and rubbed his groin against her. She remained docile, relaxed, and willed her feeble muscles to cooperate when she needed them most.

Her repulsed groan gave him encouragement. Her body jerked at the intrusion of his finger in the crack of her butt. It brushed over her anus and she found enough power to close off the small hole.

“I bet he enjoyed your tightness.”

“Who?”

“Kane.”

His tongue licked over his lips and she arched back from his approaching mouth. She wrinkled her nose to his heavy stale breath blowing over her face.

She sighed inwardly with relief when he moved his probing fingers from her bottom. The reprieve disappeared when he gripped her jaw. His mouth covered hers and he sucked on her panicked cries.

She expelled too much energy fighting the kiss. He enjoyed her pathetic struggle.

His fingers released her jaw and took a route down her neck to her breast. She found one sliver of oomph and slapped him hard on the face. He shoved her away and she staggered back to the stone table.

She gripped the edge to hold herself up. Her head hurt with a pounding ache and she tried to concentrate on shifting, but it didn't work.

"A little something to tame the beast, works well, don't you think? Now we get on with the finer points to this encounter." He came forward.

"Never." Her mind screamed, but her voice rasped low.

He pushed her back on the table. The cold stone slab did nothing to stimulate her muscles. In the flickers of some torch lights, she watched his face. She tried to determine his immediate intentions. She didn't have to work hard when he lifted her legs and slid her further back on the slab.

Timber's legs remained dangling over the edge, and he continued standing between them. While some strength returned to her limbs, her mind weakened with a strange drowsiness. Her nose lifted to another scent in the room. A familiar and safe recollection, except she couldn't place it.

Kane. She closed her eyes and thought of Kane. Fingers caressed her breasts and it seemed right, yet, it felt wrong in timing.

"Oh yes," she moaned.

Blackness surrounded her drifting thoughts. Her head lulled to the side.

"Kane?" she questioned his reason for drugging her.

Confusion kept her unsuspecting to the fingers tearing open her shirt. Her nipples were already hard and aching from the cold. He made them hurt by twisting them with his pinches.

"Please," she cried. "Please stop."

He didn't stop. She lay shivering in the chilly room, accepting the warmth of his hands rubbing her flesh in brisk strokes. He had a thoroughness she began to succumb to with endorsing moans.

Over her breasts, down her belly, and around her hips, she languished at his mercy.

“You like to be touched, I see.” He rubbed the crotch of her panties.

The voice alerted her to the misplacement of her confidence.

Not Kane, she tried to convince herself. It wasn’t Kane petting her thighs and kissing her belly. But the scent, she knew his scent, and it was near her.

Timber shook her head. It felt ready to explode and she groaned at the throbbing behind her eyes.

“Kane...Kane, why?” she asked, confused and frightened.

Suddenly, her panties were jerked from under her bottom and whipped down her legs.

“No,” she cried.

Her legs were shoved up at her knees and the exposure of her open pussy let a breeze of cold air curl into her. She groaned in horrifying revulsion. Her adrenaline-laced veins gave her the strength she lacked before and she kicked out.

The grunt following her impact ricocheted when she tried to roll away and he grabbed a fistful of her hair.

“You bitch!” He yanked her back and held her throat with an excruciating tightness, making it hard for her to breathe.

Timber panicked. She wiggled and fought the vise of his arm.

“I’d kill you right this very minute, but I have a need for you to be alive.” He dragged her off the slab.

The strike of his hand against her face sent her immediately to the floor. When her head hit the stone, a blinding splash of white stars buried her vision. The impact clouded her thoughts with a disoriented haze. She heard him grumbling and her incoherent mind wouldn’t connect the sounds with words.



He snatched her up from the floor, tossed her to the stone table, and began to slobber over her belly. He went quickly to her hips, across the hollow and between her legs. Her stomach churned in revulsion.

“Noo...ooo!” she cried.

“I want you to come on my cock and not before.”

His lips stopped slurping between her legs and she heard him unbuckling his belt. He leaned over her and even blurry-eyed, she saw his grin.

“I’ll show you what it’s like to be fucked by a man.”

He caught her wrists up and used his belt to bind them together.

She still had the shirt on because she felt the sleeves on her arms. Yet, it offered no protection from his hot breath. Flowing over her belly, his hurried grunts left a humid dampness in the wake.

“I guarantee you’ll enjoy this.” His cock touched her entrance.

Her reply came with the nausea he created. It erupted with her bile and she gagged as the odious fluids of her stomach rushed up her throat. With a searing burn, the liquid spewed from her open mouth.

The man swore loudly, but not enough to hide the squeak of the door opening.

“Help me.” She coughed on the vile aftertaste. “Please!”

Timber choked and gagged more, unable to hear the murmured talk. The heated words sounded angry, and feminine. Her mind linked to Kailey. She wanted what Kane wanted, except none of it made sense.

Then the rusted hinges creaked again. A minute later, the man jerked her from the table and dragged her across the floor.

“Fun time is over, bitch.” His body held her pinned to the wall while he lifted her bound hands.

“Why are you doing this?” she whimpered.

A chain rattled and banged her head. When his weight moved, she found herself suspended by her wrists.

“You can’t do this.” She forced herself to stand. “Let me go. This isn’t right. Kane will kill you.”

“Kane will think you ran off again. He’ll believe you really couldn’t stand living here and took off to parts unknown.”

As if things weren’t already dark enough in the room, he pulled a sack over her head. He tied it tightly to her throat. Fear spiraled as never before and to beg to be released seemed easy. Her voice would not come and it didn’t seem to matter because the thud of the door told her he left.

He meant to leave her there to die and she still didn’t know why. How long would that take—days, weeks—could she still be conscious or alive in a month?

How could he go? Leave her to dangle by her wrists. Why blindfold her? Was killing her as they did Laurie too easy? She’d be only one more body to hide. Or did a fear that Kane really cared about her prevent them from a brutal murder? If he found out, would he be as vicious and murderous as she’d seen evidence of on their walk? A quick death would be more humane than leaving her to suffer a slow starvation.

Timber focused on Kane. How did he truly feel about her? The flowers, the whispered sentiments during lovemaking, and his time, even before the contents of the will were known, he had spent practically every minute with her. She’d been with him when Hezekiah told them the terms of the will. He seemed just as shocked as everyone in the room. She had to trust he didn’t know beforehand.

She hung onto his affection to give her the strength needed to stand. The buckle of the belt had a sharp edge when pressed into her skin. Each time the weariness weakened her stance, the cutting rim pierced her flesh.

Blood trickled down her arm leaving a hot trail on her cold flesh.

“Kane,” she whimpered.

Barely a hope hung in her thoughts that he would find her because she didn't know if he would want to. Time seemed to have no place in the dark and her mind couldn't stray from the one thing nagging her the most—why the man took her.

When the door opened again, she couldn't calculate the hours.

“Who's there?” Her voice echoed.

A sudden strong odor of garlic drifted up her nose. Something dropped over her chest and the powerful scent lingered. The dank staleness of the room disappeared. The other scents she clung to vanished under the heavily pungent stink around her neck.

“What are you doing?” She tried to struggle against the small, soft hands spreading her legs. “Stop,” she cried.

The leather cut deeper into her wrists. She couldn't fend off the person probing her cunt. Someone from behind lifted her. They had her suspended as if she sat in a sling. Her legs were wide open and the probing started again.

She jerked at the first intrusion of a tongue licking inside her. She tried to buck the person away. The panting breath brutally informed her of an animal touching her. Her toes curled and she tried not to concentrate on the abhorrence of the long tongue with anything other than the hope it provoked her to shift.

“I told you she's cycled,” the masculine voice said.

He held her, but who did the licking? He dropped her legs. The weight of her body dropped, tugging hard on her wrists. She scrambled to get to her toes to hold herself up. More blood warmly swirled down her arms.

Feet shuffled across the floor.

“Wait,” she cried out.

They left her alone again. The silence pinched her nerves with fear. While her clarity and strength began to return a little, the long hours alone weakened her in a new way.

She began to talk to herself. The endless chatter started with questions and flowed into a one-sided conversation. Her throat felt raw, but it didn't stop her from singing. She did recitations of poetry she remembered. She did anything to prevent the boredom from taking her sanity.

The excruciatingly long isolation did nothing to stop the hunger pangs she experienced. With no alternatives to relieve herself, she cried when she had to let the warm urine run down her legs.

Hours, a day, maybe two, forced her into the pool of insanity. She tried shifting and her insides cringed at the lack of strength she had. She talked every chance she got and then a sound she'd not heard in a long while ended the rasp of her voice.

The grating of stone stopped her cold in every movement of her body and mind. A cold breeze floated up under and over her exposed skin in the gap of the shirt leaving gooseflesh in the wake and making her shiver.

"Is someone there?"

She wondered if they had a change of heart about abandoning her to the grim reaper. This was all a joke. That was it. Not a funny, ha-ha bit of fun, but a joke.

"If you'll undo the belt tied to my wrists, I'll leave Wolverton forever," she promised.

The air filled with a heavy, almost labored breathing. It hung with a presence she tried to sniff but the garlic prevented her from picking up any other scents. She now understood the purpose for the putrid necklace. Her legs started to shake uncontrollably. She cried when they

gave way to her anxieties and she dangled by her wrists again, making blood ooze faster down her arm.

“Please, it hurts.” She choked back the tears.

She stiffened at the touch of something on her face. Outside, over the sack, a finger rubbed her lips.

“Please,” she whispered to the entity. She feared the unknown and yet she had to believe the hand stroking her face was one of compassion.

“Who are you? Please don’t leave me here to die.” Her voice, a whisper of raspy sounds, was hardly loud enough for her own ears. “I want Kane, please.”

She flinched when a hand spread over her belly and rubbed a circle. She couldn’t escape the gentle motion and she couldn’t voice her fears as he moved higher up under the open shirt. A rough hand swept over her breast and she stiffened. Suddenly the body of her unknown visitor pressed against her.

Timber squirmed and then stopped when the chain rattled overhead. Her arms dropped and she hung on the arms of the huge body lowering her to the floor.

He squeezed her too tight and his loud ululation was fraught with sadness. He didn’t howl like a man, but a deep, rumbling wail purely animal.

“Are you...” She didn’t want to say or give name to who helped her.

She tried to reach up and touch something other than cloth and he retreated from her hold. Her weakness left her to slump to the floor.

Still submerged in blackness, she asked, “Can you talk to me?”

Timber put her bound hands up. They hung listless for a second before the weight of her limbs fell back onto her naked torso.

“I won’t hurt you.” She grasped for her shirt and clutched it closed.

Then as sudden as he came, she heard his shuffled footsteps take him away. The door creaked open and closed with an echoing thud.

“Please, don’t leave me here to die. They won’t let me out. No one will come for me. Please!” Timber propped herself up on the stone wall. “Please don’t leave me,” she begged.

## *Chapter Eighteen*

For forty-eight hours, Kane traversed the length and breadth of the mansion in anger and pain. When he went back to the room with her cake, he had found Timber gone.

While the note on her bed clearly said she didn't want to stay there, he knew if he talked to her, he could convince her. He knew if he told her what she wanted to hear, she'd not leave.

Even if she did want to go, he could go with her. He would willingly give up his empty life to be with her, anywhere she had a mind to live.

Kane checked the bus station, the hotel, and every place he could think of and she disappeared without a single trace. His conscience berated him into a rage for the inability to tell her his deepest feelings for her.

He hit a vase on the credenza in the foyer and sent it flying against the stone wall. Frustration set him looking for something else to hit when he spotted Beth in the doorway of the den.

"Is something wrong?" she asked. "I heard Timber left. Is there anything I can do?"

"Get the hell out of my sight!" He grabbed the front door handle and pulled. The slab of carved wood bounced hard on the wall. It swung all the way back and shut, putting a barrier between him and the people he came to detest inside.

He lifted his head to the howl coming from the woods. It sounded far away. Shifting instantly, Kane ran on four heavy paws in the direction of the animal's wails.

In minutes, he rose up on two legs and grabbed Willie. "Was that you?" Kane demanded.

Willie nodded and pointed.

"You don't like what?" He searched the man's face for the answers he usually sensed right off. "Come on, tell me."

Willie ran from him, heading to one of the old underground crypts. He patted the gate and made a motion of smelling a bouquet of flowers.

"Timber? Timber's down there?" Kane pulled open the heavy wrought iron. "How'd she get here?" He hurried down the stairs, listening to Willie's grunts and understanding them better.

"No, I didn't put her down here," he snarled, and at the base of the steep steps, he pushed open another door.

In the dark chamber, he let his eyes shift to utilize the wolf's night vision. Once adjusted, he saw Timber curled up tight in a ball on the floor. He smelled blood on her as well as vomit, urine, and oddly, garlic.

"Timber?" Kane shook her gently. "Timber, wake up, sweetheart."

He lifted off the string of garlic and tossed it away.

"Come on, puss, wake up for me." He worked on the leather belt binding her arms. "Timber?"

He sniffed the leather and tossed it aside as well. Willie paced near the door making awful sounds that expressed his confusion and his empathy.

"She'll be all right," Kane assured him.

Willie rarely showed emotion for anyone, but it didn't surprise him, he felt a bond with Timber. For all appearances in the lab, they were



brother and sister. However, beyond that, he sensed Willie liked Timber very much.

Kane tried to fasten Timber's shirt closed. The buttons were ripped off and he folded it over her lifeless body. He scooped her up and kissed into her hair. He didn't care how bad she smelled. It would wash off.

Carrying her from the old, dark mausoleum, he held her cold body tight against his warmth. His belief she left him hadn't prepared him to think something out of her control had happened. His rage burned inside his already tortured stomach. He hadn't protected her enough and he didn't know who to protect her from.

"Too tight," she muttered in her sleep.

Kane realized in his zeal to hold her, he squished her with all his strength, letting the anger expel into his secure hold.

"Sorry," he whispered. "I'm sorry about a lot of things, sweetheart, and I'll make it up to you."

His strides were long and swift to the mansion. He cringed each time he let his mind wander to what might have been done to her. The surface injuries looked minor. Cuts on her wrists left her a mess of dried blood. The dirt had caked to her skin and the first thing he would do is bathe her.

"Kane?" Heather floated out of the shadows beneath the stairs when he walked toward them in the kitchen. "What's wrong with Timber?"

"Someone kidnapped her and locked her in the old mausoleum."

"Did she say who?"

"She hasn't woken up yet. But you can believe they'll not live a minute beyond my knowing either."

He looked down at Timber's peaceful expression and kissed the dirty face he loved. To see the slightest trace of pain grieved him. Her fear

often made her change and he immediately wondered why she hadn't shifted to protect herself.

"Do you really think you could kill?" Heather asked. "You like to think it was you that killed Neal, but we know it wasn't. We're the only ones to know the fight you two got into ended by my hands."

"You're never to mention that, Heather." He turned on the stairs to look down at her. "We agreed."

"No, you insisted. You're always telling people what they can do, what they can think, and what they should believe. You never asked me if I liked the way Neal looked at me. You never ask me about my feelings regarding anything!"

She pushed past him on the stairs and he watched her run down the hall to her room. Her outburst baffled him. All he ever did was protect her from the cruel realities of life. Neal wasn't right for her, he saw that. He thought she had too.

Kane took Timber to his room and laid her on the bed. He got a towel and a wet washcloth from his bathroom to clean her skin the best he could. She moaned with agitation and he stroked under her chin until she calmed. He removed the shirt and was in the process of lifting her up when someone knocked at the door.

He leaned over and kissed Timber before going to the door. He opened it a crack. "Yes?"

"Heather said Timber was back. She said she was hurt and I thought I'd..." Beth's eyes widened at his snarl.

"We're busy." He slammed the door shut and turned the key in the lock.

Walking back to the bed, he knelt on the floor and examined Timber as he never had before. He looked over her cuts and abrasions. He touched her dry lips and gaunt features signifying dehydration.

"I'm going to get you something to eat and I'll lock the door while I'm gone." He kissed her unmoving lips.

At the door, he looked back. Anger hurt him and he felt the killer instinct surfacing. All his life, he fought those urges unless he stood on four paws. Now he thought of nothing else than hunting down and killing whoever hurt his beautiful half-breed.



A key in the door lock clicked. The handle rattled and the hinges creaked. Slowly the door began to swing into the room. Timber shifted before she could think. She stood on the bed growling, afraid to let her guard down.

"Good, you're awake," Kane said.

It was a good thing he quickly set the tray on the dresser because she couldn't stop her leap. Poised for attack, she leapt off the bed. In mid-air, she shifted from her wolf-cat form back to her human shape.

Kane caught her around the middle and hugged her. In all practicality, he should have seen her as a threat. He should have shifted and he didn't. It was obvious he understood her better than she understood herself. He trusted her with his life and she found it no small thing from him.

"Easy does it, puss."

"I didn't think anyone would ever find me." She speckled his face with her grateful kisses.

He carried her back to the bed. "No chance of that if you're on this estate, however, if these kisses are for a hero, Willie is the one that led me to you."

"He unchained me from the wall?"

"Yes."

"Then why did he leave me there?" she sobbed, clinging to his neck, not wanting to let go.

"Willie thought I had put you there. I've set him straight on that account." He sat her down and held her face. "Who did put you there?"

"I don't know, some man. He knew who I was and that...that we've been intimate." She closed her eyes and savored the feel of his fingers on her face. She had lain in that dark, dank crypt trying desperately to remember everything about him.

Timber hiccupped a sob.

Kane pulled her head back to his shoulder. "Did he say anything else? Something to make you think he was really doing this to seek revenge against me?"

"I don't know. Everything is fuzzy. I don't even know how long I was in that place." Her eyelids got heavy with sleep again.

"Two days." Kane lifted her chin and kissed her. "Hold on, sweetheart, I'm going to take you to your bedroom."

"No!" She held tighter. "Please keep me in your room."

"Okay, but how about we get you into a warm bath?"

At her nod, he carried her into his bathroom. She sat on the toilet seat while he filled the tub. He squirted a generous amount of shampoo into the stream of water, producing masses of foaming soap.

"There you go." He took her hands and pulled her to her feet.

Carefully, he took the soiled shirt off her. She closed her eyes, unable to watch his face as he looked over her bruised flesh. When his hand held her face, she opened her eyes and looked at him.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"Now that I'm here with you."

His smile warmed her insides. She wondered if there would ever come a day the flutter in her belly wouldn't come when he looked at her.

Kane scooped her up and eased her into the white cloud of bubbles. He soaped a wash cloth and tenderly bathed every inch of her skin. He washed her hair and sat there on the rim of the tub for a long time without speaking while his fingertips massaged her scalp.

"You've never been cleaner," he commented while wrapping her hair in a towel once he had her all rinsed.

"It feels good."

He tipped her head back on the edge of the tub. "I want you to lie here and relax for a few minutes."

"Kane?" She grabbed his wrist to prevent him from moving away.

"I'll be right back." He bent down and kissed her. "I'm going to put clean sheets on my bed."

He left the bathroom door open wide and she watched him take on the chore of stripping off the covers. For a few seconds, he went out of sight and then returned with the clean linens. From what she understood of the housekeeping chores in the house, Willie had the job under the supervision of Marianne.

In no time at all, he had the bed made. He helped her from the tub and did all the work at getting her dry, including blow-drying her hair.

"You look better." He picked her up and carried her to the bed.

"Thank you." She hugged him.

"I'd do anything for you, puss." His voice took on a low, gravelly tone. She didn't comment on the way his words comforted her.

"Now let's get some food in you." He plopped her on the bed.

She rested back against the fluffed pillows while he fetched the tray.

Timber sipped slowly from the spoonful of beef broth he held up to her lips. The liquid felt good on her raw throat muscles.

"I like wearing your clothes." She confessed as she watched his long, tawny fingers wrap around a knife. He moved his hand back and forth, slicing a piece of meat and put it to her mouth.

"I noticed." He rubbed her lip. "I like you in them."

"And out of them." She laughed weakly.

"Yes, that as well." He smiled. "Right now I can't think of anything but getting you all healed."

"Kane, what if this has something to do with the will?" She picked up a spoon and took several slurps of the soup on her own.

Her stomach went beyond the pains of hunger and she laid the spoon aside to lift the bowl. Quickly, she gulped the beef-flavored liquid. She was glad to have the strength to lift her hand, especially when Kane's face came close.

"You're making a mess of that clean shirt." He sat next to her and wiped her chin with a white linen napkin.

She touched his whiskers. He hadn't shaved in a long time and it gave a different feel to his jaw. The hair had softened, lying flatter, and resembling a beard rather than a day's growth. He kissed her fingers as they trailed over his lips. Her lungs tightened with emotion when she realized he had worried more than she thought anybody would ever worry about her.

"You're avoiding the subject." She picked a piece of bread off the roll and put it in her mouth. "What if someone in the house doesn't agree with the terms your grandfather laid out?"

"Our grandfather," he corrected.

"No, he was your grandfather. I'm a product of invention. I'm a creation he left to an experiment," her voice dropped low. "I'm nothing."

"You're my soul-mate!" Kane blurted out.

She saw how he wished he didn't say it.

“Your what?”

As soon as she asked, she wanted to take it back and not question what she had hoped for from the beginning.

“You heard me. It can’t be news since I bred you and told you I won’t let anyone else have you.”

“I said I wasn’t going to be your baby machine for money.” She pushed the tray away, almost spilling what was left of the soup.

“That’s not why I want you.” He walked across to the door and flung it open. “I’ve things to do,” he said without turning back to her.

“Kane!” she called to him, frightened to be alone.

He stopped and looked back. “I’ll be back in a little while.” He smiled. “You’ll be safe in here.”

She nodded and heard him turn the key in the door to lock it.

Some proposal, she thought. The Neanderthal man was alive and well, living in the twenty-first century. She sighed. The brute assumed control of everything. While she wanted him to be her sole lover, could she trust she’d be his?

Timber flopped back on the bed and stared at the ceiling while analyzing his statements. He had said she was his soul-mate. But he could be spooning her more lies and she couldn’t let him forever feed her the possibility he would love her. She got up and put the tray on the dresser. Crawling back on the rumpled sheets, she curled up in the middle of the bed to sleep. Too many things stirred in her distressed brain. Deprived of food and water, her harrowing ordeal depleted almost all her energy.

She tossed about the bed with maniacal bouts of fear. If she closed her eyes, she had irrational thoughts her abductor would come back for her. She hopped off the bed at one point and stripped herself of the shirt spattered with soup stains. Kane had left another shirt on the chair and

she put it on. His scent permeated the cotton. She felt closest to him when his sweat, his cologne, his unique scent cloaked her skin.

Pressing her face into his pillow, she tried to find a fresh trace of him there. A sudden noise made her sit up. A grunt, a whimper, something not quite distinguishable came from her room. Her cold toes touched the flat braided carpet lightly and she tiptoed to the door. The heavy breathing from the other side of the door alerted her to someone in her room. She looked at the doorknob and wondered if Kane had locked it. The old key hole was empty of a skeleton key. Then the ancient locks could be opened by anyone with a similar key. So often, those locks were for mere privacy and not practicality.

A door shut and she couldn't tell if it were the outer door of her room or another in the hallway. However, she had to find out who was in her room. She gripped the glass knob and prayed it was locked. Locked would mean she'd stay safely in Kane's room and wait to tell him what she heard.

Another painful whimper made her turn the knob in her hand. Damn her luck.

She peered around the corner.

The sound was louder and she moved the door further to see. Her feet shuffled nervously, yet bravely forward. The room looked untouched, except the contrast of red against white on the carpet.

Timber rubbed her blurring eyes and followed the smear to the far side of her pristine bed.

"Beth?" Timber dropped to her knees next to the girl.

The girl's eyes were wide and vacant. Her chest had a silver letter opener protruding like a cross and Timber recognized it from the desk. She turned her head, verifying it as the same.



Beth's throat gurgled and blood bubbled up around the blade like bath soap, foaming red.

"Oh Beth, who?"

Timber wrapped her fingers to the metal hilt and jerked the silver dagger free. She pulled the corner of the comforter down and pressed it to the wound. Instead of better, it made things worse and the blood Timber held back oozed from Beth's mouth. It flooded like a river onto the white carpet. The twisted fibers soaked up the blood greedily.

"I don't know what to do," Timber cried.

Beth's body convulsed once. A protest against death, a reflex of muscles seized up from the lack of blood. Then she went still. Her hair matted with the coagulating blood. Timber picked up a clean tendril. They could have been sisters and a terrible thought jammed itself into her mind. What if it wasn't Beth that was supposed to have been killed?

Her hand instantly latched onto the letter opener on the floor when she heard a noise in Kane's room. She rose up and held the knife defensively. Her breath caught as she lay in wait.

"Kane!" She dropped the knife and ran into his arms.

"What happened?" He moved her aside and went to Beth on the floor.

"I don't know." She didn't want to sound guilty, but his glance up at her took her thoughts back to Laurie's death. "I wasn't here."

"Did you see who was? Did you hear anything?" He tugged the comforter the rest of the way off the bed and covered Beth.

"A grunt. That's why I came in here." She watched him as he surveyed the room. "How can you stay so calm?"

"Do you think if I were hysterical it would solve anything? I can't find out who's doing this if I panic. I can't protect you if I'm not thinking clearly." He picked up the letter opener. "Is this something new to the room?"

"No. It was in here before." She looked at the blood all over her hands and the shirt of Kane's she wore.

She couldn't stand the smell and without a word, rushed off to Kane's bathroom. The blood stained her fingers and she scrubbed harder. Her hands burned from the abrading she gave them, but she washed them a dozen times more.

"Are you all right?" Kane asked from the doorway, several minutes later.

She nodded, not trusting her voice to impart the same lie.

"I'll go get Morley and Willie. Do you want me to wait until you clean up so you can go with me?" He turned the faucet off and held her fingers.

She shook her head.

"You can go." She squeezed his hands reassuringly. "I'll stay in your room with the door locked."

From the reflection in the mirror she saw him hesitate. "Timber, I don't think you did it."

"Thank you." She folded the washcloth and put it on the edge of the sink.

He gave her a kiss to the cheek.

"Kane?" She went to the door and caught him before he left the bedroom. "I think whoever it was thought Beth was me. We have similar shapes, hair, and she was, after all, in my room."

"I had the same idea."

## *Chapter Nineteen*

Everything was handled as it was before, in secrecy. The body of another mutant would disappear without a trace or a question. Once Kane returned to his room, he found Timber pacing and it unnerved him.

“Come with me, puss.” He reached out and ensnared her hand in his. “Let’s get you out in some fresh air for a while.”

He took her to the garden, where they walked side by side. Slowly they passed through the white arbor dripping in large pink roses. He always liked the powerful scent because it masked the ugliness of anything, even the decaying carcasses of some hunt.

Timber’s eyes closed as she inhaled. He picked one of the prettiest roses and held it to her. She took the flower and smiled. She sniffed the fragrant pink bloom and her lashes lifted. He watched her eyes sparkle and knew it was for the memory of the bouquet he had given her. He witnessed firsthand the adoration she had for him that day, and it was still there, shadowed by the traumatizing events. The smile faded and he saw the severity of it all crash in on her. She couldn’t hold back her tears and he wrapped his arms around her. The heavy shudders came with racking sobs on his shoulder.

He thought the walk in the languid afternoon of tranquility would comfort Timber. For him, the anger and overwhelming helplessness became his private battle. She needed him to stay calm and he couldn’t. His frustration blurted out the one question he fought not to ask her.

“He fucked you, didn’t he?” The bluntness and tone were as tame as he could manage with the fury tearing up his insides.

“No...I don’t know,” she sobbed. “I can’t remember everything.”

“Tell me what you do recall. I want to hear all the details.” He led her to a swing under an overgrown arbor.

“I was taken from my bed. I hadn’t the strength to fight or change. He drugged me and I couldn’t shift. He carried me for a long while over his shoulder and it hurt my stomach.” She nuzzled her cheek to his shoulder and let her head rest there.

He wanted to stop her and not know more. A strange need made him press her to go on. “After you were in the mausoleum, what do you recall him doing to you?”

“I thought I picked up a trace of your scent. I was in a fog and everything went dreamy in my mind. I was on a table.” Her fingers dug into his shirt and crumpled it in her fist at his waist.

“You were on the sepulcher of Hezekiah Wolverton. The stone tomb is his burial vault.” His hand stroked over her arm as he held her.

She pressed her face under his jaw. When she talked again, the brush of her trembling lips touched his pulse.

“I was lying there, wishing you’d help me and...”

“Timber, did he breed you?” The anger sizzled out on his ragged breath.

“That’s all you care about, isn’t it? Did some stranger fuck me?”

Kane recognized her panicked fear. He put an arm around her and kissed the side of her head. “Tell me the rest,” he whispered. “I want to know.”

She hiccupped a dreadful sob. He felt her distress and in sympathy his chest tightened. “Tell me everything, puss, you’re not to blame.”

She shook her head in refusal and he held it fast to look into her changing eyes.

“Tell me, sweetheart.” He stroked under her chin as he always did to calm her.

“I don’t want to remember.”

He wrapped his arms around her and hugged her fiercely. “Tell me Timber, I’ll never let you go because of it.”

She took a deep inhale.

“He was stroking my legs and slobbering on me. He wanted to rape me, but someone came. He hung me by my arms against a cold wall and they left. The next thing I remember is an animal...licking me between my legs. The man was angry and he left again.”

“Who else was there?”

“I don’t know. It’s all so confusing. After that, it seemed forever before Willie put me on the floor.”

“That’s all?”

“I don’t know. The man made me drink something when he took me and most of the time, I could hardly remember my name.”

Kane didn’t say anything. She wasn’t going to give any details if he pressured her with the rage he suppressed. She was his. Anyone touching her with the flagrant disregard of his claim electrified the killing instinct in his blood. However, he pushed his thoughts to that of Timber and how he could best help her get past her pain.

“Hey, listen to me carefully.” He held her quivering chin as she tipped her head back and looked up at him. “I’ll kill him for taking you, but if you tell me he tortured you, he’ll get it ten times that amount from me. No one touches what’s mine.”

“You don’t know who it... You do know, don’t you?”

"Yes." He bowed his head. "When I took the belt from your wrists, I picked up a trace of a scent. It's of the half-breed, Neal Wolverton."

"He's the one you said you killed because he touched Heather, isn't he?"

"That was a lie to protect her. I thought he was dead because she told me she killed him."

"Why did he take me?"

"I don't know, not yet. I think maybe it had something to do with my grandfather's will."

"If he's a half-breed like I am, then I'd be of no use to him."

"Not alive, you wouldn't."

"But why kill me? He could breed one of the others."

"He may know he's too late."

"How can he be too late?"

"You know how you felt as if something were going to happen but didn't know exactly what?" He pressed his forehead to hers, wanting to spare her anymore angst over his feelings toward her.

"Yes."

"Well, all werewolves have a sixth sense in different degrees. Willie's is somewhat advanced." Kane put his hand over Timber's midsection. "He told me you're going to have a child."

"He touched my belly when I was in the mausoleum." She placed her hand on his.

"The point of whether or not we have a baby together now seems to be moot."

"I never said I didn't want your baby, I just...never mind." She turned her head away.

"I think you'll be a perfect mother, Timber. I think any child of ours will be a very lucky to have you."

She looked over at him. Her slender arms coiled around his neck like a noose and he hugged her, thankful she was still alive.

"I'm sorry this didn't go the way things should have went. I mean, in a normal manner for you." He kissed the side of her head.

"My life has always been crazy. I don't think this is so abnormal." She pulled her head back and looked at him.

It excited him the way her green eyes gave love.

Kane stood and took her hand. "Minerva has the same ability and she can tell us for sure if you're pregnant." He pulled her to her feet.

"Stop." She tugged her fingers from his grip. "I don't want people to know."

"You're right." He ran his hands down the side of her face, over her shoulders. "If Hezekiah's will is making someone kill, you will be in more danger."

"That's not why. I don't want everyone looking at me as some leech trying to trap you."

"Timber." He smoothed back her hair and cupped her face. "My sweet adorable puss, that's the whole point of coming in heat and coming home."

"No. I don't care what you say. I can't accept things so easily with this natural order of things. Outside this estate, there's a world of people that would call me trashy, a slut, a whore, and a gold-digger."

Kane couldn't hold back his laughter. He hugged her tight and wished they could be those kinds of people. The ignorant, the narrow-minded, and then he laughed harder because he had been that sort of person once, only a different species.

"We'll pack and leave here."

"For how long?"

"Forever, if you'd like." He kissed her.

“You’d really give this up for me?”

“I’ll not endanger my son.”

“I don’t want to leave. You said I was family and I believe that, the longer I’m here. I’m not going to let anyone run me off or dictate what I do.”

“We’ll go somewhere that will be safe for my child and...”

“Stop saying your child. He’s *ours*!”

Kane stared at her. His laugh came easily again. He found no end to the delights he experienced when he was with Timber. Her nostrils flared with outrage and he knew he'd never tire of her.

“Ours.” He pulled her head close. “You both are important to me.”

“Why? You want me to be honest, but can you be?”

He lifted a brow. “You knew I cared about you when I bought those blasted flowers.”

“I know you’ve wanted to possess me like some trophy. You’ve wanted me to produce a child for money. Now you’ve reduced everything down to the sentiments of two dozen roses as if they mean everything.”

“Accept it for what it is, Timber. We’re good together and it’s the best you’ll get from me. Take it or leave it.”

“Ultimatums?” she squealed. “What if I said I’ll leave it? I’ll pack and go away from you and my home? Do you think I believe for one minute you’d let me, now that you have the prized child to get your inheritance?”

He stared at her, wanting to say yes, she could go, and he’d not lift a finger to stop her. How many times in the beginning did he tell her he wouldn’t let her stay?

“You’re right. I’ll never let you go. You and the child belong to me, forever.”

“All right,” she finally said.



He craved the notion of love as a magical elixir to settle his nerves for eternity.

Timber accepting they were good together worked as well. Some rough edges needed smoothing and that would take time, but on a whole, they had been extremely wonderful together.

"It's that simple for you?" He didn't trust the thrill she brought to his life.

One arm and then the other slinked around his waist. She jerked him forward so he had to step toward her.

"You never despised me as a half-breed, did you?" she asked.

He answered with a grunted "not really."

She scratched his back and pushed her nails up over his shoulder blades. Slowly sliding her fingers down, she tucked into the waistband of his pants.

"While I don't like to be bossed around, I'm still entertaining the notion you'll adjust. Be warned, Kane, I don't ever plan on leaving you."

He bowed his head and brushed his lips over hers. "I'll accept that as a promise."

Her arms tightened around him. The sparks of fire in his heart warmed with an admiration for her endurance. He had practically run her off the place. Instead of going, she persisted with her affection until she had him a trained pup willing to do anything to please her. A fact he'd try to keep secret. It couldn't be a good thing to let her know there wasn't anything he wouldn't do for her.

"Make love to me." She nibbled at his jaw.

"Now?"

She nodded and kissed his chin.

"You're sure?"

“Yes. I want to smell the perfume of this place while your cock caresses the creation of our bodies.”

Kane scooped her up and took her to a bed of lilyturf. The thick, dark green blades made a nest for him to lay her in, surrounded by a bed of roses. He inhaled the fragrance, not of the blooms of pink and yellow, but of her. That distinctive womanly headiness perfumed with the vanilla lotion she used on her skin.

Her soft body pressed slightly to his one side as he lay down with her. Timber brought the flames of his soul to surface every time he held her close. Her kisses fanned the embers of all his cravings. Scrubbing at his ribs, she clawed him with passion’s first tides.

“We can wait to do this if you’re tired,” he suggested.

“I asked you to make love to me and you’re trying to talk me out of it, why?”

“I don’t want to hurt you or the baby.” His hand caressed her belly.

“The baby is smaller than a bean.” She smiled. “You know, you say the nicest things that sometimes it makes me I forget how mean you were a couple days ago.”

“Hmmm, I was a jerk and I wish you would forget that.”

He put his hand behind her head and brought her to his mouth. Her parted lips encouraged him to taste. He sucked on her tongue and let it rove over his. He brushed his fingers, gentle and loving, over her hair at her temples. He took time to watch her expressions.

“Kane, you’re acting funny, why?”

“It pains me to think how they hurt you.” He pulled her wrist to his mouth and kissed the fading scratches.

“They’re healing fast.” She held her palms up. “Nothing at all is left from where I fell in the street.”

“I know and I’m glad.” He knew the physical inflictions would heal. It was the emotional scars she’d carry forever that made him angry.

“I see you’re thinking too much. I don’t want that while you make love to me.” She unbuttoned his shirt.

He looked at her pale fingers on his chest. The black hairs wisped possessively to claim her. He sat and pulled the shirt free from his body and drew her up.

Timber pushed him down into the thick grass. Her warm leg slid over his abdomen and she straddled his waist.

“I want to watch you fucking me.” She leaned to kiss him.

Her small pecks traveled outside his mouth. She kissed his nose, his eyelids, and his forehead. She moved higher and her breasts swung like pendulums above his waiting lips.

He lifted his head to nuzzle his face into one of her succulent tits and captured a nipple between his teeth. His hand caught her other breast, which he molded with his fingers while he sucked on her. He wanted to kiss her delightful mouth except her body arched, and her moans brought him such stimulation, he’d not ask her to come back down.

They didn't talk as they delved into a quiet place of thought. Sensations had no need for verbalization. For the better half of an hour, they only kissed and touched in contemplation of where their explorations could take them.

Timber sat up and rocked her hips to rake her clit over the swath of hair on his abdomen. He felt the knot with every pass on his navel. He reached up and massaged her breasts, stroking and twisting her nipples until she became agitated by everything he did.

“Lift up.” He held her sides to help.

Her body tensed and he let her lower at her own comfort. Inside her hot body, her muscles twitched, claiming his shaft, drawing him deeper.

“Oh God, that feels good,” she breathed.

“Are you all right?”

“I’m going to think you really care about me if you keep asking me that.”

“Geez, Timber.” He pulled her down so her breasts compressed to his heaving chest. “I do care, I care very much for you and I don’t ever want you to not believe it.”

“Shush,” she murmured low. “I was teasing. I know you care.”

She closed her eyes and they kissed, they cuddled, and their hips rubbed until the urgency drew them from the love to the passions of their sex. Timber bounced with unmerciful pleasure and rode his cock. He propelled her up and she came down. His fingers found their way to her ass and, on one downward drop of her weight he penetrated her anus with the tip of his middle finger.

“Ooooh!” she squeaked, but continued to jounce uncontrollably on his cock and his finger.

He rubbed a hand over her belly and strummed his fingers over her clit. He massaged the nub through the patch of hair with a voracity to which she continued to respond. His other hand kept her ass cheeks parted and he dipped his finger further into her with a methodical purpose.

When she draped over him, a series of spasms jerked her on his chest. Her tight, clenching body made him react and he grunted with the up thrust of his hips. It wasn’t enough and he rolled her to the dent they had made in the grass.

He caught her whimpers in the echoing cavern of his throat. She was too tired to go on, and still, his need to make her forget what happened in the mausoleum urged him to make her body reply. His kiss, once a

tender caress of her lips, made a violent blockade of her breath. Each rasp of her gasps drove him to the edge of insanity.

Her hips thrust up and the sounds she made escalated to the succinctly rapid urgency to climax again. His hands cradled her head and the arch in her back. His mouth caressed her face and he murmured all the sentiments he knew she loved to hear.

“You’re a precious treasure to me, puss. Your beautiful, silky body and warmth of affection drive me crazy when I even think how close I came to losing you.” He tried to apologize for his roughness. “You’re mine and I can’t imagine a life without you.”

She locked her arms around him and held on as the flow of exalted energy poured through him. His hands soothed the tense muscles of her back under a barrage of strokes. He tried to be gentle, even though the wave of tremors he shook from forced Timber up. She ground her hips harder to his. Her movements quickened with an onslaught of strength that lifted him. Her palms brushed at his ribs with agitation. When her body erupted with dripping vibrations and the sensual purrs riffled from her throat, his stimulation peaked. The velvety touch of her fingertips slid around his hips and kneaded the cheeks of his ass. With the hum she emitted, he found his heaven.

He kissed up and down her throat. His teeth gently bit into her shoulder. Her hips vaulted with a growing need for him to quench the thirst she had. More than happy to accommodate, he drove his cock passionately into her.

“Oh Kane, I need you.” She pressed her face into the side of his neck and nuzzled her nose to the hot, stubble of his short beard. “Oh please, I can’t...I can’t breathe without you satisfying me.”

Kane let out a strangled roar as he plunged into her quaking body. The head of his cock started to flare and fill her. With masterful,

oscillating strokes, he lodged against her womb and her piercing shrieks ended in whimpering sobs. Her body trembled as he let loose his final shudder and her tight core milked him of his sperm. He kissed her flushed cheeks. With his appreciation, he held her until his swollen flesh shrank from the tightness of her muscles and then he flopped to his back.

"Damn that felt good." He turned and laid a hand on her glistening belly. "I didn't hurt you?"

"No," she answered blissfully. "You didn't hurt me."

Kane cuddled and stroked her moist body.

"The baby?"

"No, you didn't hurt any part of me." She purred against his neck. "Did Willie say if we're to have a boy or girl?"

"He didn't say."

"I couldn't choose, though I suspect you'd want a son since you keep mentioning a boy. Oh Kane, I've never been this happy before. I don't think you could ever understand how I've longed to be here, in a house with family, and to have the start of my own family."

Kane closed his eyes to her continuous petting as she talked. The light massage and the musical sound of her voice soothed tension that aggravated him.

When she stopped talking, he opened his eyes and leaned on an elbow.

"I didn't say it right," he confessed.

"What didn't you say right?"

Her eyes sparkled with adoration. He wanted it bottled and preserved for all the times in the future he'd give her hardship with his bullheadedness.

"Timber, I care for you. I told you from the start to leave and I never meant it. That's why I've been holding tight to you every minute since. I've been afraid you'd actually leave."

"I know. Why do you think I've stayed?" She laid her head on his chest.

His heartbeat skipped along quickly.

"It feels right here and I know I belong with you." She sighed.

"I can be..."

"...mean, stubborn and ill-tempered." She laughed. "You can also be very gentle and passionate."

She smiled and pet his chest, giving him a hungry look. He pressed his mouth over hers and drove his tongue against hers with an eagerness to taste her.

He felt hesitancy in her embrace.

"What's wrong?" He drew back, weaving his finger into her hair.

"Tired, I guess." She got up and started dressing.

"I bet you don't know how cute the back of your knees are."

"The back of my..." She turned and twisted to look. "I think you're being cute."

He laughed and got up on his knees to pull her to him. "You're beautiful from head to toe."

She shivered at the kiss to her belly. His tongue dipped into her navel and she drew back.

"Come on, puss. Come on back down here and I'll kiss you in all the other places I find cute on you."

"Later."

Kane jumped to his feet and dressed. The violet, crescent shadows beneath her eyes were darker than he recalled from earlier. She really

was tired and he was being selfish again. His hand snagged hers and towed her toward the swing.

“Sometimes you’re so very protective I forget to chastise your bad behavior.”

“Bad? Me? Naw, I’m always a gentlemen. Where are you going to find a man that prefers to pleasure you before getting off himself?”

“I’ve never had anyone protect me for any reason. I’ve always had to be self-reliant. Every woman likes to have a moment when they don’t have to worry about anything.”

“I’m sorry I wasn’t able to do that when you were taken.” He cupped a hand to her cheek.

“I know. You can’t watch over me every minute of every day. But when you do, it’s...” With a smile, she heaved a peaceful sigh. “It’s a slice of heaven which I treasure and it makes all the bad times fade into distant memories.”

He kissed her. He liked kissing her. He found it hard to resist.

“Will you try to tame the bully in you?” she asked.

“Not easily.” He sat on the swing with her.

“Fair enough,” she purred under his throat.

Kane gave a push to the swing and she curled her legs up under her.

“I never did much sitting out here,” he said looking around. “It’s nice.”

“It’s very nice when shared.” She wove her fingers into his on his lap. “What do we do next?”

“Do?”

His throat muscles jerked as he swallowed hard. Timber was going to have a baby and he was going to be a father. Marriage, commitment, their lives joined was something foreign to them both.

“About what?”



“About the killer?”

“Oh.” He closed his eyes and kissed along her hairline. “Nothing.”

“We have to do something.” She sat up and put her feet on the ground, making the old wood swing stop.

“I meant *we* won’t be doing anything. You’ll stay in the house with Heather and the others. I have something to look into.”

Kane wrapped Timber’s arm around his and walked her to the house. All day he picked up on Neal’s scent. He’d caught a trace in the mausoleum and now, as they sat amongst the most fragrant of flowers, he had a whiff as if it were a pungent despicability, poisoning the air.

“Let’s go in now. I want you to rest while I see to the matter of Neal Wolverton.”

He had his arms around her waist and he liked the way she pet his hand over her belly. It soothed all his ragged nerves.

“I think you should let me go with you.” She leaned on the kitchen door. “You’re going to do something dangerous.”

Kane laughed at her reflection. “Sweetheart, what could be more dangerous than someone killing off Wolvertons?”

“No, I mean you’re in danger. I can sense it and...”

He put a finger over her lips. “You’re mine and I won’t let anybody try to take what belongs to me. Dangerous or not, this is about me, not you.”

“I know I’m a means to an end for your quest to control an empire,” she replied sullenly. “It doesn’t mean I don’t care what happens to you.” She hugged him and then quickly opened the door.

“Timber, watch Heather. I mean closely so you know her every move.” He pushed her in the house and pulled the door closed.

## Chapter Twenty

Timber wished she could get Kane to see there was nothing special about Heather. She was a werewolf and a self-centered person. Yet, who could blame her after growing up with Kane pampering her like some princess of his Wolverton dynasty?

Timber's skin quivered like a leaf in a storm. An alarm of senses terrorized her enough to make her feet root to the spot by the door. Her hand remained fastened to the knob in hopes of escape. Heather entered by way of the backstairs but it wasn't her who had gripped Timber's lungs and squeezed. It was someone else and she waited for the figure she heard in the shadows of the next room.

"Hello, Timber." The man entered.

"Oh, I didn't know you two met." Heather danced lightly across the room to the refrigerator. "Anybody want to share an apple?"

Timber's vision began to blur with the familiar flash of colors.

"No, we haven't formally met," he said, staring at Timber.

His evil smile was all knowing, and Timber knew it well. She blinked to focus.

"Timber, this is Neal Wolverton. He's another—" Heather yelped when Timber grabbed her arm.

"Come with me," Timber insisted. She flung open the door and it slammed the corner of the counter.

"What are you doing?" Heather shrieked and jerked at Timber's grip.

"He wants us dead," she said, running with Heather in tow. "Kane!" Timber shouted, not knowing which direction he went.

"You're crazy." Heather broke free and ran off ahead of her toward the woods.

Timber followed, knowing Kane would hate her if she left his sister alone with the man. Shifting to her animal form in the middle of her run, she leapt over logs and low scrub bushes as she went further into the dense forest surrounding the estate.

A whistle stopped her and she shifted into her human form and ran to Kane in a small clearing.

"I told you not to follow me." He held her out from him.

"The man, the man that took me," she panted. "He's at the house."

"No, he's not." Kane moved her aside.

She turned to look behind and there stood Neal.

"What's wrong, Kane?" Neal grinned and leaned on the fat trunk of a tree. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

"What took you so long to return?" Kane folded his arms together.

"Well, seeing how we didn't quite get along or see eye to eye about Heather, I felt it in my best interest to skedaddle for a while," he coughed, "you know, until the will was read and how it was that you believed you would get Wolverton instead of Morley."

"What makes you think you're safe now?" Kane paced back and forth in front of her.

"What's wrong, Kane? Can't understand how it is your precious sister could love a half-breed? I see you've found one for yourself. But then you had no choice, did you? She's the binding link to your control of this empire our ancestors built. That babe she carries is your ticket to the front of the line."

Timber listened and tried not to think of anything other than what Kane was going to do. It didn't even seem strange Neal knew she was pregnant since Kane explained how some werewolves sensed that sort of thing. She believed in Kane and the feelings she held for him. Intuition had to have a part in her considerations and while everything Neal said was true to some degree, no one could factor in emotion. Kane never planned to care for her. He made that obvious on many occasions as he resisted offering up affection. She carried his child within her and he could have cut the emotional strings. Instead he reinforced them by admitting he cared very much. He left the way open for them to have a future together and she needed to have faith in that.

A shot was fired from the woods and Kane dove on top of Timber. It reaffirmed his protectiveness of her. However, evil snippets kept reminding her he would protect his child above all else.

Kane rose up and ran at Neal. They danced a waltz of danger and Timber got to her feet. Who had shot? Was it aimed for them or was it merely Morley hunting up supper for that evening?

Kane's second lunge missed and she gasped as Neal came at her. He got to her fast and held her in a precarious position. It prevented her from shifting or escaping. Kane shifted and stood ready to charge.

Neal held Timber around the middle. The sharp knife pressed her abdomen.

"So Kane, what will it be, you shift back or I slit open your playmate's belly. You can get to see your child spill to the ground in a pool of blood."

Timber gulped. She stared at Kane pacing on his four large paws. The rhythmic gait went from left to right and back again. He was thinking. If she knew him better, she could guess his thoughts.

"If you let me go, he'll be more reasonable." Timber whispered. "I can calm him down."

“No one controls Kane. He’s as stubborn as a mule when he thinks he’s in charge.” Neal sneered. “Besides, what assurances have I that you’ll not turn on me as well?”

Timber couldn’t think of any way to convince him. He was right. She could shift if the knife didn’t scare her so much.

She watched Kane’s steady gaze. His ability to read her emotions gave her an idea and she decided to try for the possible.

Letting her fear help, her eyes began to blur. Kane’s pause and the bow of his head told her he understood. Instantly she shifted, dropping down to her wolf-cat form, putting her out of the critical area of the knife.

Kane took her place within seconds. She leapt out of the way and Neal slashed the air. The knife glided across Kane’s shoulder and he flinched with a piercing howl. The fur flew in bits. She stepped to go toward him, except he had already spun back to attack Neal.

The second time the knife struck, it gouged the muscle of his shoulder. His yowl of pain backed him down. She started to approach until he snarled at her to back off.

In that delay, Neal shifted into his beastly shape. It wasn’t so much slow as it seemed painful and Kane tried to take advantage by lunging at him. He knocked Neal to the ground but Neal’s paw hit upon the knife and Kane rolled off with a yelp. Again Timber advanced, wanting to help him. She met his angry glare and knew he wasn’t going to let her interfere.

Neal’s gruesome form was larger than Kane, but slower. The bulk of his weight as his wolf was in his waist. His middle had the fat shape like a potbellied pig.

It never occurred to her that Kane could lose until Neal leapt on him and bit into the knife wound. Instantly she ran toward them and pounced on Neal. Her fang teeth sunk into Neal’s back leg. Blood spurt

into her mouth. She moved back as soon as her bite forced Neal to let go of Kane. When he did, he turned on her. She stood in fear and resolve as he charged. Unaccustomed to battling anything more than the transformation itself, Timber took an evasive action and ducked. The chunky wolf flew over her, and before he had time to turn and repeat the attack, she ran for Kane.

He was on his feet, and as she passed him, he growled the clear warning for her to stay away. She wanted to and yet there was nothing he could say or do to make her not want to protect him by any means. She loved him and with that passion came loyalty and a vigilant preservation of his life.

Kane's hackles rose. He was wounded and she could no longer count on his strength to win. However, before she thought of what she could do to help, Kane ran at Neal. At the last possible second, Kane shifted into his human form and grabbed the knife. Neal's leap came at precisely the same time Kane held the blade up and it plunged deep. With a twist, Kane let go and they toppled to the ground. Timber ran to get to him. Her paws pounded the ground and came to an abrupt halt at Neal's movement. He wasn't dead.

She watched Kane shifted back into a wolf. His fur was blood spattered, and his run faltered with a limp on his front leg. Nevertheless, his feet padded along with a determined victory. He clamped his teeth into Neal's throat and crushed his windpipe. The grinding of bones didn't stop as Kane continued to rip the flesh open and tear the wolf's throat out.

The severed jugular spewed blood like a geyser. The howls of pain turned to a deadly whimper fading to silence. The predator in her howled, as blood tainted everything. Neal thrashed a final time beneath

Kane's powerful jaw. An eternity of waiting ended in moments. She stood entranced by the brutality. Kane's victorious howl met hers.

Kane shifted back to a man. He staggered to Timber and crashed at her feet. She nuzzled her face to his and rubbed her muzzle against his skin. The fresh kill of Neal's blood clung to every pore on him. He didn't want her to have to deal with it.

"Go to the house," he commanded.

She licked his face clean before shifting into the beautiful, slender woman he had put all of his efforts into not losing.

"I will not, you're hurt." Her glassy, dazed look was nothing more than a pause for composure. She kissed him profusely and held his head in her lap. She pressed her palm over the wound in his shoulder and he willed himself not to cringe for her benefit. She held him lovingly to her waist and he didn't want to move. Unfortunately, he jerked with the pain and squeezed her side

"Are you all right?" he breathed heavily, and slowly he sat up to pull her against him.

"Yes." She closed her eyes and pressed her face to his hot, moist throat.

Kane pulled her face away to check for himself, not content until his eyes met the green tranquility of her eyes. She brought his soul peace. She soothed the savageness in him with the love that poured out in her embrace and her kiss.

"Let's go home, sweetheart," he murmured against her head. "You need to get me down to Hezekiah's lab so I can get this stitched up before I pass out."

"It'll heal, won't it? We heal quickly and..."

“Minor cuts and scrapes heal with very little effort on our part. This is somewhat different and I may lose too much blood before my body can start regenerating the tissue.”

He managed to get up with her help. They walked slowly. She encouraged him to lean his weight on her and he did so only for her benefit. She kept a hand over the knife wound as they walked and her chatter had a calming effect.

“There’s a way into the cellar over that way.” He pointed further along near the back of the mansion’s hundred juts in the structure.

Timber moved along until she found the inconspicuous entrance. She leaned down on the sloping cold gray doors and fingered the hasp. “It’s locked.” She looked up at him.

“Come get the keys from my pocket.”

Everything about the daylight dimmed for him. His hand went to her shoulder when she came to him.

“Kane?” She put her arms under his and hugged him to keep him up.

“My right pocket,” he groaned, trying to hang on as long as possible.

She couldn’t stop him from sliding down the wall. Once he sat, propped on hard gray stone, he pushed her to hurry and get the cellar doors open.

The jingle of the set of keys clattered against the heavy steel slabs. The creak of the hasp followed by grinding sound of the hinges told him she got it open. He pushed up on an arm to get to her.

“Kane?” She was there holding him a second later.

For a young woman, she was strong, but neither as a wolf or a human, she would have the strength to get him in the cellar.

He pushed away from her and shifted. His quick solution was also a painful one.

“Kane!”



Her startled cry was muffled by the thumps of his body tumbling down the stone steps into the room.

He shook uncontrollably. Timber's presence, her fingers petting over his head as he fought to change back, seemed enough, and yet he couldn't raise the level of energy he needed. Howling from the chaos his mind traveled, he latched onto Timber's voice.

"I'll take care of you," she whispered soothingly. "You needn't be afraid."

He had trouble thinking. As much as he was in pain, his trust in her, converted his disorientation into a peaceful clarity. She was everything he ever needed to be happy.

"Kane, please," she insisted. "I need you to come back to me so I can help you." Her fingers raked through his fur and scratched behind his ears. She nuzzled her face next to his sticky muzzle. "I trust you, please, trust me."

Kane willed himself back to a man and kissed her. He held the back of her head and kissed her hard.

"Lie still and I'll find everything you need." Timber hurried around and opened drawers and cabinets.

He noted she avoided the one with the jars of fetuses. She came back with an armload of items—scissors, needles, thread and something that had the word antiseptic on it.

"Pour some of that on the wound."

Timber put a hand on his good shoulder to hold him down. He gave it a reassuring pat. When the liquid burned deep into the wound, his roar came muzzled by the kisses Timber pecked over his face. The muscles in his jaw worked in unison with the pain and ached when the shock ebbed.

"Thread the needle and sew it, Timber."

"I... I can't..." her voice quaked.

"Half-breed, don't make me call you nasty names to get your hackles up. Just sew it and make no never mind of what pain I'm in. This has to be done."

She held the needle up and threaded it with a thick, black, waxy thread.

"That's my puss." He lifted a hand and stroked under her chin.

Timber smiled and leaned over to take her first jab at his flesh. Amazingly, she gathered the ragged skin together and made the long run of stitches without complaint.

"Good job, puss, a real good job." He squeezed her hand and let his heavy eyelids drop.

Timber adjusted her position and he forced his concentration on healing. In the half-sleep stage, his thoughts drifted with random simplicity. He cherished every moment he spent with Timber. He had things to change about himself and his inability to tell her how deep those feelings of love had rooted in his heart had to be first. She deserved to know she was loved for herself and for that alone.

When Kane felt the strength returning to his limbs, he opened his eyes and stared up at her reading a journal over him.

"What you got there, puss?"

He attempted to get up, but she held him down with her hand on his chest.

"Lie still or you'll make the bleeding start again. This is our grandfather's accounting of all he did. In the last couple hours, while you were sleeping, I managed to find out some very interesting facts."

"Oh, like I'm a half-breed too?" He chuckled and cringed with the pain in his shoulder.

“No.” She set the leather-bound notebook aside and put her hands on his cheeks. “You’ve never read it, have you?”

“I never saw it before.” He held her hand over his mouth and kissed her palm.

It seemed his weakest moment, to lay there and let her tend his wounds. Yet, it was also his strongest moment to be able to enjoy the comfort of not having to be a tough guy every minute with her.

“It seemed to be hidden. No one would look under that cabinet, I suppose, unless you have a reason to be down here on the floor.” Her mouth turned down with a frown. “Kane, I have something to tell you and I know you won’t want to believe it, but you have to keep an open mind.”

“If you’re concerned I’ll tear your throat out, don’t be. I’m as weak as a pup, and besides, you have an important purpose in my life.”

The grimace on her face told him instantly she thought he meant the baby.

“What do you want to tell me?” He laced his fingers between hers.

“Heather’s a half-breed.”

Kane closed his eyes tight. “You read that in Hezekiah’s journal?”

“Yes. He considered her perfect and decided not to tell anyone, not even you. Though I think, he came to regret that later. If you just read...” She picked up the journal and Kane swatted it from her hands. The book careened across the floor and hit a cabinet.

“I don’t need to read it, I already suspected.”

“It’s not so bad. She’s still Heather and...and well, you’ve accepted me as part of your family. You don’t have to feel any different about her.”

“I don’t.”

“Not even if she is the one he made for you, and not me?”

“Hezekiah manipulated creation. He has no control over emotions. You are the one that fits me.”

He got up from his repose and stalked the room, disturbed that everything he guessed about Heather moved closer to becoming a reality.

“It must be close to supertime and we need to change.” He headed for the stairs.

He looked back for Timber, and watched her retrieve the journal. She clutched it to her.

“Leave that here.”

“No.” She shook her head. “I’m reading it and maybe you don’t want to know what it says, but I do. I wasn’t privileged with growing up around him, and I certainly don’t know the little secrets you undoubtedly still keep from me. I’ll not have you dictate what I can and can’t find out on my own.”

“Fine.” He waited for her to go up the stairs ahead of him. “And I’m not keeping anything a secret from you.”

“Then why didn’t you tell me you didn’t think Heather was a full-blood? You’ve thrown it up in my face every chance you get that I’m a half-breed.” She trudged up the narrow, dark stairwell as he turned off the light below them.

“It was a suspicion, Timber, nothing more—a hard fact I didn’t want to give credence to except...” He stopped when the door upstairs open.

Heather stood silhouetted in the frame of the opening.

Timber stopped a half dozen stairs from the top with him behind her. He shook off the feeling Heather would know what they talked about. When Timber casually slid the journal behind her back, he closed the space to conceal it. If there were no questions, there would be no hard answers to concoct. Truth or lies, both would be revealing and neither would serve a greater purpose than to disrupt the household more.

"You're a mess," Heather said and stepped out of the way so Timber could pass.

"We were hunting," Kane answered, before Timber told her how they killed Neal.

"It must have been a bear by the looks of you both." She reached out and stopped him from passing her. Her hand lifted to his face and her cool fingers stroked his cheek.

Kane used his thumb and forefinger to hold Heather's chin. "You look beautiful today. I'd hug you but as you can see I'd get you all bloody." He smiled.

"You know I don't mind. A little feral foreplay has always fascinated me." She licked his cheek and then suddenly, her lips were over his.

She kissed him before with her sisterly sweet pecks, but never passionately as if to arouse him. He let her finish, testing his emotions, and found nothing stimulating in her actions. It proved to him, Timber was his one true love.

"I hope you'll be sitting next to me at supper, now let me go get washed up." He set her aside and walked to Timber.

"I'll be there, Kane," Heather called.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" he snapped at Timber and she ran up the stairs to the second floor.

He took the flight slowly, unrushed, and praying each step closer he could explain his actions.

His bedroom door stood open and once inside he closed it. He didn't see Timber, but heard the water running in the bathroom. "I have to go get rid of the mess I made," he told her.

## *Chapter Twenty-One*

Timber came out of the bathroom with only a towel wrapped around her.

“You need to wash, rest, and have supper,” she told Kane.

“It’s important no one knows Neal is dead.”

“I know, so while you were passed out on the floor in the cellar, I asked Willie to hide him.”

“Willie?”

“Yes. He came to check on you. He’s not a big talker, is he? Anyways, I explained he was to hide the body where no one would find it. I told him no one could know and he seemed to understand.”

He rubbed a hand over his jaw. “I suppose Willie can handle it well enough on his own.”

“He’s very loyal to you and I’m still trying to figure why if you never liked half-breeds.”

He lifted a lock of her hair.

“He’s much like you, Timber. He needed my protection. You know how the family is. Well, I guess I’m the black sheep around here because I take care of the half-breeds.”

“Is that the only reason you have for me?”

“It was the start. Hezekiah’s plan for us was the middle, but...”

“His plan was for you and Heather.”

"I meant us, as in his heirs." He put his hands on her hips. "I'll have you know, puss, there's a whole different ending for you and me. One I never could have imagined and it hasn't anything to do with what our grandfather wanted."

"Will it be a good ending?"

"Oh yeah."

She curled her finger into his waistband and led him into the bathroom.

"I hope this isn't a common thing around here. I'm not sure I like dealing with all the blood." She turned the faucet on and washed her hands first.

"Until you got here, we had a pretty boring existence." He looked at her in the reflection of the mirror.

She turned while soaping a washcloth.

"I've never had a boring day, not really. I sort of like the notion of going a whole twenty-four hours without something happening."

She wiped the cloth over his abdomen. The muscles moved, shrank, and pulled from her ticklish swirls with the cloth. Lowering to her knees, she unfastened his pants and pulled his cock out into her palm.

"I don't know that I can give you a day without anything happening, puss. Not when you start this kind of stuff."

She leaned forward and licked the tip of his cock.

"Do that again." He weaved his fingers in her hair and pulled her mouth closer to his erection.

"Like this?" She brought up saliva and wet the mushroomed head.

"Uh-huh," he moaned.

She traced the veins steeped in adrenaline. The vessels filling with hot blood jerked his shaft up into a jutting erection. Her fingers caressed

his scrotum with gentle massages, pumping, until he moaned from the ache she created.

She licked the plum head, her fingers wrapping the pulsating shaft. It grew in her hand to proportions she didn't remember to be so long. Her wet tongue trailed to his balls, letting every flicker of her tongue arouse him. She moved closer and kissed her way back up from his swollen sac to the velvety plump head where a drop of cum tempted her palate.

"This is a terrific idea you had at relaxing me." He breathed heavier.

Timber cupped his balls to roll them in her fingers as she sucked. Her other hand gripped the cheek of his ass. She loved the way the muscles moved as he thrust in short strokes and she swallowed his cock deeper into her throat.

"That's enough." He bent down and pulled her up.

Timber stuck her hand between their mouths. She had brought the washcloth up off the floor and rubbed his lips when he tried to kiss her.

"What the hell?" Kane spit on the floor.

"You're not kissing me without washing her saliva off first. The blood is one thing, but I'll not have you touching me with Heather's spit on you."

He wiped the back of his hand over his mouth. "I had a reason for doing that."

"I know, but I don't have to like it." She tried to leave the bathroom.

Kane followed and wrapped an arm around her middle. He held her tight as he untwisted the towel and pulled it open. His hand moved roughly over her quivering flesh, squeezing her breasts, and rubbing the ringlets at the center of her legs until she relaxed and tensed at the same time.



“You’re who I want. She’s who I have to keep happy and off guard.” He turned her to him and held her upper arms. “I believe she was behind the plot with Neal to kidnap you.”

“You should have told me before.” She twisted out of his reach and turned on the water to fill the tub.

“I told you to watch her closely.”

“I thought you meant because you were afraid something bad would happen to her.”

“No.” He held her to him. “I was concerned about her doing something to you.”

Kane scooped her up and stepped over the side of the claw foot tub.

“Your shoulder?” she said, careful not to bump it.

“We heal faster than usual.”

“I know, but this took longer.” She kissed the outlying areas from the stitched seam.

“It’s healed enough.” He stood her in the water and bit playfully at her shoulder and neck.

Timber didn’t flinch at all. Instead, she cocked her head and offered him all the access he wanted. Hours earlier he showed her how he could tear a man’s throat out and still she trusted him. Holding her head and giving her even less chance at moving, he sucked up and down the thin white column stretched out for him. He twisted her head and took full control as to where his lips scorched her flesh with burning kisses. All she offered in return were the sweet mewls of gratification. Beneath her chin, he stopped and rubbed his nose.

“Purr for me, puss. I love the way you purr.” He pressed his mouth over hers, bathing the inside of the cavern completely before freeing her.

Timber took every ounce of his affection with a gluttonous self-indulgence. He atoned for making her watch him kiss Heather and she let him pay the penance.

His mouth blazed light kisses over her shoulders. His fingers slipped down and pulled at her nipples, gentle tugs, tender twists, and loving swirls. He made her shiver with the excitement.

Kane lowered to his knees behind her and nipped at the wet cheeks of her ass. His tongue swiped between the cleft and she bent over with a surprised squeal of delight.

“Get on your knees and lean over the end of the tub.”

Timber followed directions. She prepared for the pressure of his cock penetrating her anus.

“Oh...oh...oh Kane...” she grunted. “Oh God, it’s too tight.”

He pulled out and fingered her cunt until she trembled. His fingers dipped in and pulled the creamy juices up the crack of her ass and he pushed his wet fingers into her bottom.

“There, all slick for me.”

Again, he entered her tight bottom. She gritted her teeth with each thrust and groaned at the way he hit a stimulating point inside her. Her hips banged against the curb of the tub and water splashed over the sides.

He leaned down and licked her back, kissing her spine with slurping nips at her skin.

“Can you handle it?” he asked.

She bit her bottom lip and held it between her teeth. “Uh-huh,” she grunted.

Her insides shuddered. The warmth of his sperm drenched her and made the jabs of his erection less torturous.

“Almost, puss.” He pulled her up and cupped her breasts. “I’m almost there.”

He squeezed and kneaded her flesh, and then his hand slid between her legs. Rubbing over the hood of her clit, he brought her to another climax. At the same time, he forced her back against him.

His groin jolted against her ass and he froze. He jerked several more times with an uncontrolled flex of his hips, and then held her.

“How was that for you?” He panted against her neck.

“Different.”

“You’ll learn to enjoy every fuck, sweetheart.”

“I enjoy being with you.” She put a hand up to hold his face against hers.

Kane pulled his shaft out of her sore bottom and stood up.

“Let’s get out so I can fuck you proper.” His fingers gripped her arm and he helped her up.

“Normal, in bed?” she asked.

“Hmmm, I was thinking something a bit different.” He lifted her like a weightless cloud in his strong arms and carried her to the bedroom floor. The soft silver gray carpet cushioned her back only half as much as the mattress.

“Wouldn’t the bed be more comfortable?”

Kane’s lips were to the top swell of her breast and he kissed into her breastbone.

“Change with me now.” He hugged her, nuzzling his face against the side of her head. “The wolf wants you.”

Timber nodded and Kane watched her sparkling green eyes shimmer into a tranquil blue. Her fingers touched his buttocks and he reveled in the sensual lightning tingling through him. She pulled away and his

thumb rubbed at her nipple. He kissed the hard bump, suckling it for a minute. His body pulsed with the need to fuck the wolf-cat that teased him by changing slowly. He loved that she learned to control the shift.

He lowered her to the floor and licked at her face as they both shifted into wolves. The smooth sable hair was a glossy softness on his mouth. He nudged her to roll over.

It was not a slow coupling as it could be with her human form but it would be gentler since he knew how to control her climax. He mounted her and clamped his teeth into the folds of skin between her shoulders. He let go to nuzzle her neck with affection, and then gripped the furry flesh again. He penetrated accurately the first time he drove his shaft into her channel. Her loud yowl painfully hit into his heart. He loosened his grip on the folds of skin as she relaxed and let him thrust in her.

Her body accepted him and he felt the rippling of her inner muscles. He rocked against her until she stilled with his shudders. His teeth bit down harder into the thickness of her coat. She whimpered and he let go immediately. Her body quaked, giving him the most enthralling sensation, twisting his cock. He fell away and left her thrashing on the floor until the spasmodic tremors she couldn't still subsided on their own. He wanted to lick her face and show her his affection, but her claws were painfully sharp.

Her purrs stuttered and he moved close to lick her face. She soon bounced up on her four paws. Affection poured from her slurps at his cheek, and then she nuzzled her face against his throat, purring into the thick ruff of hair. He loved the feline in her. He ate up her adoring gestures and took another swipe of his tongue over her nose.

Timber lay down at his feet. When he lay down, he draped himself partly over her. He tried to give her a secure feeling every minute they were together. Closing his eyes, he went to sleep listening to her

contented purr. When he woke, he found her curled to him in human form. Their naked bodies twined together peacefully.

“Hey, beautiful.” He wiped a hand over his mouth to cover a yawn.

She wiggled against him. “Good morning.”

“I think that was the best night's sleep I've had in a long time.”

“I know it was for me.” She freed her legs from his and sat up. “When did we get to the bed?”

He eased the white sheet up to cover her chilled limbs.

“I don't remember. You had shifted back and were using me as a pillow sometime after midnight. So I shifted, picked you up, and we resumed our positions in the bed.”

She trailed tickling fingers up and down his belly.

He laughed and pushed her back on the bed.

“I was thinking if I were to continue to stay in here, we could make my room the nursery,” she said.

“Good idea, however, I have a better one.” He held the sides of her head. “Hezekiah had the grand suite in this old house. It has an old nursery already attached. You could have more room to put things and...” He stopped talking when her face wrinkled. “What's wrong?”

“Just how far away is this room from yours?”

“You're cute, puss, real cute.” He kissed her nose. “I had every intention in sharing the room with you.”

“Oh.”

She smiled at his grin and his lips swept coolly up her warm cheek.

With the window open, he heard the song of the morning doves outside in the eaves. The scent of roses wafted up from the gardens and everything seemed right with the moment. He lusted for Timber and he let her know quickly.

“And just where do you think those fingers are going?” She seized his hand before he got between her legs.

“Oh, they figured on pleasuring you, woman, until you're ready to go get this beast some breakfast.”

“Then please proceed,” she giggled, whipping the sheet aside and spreading her legs.

Her feet shot up into the air, and following the vee of her wide stretched limbs, he looked at the petals of her mound slightly parted. The lips no longer hid the more sensitive pleats of pink flesh. Her fat clit winked at him in the center as she began giggling.

“Well, what are you waiting for?” she laughed.

“I want to watch you touch yourself.”

Her knees bent and she put her feet on the bed.

“I think that would pleasure you and this was supposed to be about me.” She reminded him.

“We’ll get to that part.” He gave her a wicked grin.

It was returned with equally naughty looks and laughter. Her fingers slithered seductively over her abdomen. He watched with rapt attention while she parted her pussy lips. He licked his tongue over his top lip, hungering to taste the moist center.

On the white sheet, her ivory-toned skin contrasted with a blushing pink glow. The coloring touched every inch of her shapely curves. With her knees still bent, her velvety thighs sloped outward. He smelled the fragrance of her ripe sex.

Timber liked the window open at night. He didn’t care until the breeze made him shiver. She trembled as well and his cock responded with a leap to readiness. He didn’t need more than her lying there to get an erection. How long could he watch without dispersing cum on the

sheets? His mouth watered to taste the first drop she massaged over her pussy lips.

His gaze followed her fingers in and out and around the smoothness of her mound glittering with the moisture. Her eyes closed and he watched her finger curl into her cunt. When he looked back at her face, he saw her watching him slowly stroke his cock.

“Can you imagine my heat?” she whispered. “My juices bathing your silky cock?”

“Uh-huh.” He nodded, unable to form words.

When her perfectly tapered fingers skated up her belly and cupped a breast, his mind split. Which direction should he watch? The nipple, plump like a grape, swelled at the pressure she pushed her breast up. Her head came forward and he could have lost his eager sperm when her lips stretched to the hard nub and sucked her succulent nipple between her lips.

She dropped her head back, leaving the glistening peak for the sensations she stirred with her fingers rubbing her clit. Periodically she dipped a finger between the thin flaps of reddening flesh.

“Oh Kane,” she moaned.

“Yeah, puss.” He thirsted to suck the dew from her.

“Don’t you...don’t you want to...oh...oh...oh...”

His hand pumped his cock to the rhythm of her gasps. Her fingers stopped the self-pleasure and she writhed on the bed before him. He could take her to new heights, only he couldn’t get past the sultry way she lay helpless in her orgasm.

The dewy labia parted upon her return from the netherworld her mind fell into and she drew out the hot fluids, smearing them over Kane’s cock. He pushed her back and crawled up to straddle her waist. Then laying his cock to her breast bone, he fucked the valley he created

by squeezing her breasts together. His shaft was encased in the flesh and peeked out at the top. Each stroke bumped her chin until she tilted her face to lick the head. Her fingers dug into the crevice of his ass and squeezed the cheeks with brutal force.

At his first tremors, she pushed him back and propped herself up on an elbow to suck him deeper into her throat. His balls nested to her chin. He jerked several times, unable to stop the flow. Once the eruption subsided and her tongue licked the last droplets from the tip, he got off the bed.

“Where are you going?” she asked.

“I think I owe you a breakfast.”

“You’re reneging on pleasuring me?” She orbited the entrance of her vagina with one finger. “You can’t resist me forever.” She gave him a throaty, sensuous laugh.

Kane lifted her legs up to his shoulders and jerked her to the edge of the bed. Her tits bounced with the rough handling. Her moans were pleasurable appreciation. He rubbed her partially shaved mound and folded opened the skin to stick his middle finger into her wet center.

“Is this what you wanted?”

She put her finger in her mouth with a shy smile and nodded.

He pressed his thumb down on her sensitized clit to roll the distended nub. He began to pump his fingers in her and drew the warm liquid out before she finished climaxing. Stabbing his cock in the hot orifice, he wrapped his arms around her thighs to hold her legs up.

She whimpered on strangled gasps, propelling him faster into her cries. Almost immediately his cock flared tight against her insides.

“Kane.” She reached a hand out.

“It’s all right.” He caught her fingers between his and leaned forward to kiss the back of her hand.



“I thought if I’m pregnant you wouldn’t attach to me.”

“Me too, sweetheart. I guess we’ll learn as we go.” He eased her legs down and lifted her up.

He boosted her off the bed and her legs wrapped his waist.

She put her head on his shoulder.

“I’m beginning to like this lock down when we join unprotected.”

“Because I’m trapped?”

“Uh-huh.” She kissed him. “I know you belong to me the most when you’re here like this.”

“The most?” He hugged her tight. “I belong to only you, sweetheart.”

## Chapter Twenty-Two

He was a beautiful man and love blossomed between them to heights she never thought they'd reach. Her fingers delved into his wavy hair. She kissed him profusely and waited with a quiet moment of sedated love. Waking with him each day was going to be another day her past was further behind. A baby, a man and a home, everything she ever wanted.

She stared at his wet eyes and wondered if he felt the overwhelming emotions such as she did. Were those unshed tears? Was he capable of loving her with unconditional abandon? She had given everything of herself and she wanted everything of him in return. Kane's kiss filled her with a heavenly sensation of tranquility. Fire consumed her veins while every nerve ending tingled with sharp accord during sex. The only problem was his ability to say simple words such as *I love you*. She could only hope one day he would.

"Kane, you're not trapped in me any more."

"I know. I just like holding you."

"Put me down and I'll go get breakfast for us both."

He dropped her legs. "A hearty meal would revitalize this worn body."

"Yes, well, I think you could go for days without nourishment." She smacked his bottom and trotted off to get some clothes on before going down to the kitchen. "I really do need to go shopping," she called from the bathroom.

“After we eat.”

She emerged to find Kane lying naked on the bed.

“Aren’t you getting dressed?”

“After I eat.”

She pursed her lips. “Oh, I know just what you think you’ll be doing but you’ll get breakfast only.”

She leaned over the bed and kissed him. His arms swung up to catch hold and they glanced off her hips as she swirled away.

“Naughty man, I’ll go get something yummy.”

She blew another kiss from the door and trotted down the back stairs to the kitchen.

“Good morning.” She smiled at Heather and danced over to the refrigerator, hungry enough for ten people.

“You’re very bright at this time of the day,” Heather said. “Then I guess when you’re about to get all the Wolverton money, what reason would you have to be sad? Poor Timber Wolverton, no parents, no home, all alone growing up in this cruel world finds a Wolverton stud to take care of her.”

“Heather, I...Kane and I have always...” Timber didn’t know what to say.

She turned away and found a frying pan in the cabinet.

“Try to deny you’re already pregnant. I couldn’t believe Neal when he said he was too late.”

The eggs Timber carried in her hand from the refrigerator couldn’t handle the abuse of her clenching fingers.

“He told you what he did to me?” Timber didn’t look at the yolk dripping to the floor.

“Told me? He didn’t have to tell me. I’m the one that examined you and discovered for myself you were pregnant.”

"You have a similar scent to Kane." She blindly lifted a towel and wiped the goop off her palm. "It's why you put the garlic on me so I couldn't tell you were there."

"Yes, well, I had planned on letting Neal have you as a playmate while we waited for that baby to come out. I knew Kane would breed you. Hell, you hadn't been in the house more than a half hour and you were in his room telling him how new you were at having sex. He loved that, didn't he?"

"You listened to us making love?"

"Making love!" Heather doubled over hysterically. "I heard my brother humping you as he's done to a hundred other bitches in this town. He did surprise me by doing it in his own bed. Now that was new."



The tail end of the conversation between Heather and Timber enraged Kane. He didn't think he could have anger push him to the murderous extent pummeling his thoughts. What happened to Timber had hit him hard because of her pain. Hearing Heather confess to being part of his sweet puss's torment rekindled the fury.

"Heather!" Kane stormed into the kitchen.

"She was the other person with Neal in the mausoleum." Timber rushed to him.

He pushed Timber behind him, wanting to comfort her and yet needing her to stand free from his wrath. His veins raced with the beastly blood ready to tear his sister's throat out.

"Don't look at me like that. You were using her to get the family fortune too." Heather told him with some matter-of-fact attitude she thought he'd understand.

"No, I wasn't and she knows that." He tried to advance and Timber's grip on his arm was a fierce hold.

"Kane, no, she's your sister." Timber stroked his arm and held tighter.

"You were going to kill her, why?" Kane shook Timber off him.

"Oh, we weren't going to kill her... Well, maybe we were but not right away," Heather declared. "We needed a baby from her. You know getting a werewolf baby isn't like shopping for one at the supermarket."

"I would have always taken care of you." He shook his head in disbelief. "I've always protected you from everything."

"I don't need taken care of. You never saw that. You think because you're an arrogant male that no female is capable of making decisions. Well, I made this choice rather quickly, didn't I? Neal would keep Timber drugged until she had the child and then I'd go away for a while and return with the bundle of joy as mine and Neal's."

"Why didn't you have a baby yourself?" Timber asked. "If he meant so much to you."

"He didn't mean spit to me. Besides it wasn't as if I didn't try," she sighed. "I found that journal and learned I was a half-breed and still I thought I could pass off a baby we produced as part full-blood and part half-breed. Unfortunately I'm not as fertile as you."

Kane chuckled. "You should have kept reading. Hezekiah put assurances into his plan. He felt full-bloods would control each others' deceit. As for half-breeds plotting a take over and ousting us all, well, it's not possible for you to reproduce with another half-breed."

"I figured as much," she said wistfully. "So now what, dear brother, do you send me away or kill me?"

"I haven't determined that yet and I don't think I will." He reached behind him and Timber's hand fell into his immediately. "You tried to take what was mine. She will decide your fate."

Heather lunged for Timber and Kane grabbed her by the throat. He held her up against the wall until she could hardly breathe. "If you have any value for your pitiful life, I suggest you never touch another member of this family or I *will* kill you, Heather."

"You can't," she choked out. "You haven't got what it takes to kill. Face it, you're as flawed as the rest of us. You couldn't kill Neal the first time and I believe you let Timber kill him for you this time. I've killed every one of those little tramps waltzing in here thinking they would own us."

Kane threw Heather to the floor. "You killed Laurie and Beth?" He raised his hands in disgust.

"Yes," she gloated.

"I never saw it in you. So innocently sweet, I thought you were perfect. How very mistaken Hezekiah was about your formation." He stared down at her. "You're right. I am flawed. I have a soul, a conscience, and a blind spot where you were concerned. Never again. You'll leave this place and not return. As for Neal, you're very wrong in my capabilities. I tore his throat out and enjoyed doing so. If you ever return, I suggest in your scheme of plots, you better have a good way of killing me because that'll be your only salvation."

## *Chapter Twenty-Three*

Heather rose up from the kitchen's slate floor. She brushed at her clothes with an annoyed chirp.

"You think your precious Timber will be the link in you getting the estate? Well, I suggest you think again. I'll kill every half-breed in this house until it's just you and me. Then I'll be the only one left for you to fuck to get the baby you need for us to take over the family money."

"You've got to be kidding." Kane pulled Timber protectively closer to him as he listened to Heather. "You've been my sister for so long I'd never think of..."

"You will, wait and see." She turned and ran from the house.

Timber watched the beautiful girl with long blonde curls shift into an ivory and gray wolf. She was every bit as attractive in her beastly form as Kane. Hezekiah believed he had perfection with Heather. The greatest flaw in her, however, was the one he had tried to eradicate in his creations. He wanted the killer instinct bred out of them. Heather was a murderer through and through. Her kills weren't for preservation but greed of power and money.

"Wait here. I've got to stop her." Kane set her from him.

"Kane!" Timber called as he raced out the open door.

She knew he'd not be satisfied with Heather's departure. Heather's threat was serious. It was deadly and all half-breeds would be in danger. She had the taste for blood and wouldn't stop. Timber hurried to follow.

Immediately outside the door, she was knocked down. Quickly she rolled over to see Heather had circled back.

“Don’t do this, we’re sisters,” Timber begged.

Heather continued to stalk in front of her, forcing Timber to crawl back toward the woods.

“Please, you had to know that all of us, all the half-breeds had the same mother. It was in the journal and you read it.”

Heather’s pace quickened. Timber shifted and ran with Heather pursuing. Then she stopped, knowing the confrontation would have to end with this day. She couldn’t live knowing Heather would bide her time and come after her again.

Timber and Heather circled each other in a stand-off. The formality was simple. They’d stare one another into a boredom that forced the other to leap. Timber had never fought for her life before.

“Hey, half-breed!” Kane shouted and Timber’s head swung around to him.

He raised a rifle and fired one shot. Her heart sputtered, her breath faltered on the unbelievable shock, and she spun to look at Heather. His aim was precise. The bullet hit Heather directly in the heart and she fell instantly.

Timber shifted and stood panting as Kane ran over and knelt next to Heather. Her wolf form rescinded and she shifted into a beautiful young girl with hole in her chest.

“Kane?” Timber put a hand to her mouth to stifle her cry.

He killed for her. He killed his beloved sister to save her. She knew no purer love than to have him protect her over all else. If she hadn’t been sure before, she was now. She knew the baby was not his sole determination in his actions.



Kane rose up, leaving the gun on the ground. "You ever hear the saying don't bring a knife to a gunfight?" He heaved a solemn, labored sigh. "Well, it goes for fangs as well. Nothing quite kills a werewolf better than a bullet and it doesn't even have to be silver."

"Oh, Kane, I'm so sorry." Her bottom lip trembled.

He made morbid jokes for her benefit and to mask his grief. She had seen how much he cared about Heather. His sister was the one person in the house in which he had displayed unfettered affection.

"Come here." He held his arms out.

She put both her arms around him, letting her senses become inundated in the immeasurable affection. He crushed her in his embrace. With his face buried beneath her hair, his hot breath stuttered. His upset was hers and she held his head tighter. The dampness on her skin could have been sweat from their exhausting battle with Heather or it could have been his tears.

"I'm sorry," he said hoarsely against her neck. "I should have insisted we leave here. You could have died and I would have had a hard time living with that."

He lifted his head.

She saw his eyes, all blue and watery. Where he should have had sadness, the scintillation of a happier future lurked in those hopeful pools. She couldn't love him more.

"Hey." He smiled. "No crying, I don't like when women cry."

He brushed over her cheeks. Leaning in, he kissed away some of the tears.

"No?"

"No, because most use it as a way to get their way."

"I don't think you're susceptible to giving into women that cry."

"Not in the past I wasn't. With you, I could be highly prone to be swayed by a waterfall."

She looked past him.

He pulled her face back to his. "I'll ask Morley to handle burying her."

"You won't do it yourself?"

"I can't deny I still have feelings for her as someone I believed was my sister, however, she wasn't. I don't mean because she was a half-breed, I'm talking about what was in her heart and soul. She obviously never had anything good in there, like you do. I was too blind to see that. The fact she tried to kill you and destroy me took something away I can't ever feel for her again." He kissed her forehead. "Let's go pack."

"Pack, why?"

"I'm taking you away from here. We'll start a life somewhere quiet and raise a litter." He slid an arm around her back.

Timber snuggled against him. "Do you really mean that? You'll leave this all behind?"

"It's not as important as you are to me. Not any more."

"Then we stay, even with all that's happened, this is home. We'll make it a better one than those that came before us."

"Oh and how do you suppose that will happen? My mother, my great aunt and all the others won't change," he chuckled.

"I don't know about that." She swung around and kissed him. "I managed to tame one Wolverton, didn't I?"

Kane turned so Timber wouldn't look at Heather in the distance. He glanced that way and shouldn't have. Her dead body on the brilliant green lawn clawed at his conscience. He wished there had been another way. He knew he'd miss the girl he thought she was, but he couldn't dwell on the bad. He had sensed this event coming. It was there in his

head as Timber had described once. Something wicked was to happen and he ended it. Today was a start to his new life with the woman he loved.

He looked down at Timber's solemn expression and gave her a smile.

"Yes, you did tame me and I'm probably the most stubborn of the lot." He rubbed a finger under her chin.

"Then the rest will be a piece of cake! Oh, you don't suppose there is anymore chocolate cake left, do you? I'm famished and I am eating for three."

"Three?" He stopped and looked at her, perplexed, as one side of his brain grasped one thing and the other scoffed.

"You said you'd like me to have a litter so don't act so surprised."

"We're going to have twins?"

"Oh, I hope that's all. One will make me nervous, two will surely make me tear my fur out, but three or more, I don't think I could handle that many at once."

"How do you know its two babies?"

"I don't know. I sort of sense it." She took Kane's hand and put it on her midsection. "Do you think I have that ability because of my pregnancy?"

"You've always had it. I just think your condition has heightened it. Or maybe, now that you know, you're more aware."

"There have been times when I sensed things. I just never thought of any of it having importance." She leaned her head against him. "What do you know about the incubation time for werewolf babies?"

"Oh, sweetheart, I really need to tell you a lot." He scooped her up and rubbed her nose with his. "Just remember, I'll be there with you every step of the way."

Kane put Timber down when they reached the kitchen door. His hands rested on her hips. "I want to tell you something, half-breed, and then I don't want to hear anymore about it."

"Okay. It sounds serious." Her fingers scratched nervously at the front of his shirt.

"It's very serious." He looked away.

Willie was near the corner of the house.

"Do you think he knows Heather was his sister or that I am?" She tried to pull away and go to him. "Do you think he knew he was a brother to all the half-breeds?"

"He's not stupid. However, I think that book held what secrets there were and it should remain as such. Willie and Buckeye need never really know. You and I'll continue to look after their well-being."

"I wish I knew her, the woman that gave us life."

"Yeah, it would have been interesting to know what made Hesper Wolverton go along with her brother's experimentations and birth so many genetically altered children." He waved a hand signal to Willie. "He'll take care of Heather better than Morley."

"You were going to divulge some mysterious information to me before we saw Willie, what was it?"

"And here I thought maybe I found a way to get out of it."

"It's all right." She bowed her head. "You don't have to say anything."

"I have to say this and I'll have you know I've never said this before in my life. Now that I want to, it scares me."

"Well, you're scaring me by taking so long." Her lashes lifted for a second and then lowered to shade her eyes.

"Hey." He lifted her chin with a finger. "It's not bad...I don't think."

"Then tell me and I promise not to bring it up again."

"I love you." He cradled her face in his hands. "I love you very much."

He said the words, plain and simple. He wanted no mistake in their meaning. She had come into his life—a whirlwind, a zephyr, a dream of everlasting hope for their bloodline. She stood before him with her trusting, loving nature, and full-blood or half-breed had no meaning. While the name and lineage of the Wolvertons would go on, Timber's happiness was all that mattered to him.

It worried him he wasn't worthy. At the same time, he was proud to have accomplished exactly what Hezekiah Wolverton had destined. Never had he worried over another creature as he had about Timber in the past week. It was quick, it was overwhelmingly unfathomable, and still, he couldn't see his life without her.

He took her arm and steered her through the open door, hoping it was the end of conversation. Sentimentality was a foreign experience. He didn't feel comfortable expressing emotions he wasn't in control of. He told her the facts. Nothing more had to be said, he didn't think.

"Is that all?" Timber's nonchalance came as a surprise.

She strolled over to the cookie jar in the kitchen, lifted the lid, and took out a large chocolate chip cookie. He ignored the inviting scent. Her baffling curtness knocked the wind from him.

"What do you mean 'is that all'?" He grabbed her arm, ready to demand a different reaction.

Only he knew he wouldn't...couldn't...nor wanted to force her to give him the very sentiments he had trouble expressing. She always understood his male pride was not negotiable. He needed to master every emotion.

"You made me think it would be something you wanted to hear."

She bit the cookie and held a piece to his lips. He had exposed himself right down to the raw core of his sequestered soul.

"So, did you want to hear it?" he asked with quiet defeat.

"I thought you didn't want to talk about this once you said it?" She raised a brow.

His frustration built on her silence.

"Well, I expected a different reaction." He chomped on the cookie she held.

"Okay." She wrapped her arms around his neck.

"Okay?"

"Pick me up," she ordered.

His hands slid under her bottom as she hopped up and locked her legs around his waist.

"Kane Wolverton, by making a discussion of this, you've broken your own rule of never speaking those words again. From now on, I expect to hear you tell me every day that you love me, and if you forget, I'm going to remind you."

"You set me up?" He tried dropping her legs with a grunt of disconcertedness.

She held him tighter. "You can walk around here all you want thinking you're in command of everything and everybody. In front of your family, you can treat me as if I don't matter and I'll probably allow that. However, when we're alone, I don't want you to ever hide your emotions from me. Whether it's love, hate or fear, I want to know."

Kane put his forehead against hers and closed his eyes. "In time, I know I can share myself completely with you."

She dropped her legs and stood in front of him.

"As long as you love me, I'll give you a lifetime." She cupped his face in the palm of her hand. "I know you're a strong and independent man, but you don't have to be that way with me all the time. I want to take care of you as much as you want to take care of me."

Kane took her hand from his face and kissed her palm. "Then come take care of me now." He tugged her to the stairs leading up from the kitchen.

She pushed him to the corner on the first landing.

"And what are you up to?" he asked, holding her.

"Tell me again," she begged.

"I love you, Timber. Will you marry me?"

"Oh yes," she sighed breathlessly.

He kissed her lightly. When he thought he'd never experience anything so endearing as her embrace, the words that fell from her lips as she kissed him seized his heart.

"I was born to be your soul-mate," she whispered against his lips. "I've waited my entire life to love you."

## *Brenda Williamson*

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