

# **A Night to Howl**

## **Kell Casey**

All rights reserved.  
Copyright ©2006 Kell Casey

**No part of this e-book may be reproduced or shared by any electronic or mechanical means, including but not limited to printing, file copying or sharing, and email, without prior written permission from Changeling Press LLC. Willful violation of this policy will result in suspension of account privileges and will lead to prosecution.**

**WARNING: Illegal files may contain viruses.**

ISBN (10) 1-59596-463-0  
ISBN (13) 978-1-59596-463-2  
Formats Available:  
HTML, Adobe PDF,  
MobiPocket, Microsoft Reader

Publisher:  
Changeling Press LLC  
PO Box 1046  
Martinsburg, WV 25402-1046  
[www.ChangelingPress.com](http://www.ChangelingPress.com)

Editor: Crystal Esau  
Cover Artist: Sinamin



This e-book file contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language which some may find offensive and which is not appropriate for a young audience. Changeling Press E-Books are for sale to adults, only, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

## Chapter One

The sickening cries of war rode in on the outstretched arms of the wind. Animal instincts rose in alert as Derek Romano delivered a spinning kick to his opponent's gut, then swiped a blade across the taunting man's chest, cutting deep. The bastard could play all he wanted, but the time for games had passed for the pack.

God, he hated war. Hated to fight. It went against everything he was. But there he stood, in the heart of Griffin Hills, doing the very thing he hated the most -- fighting.

"Don't you think you've done enough, Romano?" Timberlane lunged forward, attempting to stick Derek in the chest, but Derek was too fast for him. He caught the arm in a swift movement and flipped the man to his back.

Timberlane was six feet tall with a slight hump on his back. Being undead for a while had ruined any chance of good looks the minion had -- not to mention giving him a case of breath that would wilt a whore's tits.

Derek held the knife close to the vampire's throat. "Tell me where she is."

"Never."

Timberlane's teeth clenched, and Derek pressed the knife harder. "You'll give her up, or I'll kill you and all you hold dear." Derek wasn't a murderer. Hell, he wasn't even a warrior. Sure he was trained in fighting, the same as everyone else in the pack. He could take care of himself and his own. Being the youngest of the brothers, he'd never really had to. He'd rather spend his time partying or surfing. But the rest of the pack was in captivity, which left one person -- him.

And what the vampire didn't know wouldn't hurt him, he chuckled inwardly.

*Figured.* He rolled his eyes at the weight of the responsibility on his back. But a member of the Romano pack protected his own and that's just what Leesa was for now -- his. *His* responsibility. *His* to protect.

*Even if she didn't know it yet...*

Derek swallowed hard. If he killed Timberlane, he knew he'd never find the governor's daughter.

Damn, he was a lover not a fighter.

Oh yeah, he could hold his own. Although, he'd rather play Casanova by a dimly lit fireplace and mate for hours at a time. Nothing like enjoying the smoothness of female skin coasting under his lips.

The sooner he got this shit over with, the sooner he could call Cara and finish their date just where they'd left off. *Hmm... she was a fine piece of tail.*

"Talk, Timberlane. Tell me where Leesa is," Derek demanded again.

Timberlane's eyes widened. The blade nicked his neck, drawing a thin line of blood. Crimson was the color of fear and anger. All of the good emotions really. If he were a betting wolf, he'd bet Timberlane was seeing every shade of red right now.

"S-she..."

"Spill it or I'll cut off your head here and now."

Timberlane swallowed hard at the threat. "They have her hid, deep in the forest of Griffin Hills."

"Who?" Derek growled low in his throat. The man's glare was laced with the menace of not wanting to give up his master. Well, he'd give him up or die trying to protect the asshole. Easy decision as far as Derek was concerned.

Derek bunched up a hard fist, slammed it straight into Timberlane's gut while pressing the knife harder still, but not hard enough to kill him -- yet.

"Z-Zadur," the man answered.

"If I find out you're lying to me, I'll hunt you down and finish what I've started. Only next time I won't be so nice."

"No, it's Zadur."

Derek searched the vampire's putrid eyes for remnants of a lie, but found none.

The lucky bastard got to live another day.

Easing pressure from Timberlane's neck, Derek stood carefully, not allowing the startled man a chance for quick revenge. The corners of Derek's mouth curved in a calculated smile. Wouldn't be long now...

\* \* \*

"Take the prisoner to the other room. Lock her in the special chamber," the old man ground out in a crackling voice.

If he even was a man. She was in Griffin Hills after all, a paranormal town filled with vampires, werewolves, fairies, mermaids -- just about anything of the supernatural made its home there. This creature proved no different. Wrinkles lined his elderly face. His eyes were a blinding blue and pierced her, making her head ache further.

They'd captured Leesa, dragged her through the forest like an animal, and thrown her into the room as if she were less than even that.

This was her one chance to escape from her life. After picking the locks her father caged her in with, Leesa had survived many nights on her own. But being on the run wasn't all it was cracked up to be when the hunger pains came.

And freedom, the unrelenting carrot, dangled close to her face. So close she pictured taking a bite.

The taller guard placed a death-grip on her arms. His fingernails bit into her flesh, and his hands tugged at her tired, helpless body. Before she realized it, she was escorted to the "special chamber." Leesa's head dropped from weakness, from starvation. Something about this place drained everything from her. It took her last drop of energy just to draw breath. There was no way she could fight these goons off.

Searching deep within herself, she closed her eyes, drawing the energy she knew lay within. But it was useless. She was too tired.

So weak she could barely stand, Leesa was practically carried to the small cell. "W-when can I eat?" she asked. It wasn't an unreasonable request. Hunger gnawed in the pit of her empty stomach with fierce claws. This was the third place they'd taken her since the kidnapping. It was apparent they feared someone would rescue her before Zador carried out his plan.

They hadn't planned on her not wanting to be rescued.

"Not for a while, missy. Not until --" The man paused as his partner raised his fist.

Okay, maybe she hadn't counted on the harsh treatment, but it was a miniscule price to pay when one considered the life sentence she was up against.

A hand cracked across her face, answering her request for a meal. Leesa slumped into a corner. Tasting the metallic blood, Leesa bowed her head and prayed she'd regain enough strength to escape. After she'd lain there for what seemed like forever, the unrelenting tug of sleep overtook her and she slept for the first time in days.

\* \* \*

"I've got you, bastard," one of the goons snapped as Derek approached the heavily guarded lair. The lair was just a rotted blur, teasing the corner of his eye.

"You know I'm here for the girl."

"What girl? Haven't seen a girl myself. Have you, Trasius?" The vampire laughed, turning his head toward the second's vexing chuckle.

The vamp smiled, licking his exposed, right incisor. "Nope, haven't seen a girl."

Losing patience, Derek stalked toward them. "Hey, how about you remember before I send you to the land of a thousand ashes."

"Ohhh... I'm shaking in my boots," Trasius mocked, swiping drool from his mouth with a fist.

"I'll find her with or without your help."

"Yeah, well, I'm sure your nose will lead you, Derek. I heard you had a way with the ladies."

"Not this one. I'm not keeping her for myself," he informed him, wondering why that even made an ounce of a difference.

"Yeah, the old girl is probably used by now. If Zadur has his way about it."

Something fierce welled inside of him. "If I find anyone's touched a hair on her head --"

"What are you going to do, Romano?"

Yeah, what was he going to do? He'd what? Seen a picture of her for the bulk of like two seconds and all of a sudden he'd protect her to the death?

*It's not her you're protecting,* he reminded himself. *It's Darius and the pack.*

Derek shifted into his wolf form with practiced ease. He leapt through the blistering cold air and lunged, aiming straight for the jugulars of the guards, but was cut short when a burning pain entered his side.

Then he remembered nothing.

\* \* \*

Leesa woke with a start. Weight pressed against her, squishing her insides and making it almost impossible to breathe.

A male lay directly on top of her -- make that tied to her. His wrists were bound and secured behind the back of her neck. The outline of his muscular torso pressed firmly against her. Shallow inhalations of breath rose and fell against her ear. The rap of his heart thumped rhythmically against her chest and the warmth of his skin pressed solidly on top of hers.

She couldn't see his face. His head rested on her left shoulder. She had no idea who was tied to her, but she knew one thing for sure -- the man had muscles.

*Hard* muscles.

Muscles that rippled and flexed even in his sleep.

His hair tickled her neck, and tiny trails of whiskers lightly scraped her bare shoulder. It was the most comfortable she'd been on the cot. And it was the most comfortable she'd been since she'd been in the vampire's prison cell. By the reaction of his body to hers -- she'd bet he was damned comfortable.

Yes, *very* comfortable indeed.

"Could you tell me why you're tied to me?" she asked.

Lips nibbled along her neck, kissing a tiny trail down the curve, shoulder and back up again.

"Oh, um..." She should tell him to stop. For some reason, she didn't.

His erection grew, pressed solidly against her body. Desire pooled in the juncture of her thighs. Leesa hadn't craved a man so strongly since... ever.

"Cara, I need you," the man whispered before coming up to capture her lips in a sultry kiss.

*Cara?*

She wasn't Cara, but at that point did she really care?

Yes. Yes, she did! She opened her mouth to protest, but it was too late. She'd fallen helpless to his kisses, to the way his mouth moved and drank hers. His heated, dampened tongue swept against hers, delving into her pliant, welcoming mouth.

\* \* \*

Derek roused from the strapping effects of whatever the hell the vampires had done to him. His arms were sore. Tied and wrapped around --

He looked down at the woman lying beneath him. Derek allowed a slow gaze to pass over her face. Flecks of gold shimmered behind the faint emerald of her eyes. A tiny smattering of freckles splayed across her button nose.

Oh, she was cute. Too cute.

And for the life of him, he couldn't remember bedding this one.

Pity.

"Are you finished kissing me?" she asked.

A slight curve played at his mouth. "You mean that was you?" He furrowed a brow then reddened only slightly.

Waking up tied to a woman was in the deepest recesses of his fantasies, yes, but not some spoiled politician's daughter he'd have to save.

Although for some reason that kiss had gotten his blood boiling.

He couldn't temper the excitement pumping through his veins. Maybe it was the aftereffects of the drugs. Maybe it the full moon approaching that had his blood pumping like a jackhammer.

*Maybe it was the woman.*



"Well, I'm not Cara if that's what you mean," she warned, bunching her strawberry blond eyebrows in disapproval.

"Yeah, no shit, lady."

She frowned at his words.

Probably shouldn't have said that. The truth was she was ten times prettier than Cara was. *Fuck*. Of all people, he didn't need to be kissing Leesa, the very reason he was on "search and rescue" to aid his brothers.

If she hadn't been kidnapped none of this shit would've happened in the first place and he'd still be on his way to vacation in the Bahamas.

Surf, sand, and getting laid. The way God intended him to live his life. He let out a ragged breath. None of this comic book hero bullshit. "Any idea how you got in here? And better still how to get out?"

Faint traces of pink colored her cheeks. What in the hell? "No, I... uh. No I don't."

For some reason he didn't believe her. Hell, knowing who her father was he trusted her about as much as he did a she-wolf in heat. He enjoyed sleeping with she-wolves, however, with Leesa, it was different. He shouldn't even have given thought to kissing her again. She wasn't a wolf. She was human.

The softness of her skin beckoned him. Lust shot to his groin, desire, hot and painful. Leesa was a politician's daughter for shit's sake. A spoiled one, if rumor served her correctly, and the daughter of the bastard responsible for kidnapping his brothers.

Tomar had done it just to piss him off and further the effort of the vampire/werewolf wars.

A low humming sounded in his ears. Iridescent indigo beams radiated from the cell bars. "So, princess, you have no idea what that glowing shit coming from those bars is, do you?"

"No," she answered.

"It's juice. Rays to suck out powers of the supernatural. Makes humans tired as hell."

"That makes sense," she answered, wiggling slightly beneath him.

Fuck. She needed to stop that, he thought, his cock growing in response to proximity and movement. Leesa's eyes widened, glaring directly into his.

"I'm a man. What can I say?"

"Could you please keep your man parts to yourself?" she asked haughtily. If memory served him, it was the first time any female had ever asked him to do that.

"Don't you worry," he said tersely. "I'm all about the pack, baby. Pure breed, never strayed from wolf -- not once."

Not that it hadn't crossed his mind. It had, but she-wolves were magnificent lovers and when in heat... He bit his lip at the memories.

"G-good."

He wiggled, his cock growing even at her insults. Oh, but he'd love to teach her a thing or two.

"You two enjoy being tied up a little bit too much," the guard said. His prodding eyes raked over the two of them.

Derek wasn't much on voyeurs. Never had been.

Leesa ignored the scent of wood and man drifting into her senses every time she took a breath. Most men she knew smelled of stout, expensive cologne. Not rugged male. Not that she was complaining.

Well, other than the fact she was tied to the man -- er... wolf.

She knew he was a Romano. His good looks and quick comebacks were enough to assure her of that fact. The pack was legendary, even in her neighboring town. And if she was not mistaken, this one...

"Could you move just slightly? My arm is going to sleep." Warm breath whispered down her neck at his words.

Goosebumps prickled her flesh. "And how am I supposed to do that?" she retorted. "It's not like we have a lot of room here."

He lifted himself just enough so he could look at her. Damn, she wished he hadn't done that. Tousled strands of blond hair fell loosely around his masculine face. Searing blue eyes bit into her, like ice. The slightest stubble lined his strong jaw.

The urge to lift her hand and feel them prick her fingers quickly subsided. After all, they were still secured behind his back.

She sighed.

"Just relax." His calm tone washed over her and relaxed her tense cells.

"And you are?"

"Derek. Derek Romano." She should've known it. Derek was most popular with the women to hear her friends tell it. He dated a different woman almost every night -- and not just dating, either. Sleeping with them. The man had more notches in his belt than a sultan.

She looked away.

"You've heard of me?"

"Yeah, I've heard of you."

"So I take it you're glad to meet me?" he mocked.

"Mr. Romano, your reputation precedes you." He needn't make a move on her. Leesa didn't go for the womanizing type. No, she saw through Derek.

"You were wiggling beneath me. I -- I was asleep." He closed his mouth hard with the words.

"Yeah, with Cara," she reminded him.

"Do you want to get out of here or not?"

*I was about to get out of here before you showed up.* "Save yourself. If I could get you off of me, I'd be out of here and to the next town before you could blink."

"Sure you would, princess. Oh, and don't forget your father has notified authority units in four counties."

"He has?" Breath withered from her. This was not what she'd planned. Cursing herself for not thinking that far ahead, she closed her eyes against the blinding neon

lights blazing from the ceiling. She still felt drained. When she'd fallen into Zador's clutches, she hadn't known what he had planned for her.

"Okay, trust me. Drape your feet over the side of the cot until you've planted them on the floor."

She didn't question him as he'd expected she would. She just did it. Derek lifted them both to a seated position. Well, this was worse. He'd lift his arms from around her neck if there'd been anywhere else to put them. They were bound so tight, the chain bit and burned into his wrists.

He could only imagine how Leesa felt. She'd been tied up for much longer. Days. Weeks maybe. She'd been gone for a while before her father called for her rescue.

Looking around, Derek assessed the situation. They were captives of the vampires -- not the good kind -- locked in a cage like animals and tied closely together.

*Too close.* Leesa's breasts pressed tight against his chest. Her nipples pebbled through her cotton shirt and teased his chest. A wry smile curved at his mouth.

"I'm cold," she confessed.

He sniffed the air, thick with her arousal. "Yeah."

"Really, I'm cold."

Sweet breath fell against his lips as she spoke. Mmm... she smelled of mint and sweets. "Have they fed you lately?"

"No, and I don't think they plan to."

"Any ideas how to get out of here, sweetheart?" he whispered as the air thickened.

"One. But I go it alone."

"The hell you say."

"Tell me, Derek. You don't seem like the hero type to me, so why are you so dead set on helping me escape?"

"Your father will kill my brothers if I don't."

## Chapter Two

"Oh." Leesa wiggled against the relentless pull of the chains, feeling more suffocated than ever. Maybe she should've just stayed at home and sealed her fate.

No. She couldn't.

Derek's glare softened, as if he sensed how much her middle ached being at this proximity. It wasn't just looking at him. It was the satiny smooth muscles pressed solidly against her body. She'd never felt a man as muscular as him. Rigid steel covered by velvet.

"Derek, I -- I... I don't know what to say." She gazed up apologetically. This wasn't the first time her father had pulled such a stunt. Most definitely wouldn't be the last.

"You're going home," he warned. The distance between them was minimal. Each syllable left his mouth lingering uncomfortably close to hers.

"No." Leesa knew she could never go back. If she did, it meant a lifetime of unhappiness. A lifetime of... She swallowed hard. A wave of panic flexed through her entire system. Skin crawled, inched over her bones. And a sickness she hadn't felt in days overtook her once again.

"Selfish of you, don't you think?" His voice was muffled as she returned from her distant thoughts.

"I... I can't go home." Leesa's breathing became erratic, frighteningly so. So much, she buried her head in the wall of Derek's chest and prayed he didn't notice.

He didn't.

"I don't think you're hearing me correctly, princess. I'm not giving you a choice."

At once, the air thickened. Leesa wondered just what was going on in Derek's mind. Would he really force her back to a lifetime of no choices?

But she already knew the answer. Yes. Derek Romano would let her destiny be chosen for her to save the lives of his brothers. Who could blame him?

It wasn't as if he had a choice. Just the way her father liked it.

The man had let his lust for power control him. Leesa closed her eyes against the hopelessness that had become her life. She'd been happy once, when her mother's angelic voice whispered in her ear, and sang her to sleep with sweet lullabies.

A tear crystallized in the corner of her eye. That was a part of her life that was over. The only family she had left conceived her out of obligation. Out of duty to the country to produce an heir.

Too bad Leesa had been born a girl.

So, Tomar had chosen a ruthless man to win the election. With the merging of their families, her father was a shoo-in for President. Witherton was a man Tomar could mold into his own twisted image. His protégé.

And she'd have to...

No, she couldn't think like that.

Leesa straightened herself and looked directly at Derek. "I have a proposition."

\* \* \*

Derek listened for a while as Leesa went on about how horrible her life was and how she was to be forced into marriage to Witherton, a terrible man. How she'd never love him and how a lifetime of a little love was better than a lifetime with her father's business associate. How she deserved an opportunity to find someone that would love her for her.

Basically the same bullshit most people with money bitched about. Yada, yada, blah, blah, blah.

What she said next, however, nearly caused him to fall off of the cot and drag her with him. "So, I was thinking. If you bite me you can turn me into a werewolf right?"

His arms tensed around her neck and if he'd been able to at that point, he'd choke the woman for what she was suggesting. No one wanted to *become* a werewolf! It

was insane. You were either born or attacked. End of story. It wasn't like the romantic illusion women had about the sexual immortality of a vampire. Hell, no.

Weres died. Not for a while, but it happened. And marking her would automatically put her in the Romano pack. That in itself held repercussions she had no way of understanding.

It was the last thing they needed.

If Tomar's undies were in a twist over a little kidnapping, he'd shit golden bricks if he found out his precious daughter was a were.

Armies would invade Griffin Hills, killing its citizens once again. Derek would have to take time out from his lazy days of drinking, lounging and entertaining lovely women.

Nope. Not happening.

"Are you out of your mind? You'd never survive a moment in the wild. Hell, I doubt you'd survive a minute in the streets by yourself much less as a werewolf."

There. That ought to shut her up a bit.

"I've survived more than you realize."

"Doubt it," he countered.

Eyes the palest shade of green sparkled under the fluorescent lighting of the cell. In their depths, tiny shards of pain floated.

Maybe that was another thing he shouldn't have said.

He blew out a hard breath. "Why do you want to be a werewolf anyway?"

"Freedom."

"Yeah, like what I have now? And what my brothers have, you call that freedom?"

"Better."

"Yeah, you have it rough, princess. Servants, a father who loves you --"

"Just because he wants me back doesn't mean he loves me," she interrupted disdainfully and swallowed hard. "He wants his lineage carried on. That's all."

"Heard that before. I hope you don't think I believe that song and dance for one moment. Sounds to me like it's straight out of a A Woman's Guide To Being A White-Collar Politician's Daughter. It's a hard knocks life, princess."

A tear welled in her eye, threatening to drop. "Don't mock me. You don't know me."

Something pressed against Derek's chest then. Did he feel sorry for her? "No. I guess I don't. So what's so bad about marrying that guy? He has money, right?"

"Yes," she said, without a smile, "He has money."

"So what? What could be so bad? Your kind is bred for that shit. Marrying out of duty. You grew up knowing that's what would happen."

Without so much as a blink, Leesa began, "Derek, I'm going to say this once, so don't ask me to repeat it. Okay?" Seriousness lined her voice, something he hadn't counted on. "Witherton always lurked about when I was a child. He made me really uncomfortable. My father knew it and did nothing."

"What?" What was she talking about?

Leesa stared into curious blue eyes, not at all believing she was about to expose her soul. But if she didn't, she'd be back where she'd started, in Witherton's clutches.

And she couldn't have that.

She could *never* have that.

"He... uh... Derek." She dodged his probing eyes. There was no way she could say it if she looked at him.

"What? Didn't buy you enough presents for Christmas?" He gave a half-laugh.

"You're mocking me?"

"I'm sure whatever it is, it can't be that bad. I mean reality to a socialite and to the average citizen is different. There's no way --"

"He t-ried to..." she interrupted then tapered off.

She couldn't.



Memories of Witherton's leering looks, the way his eyes raked over her -- the man thought she was already his property. The thought of his hands touching her made her want to retch.

Leesa had carefully planned her escape from her home, fighting two guards on her own. Everything had gone according to plan until the knife slipped from the secure leather strap bound to her leg. It got lost in the shuffle with the guards.

Now she was once again in a position she hated. At the mercy of another man.

"Witherton gave me the creeps. Even as a teenager, I tried to stay away from him. He tried to kiss me when I was young and I was scared to be in the same room with him after that."

Derek's mouth dropped. She hated the way he looked at her now. Like he pitied her. Like because she was rich she wasn't allowed to experience pain. Not allowed to feel.

Well, she felt. Maybe she didn't always feel pleasure, but Leesa felt.

"Oh," escaped his mouth before it closed.

"Yeah." She looked away. Leesa couldn't face his horrified expression.

"I'm sorry. I had no idea."

"It's okay. I'm going to be okay. If I can just get out of here."

"You see, kids, that is impossible." A strong voice echoed through the cell, followed by the clunking of boots along the cement flooring.

*Zadur.*

He wasn't much to look at. Hell, the ancient vampire never had been. Derek moaned as his hateful presence appeared from the darkness of the hall. "Aren't people supposed to be handsome when they go vamp? Seems to have done the opposite to you, Zadur. You're one ugly motherfu --"

"Silence," Zadur commanded, slicing a hand through the air. "I did not come here to listen to insults from a canine."

"Pity," Derek murmured under his breath, "because I have lots more where that came from."

Leesa's eyes widened, warning him to close his trap. Another one of his vices -- not knowing when to shut up.

"Like being tied to a politician's daughter, wolf?" Zadur questioned as he approached the center of the cage. A long fingernail dragged along the bars, screeching like a night owl.

Derek suppressed a shudder. "Isn't the first time I've been tied to a beautiful woman, Zadur. Only they usually volunteer."

He ignored the pink coloring Leesa's cheeks. He didn't want to embarrass her, but he wasn't letting the vamp get one up on him. Never had and damned well wasn't going to start now.

Zadur clucked his tongue. "That so? Well, we'll see how the lady likes being forced to have sex with you. It appears my fellow vampires are in need of entertainment. Videos just aren't what they used to be. A live show is much more entertaining, don't you think?" He let out a wicked laugh.

Derek's eyes shot to Leesa. There was no way he'd touch her in that way. He'd never forced himself on a woman and he wasn't about to start now. "Fuck you."

"No, fuck her. Prepare yourself. We'll be back."

"What if we don't perform for you?" she asked, her voice in a state of panic.

"You will both die, and I'll find more entertainment." Zadur didn't look back as he exited the room.

Derek could think of a thousand reasons to sleep with Leesa.

Because Zadur commanded it wasn't one of them.

\* \* \*

"Do you think he's bluffing?" Leesa's eyebrows lifted in concern.

"It doesn't matter. There is no way I'm going through with... something like that." He craved to be free from constraints, to give her panicked, pale body time to recuperate from such a threat.

A tight knot formed in his throat. Damn, this wasn't part of his plan. Everything was going wrong. His brothers were still at the mercy of Governor Tomar. If that

bastard would allow some old pervert to be around his own flesh and blood, what would he do to them? No doubt they were being tortured beyond belief.

"I didn't have you pictured as that type of man, Derek." She fumbled with the chains around her wrists. He heard them clank as they rubbed together. "It's j-just... Look, you can shift. Do it. The chains will fall from your arms and you can try to escape."

"No."

"What do you mean no? Are you nuts? Go, get help. I'll be okay."

"I'm not leaving without you."

"Don't try and be noble, Derek."

"I'm not. I want my brothers safe. That's it. This isn't about you." Was it?

"Then turn me into a wolf. I can protect myself. I can. If you return me as a were, whenever Witherton comes for me I'll be ready."

She had a point. If he turned her, the Romano pack went free. It wasn't a bad trade. Except she'd be part of the pack. It was against everything in him to allow a pack member to be hurt. His brothers would be obligated to defend her as well.

The question was could he return her knowing she'd be in danger?

"When's the next full moon?" Leesa asked, her expression serious.

"Tomorrow night." Wasn't like he needed to check the calendar for that one. He felt the tug of the moon days before it actually appeared.

As she leaned in closer, her sweet breath fell on the curve of his chest, tickling and toying with his senses, like a gypsy dancing under the light of the moon. "We can endure anything for only a night."

"Goddess, Leesa. I... I can't do that to you." How he wanted any excuse to be with her. He was more attracted to Leesa than any other woman he'd been around. He'd had to keep his cock at bay the entire time, which at this proximity was almost impossible.

"Derek, I understand if you don't want me," she whispered softly, her lack of self-assurance apparent once more.

For some reason, Derek wanted to see her smile. She'd lost so much. He loved the feel of a good woman the same as the next guy. But he refused to take from her any more than had already been taken.

"Is that what you think? That I'm not attracted to you?"

## Chapter Three

Was he? She'd never been afforded the opportunity to date anyone outside her social standing. Most of the slime she dated were just like her father, rich and power hungry. It was hard to determine whether they liked Leesa for herself or were trying to gain points by marrying well and ensure themselves seats in the Senate.

Something turned in the bottom of Leesa's stomach, like shards of glass writhing and slicing.

*Impossible.*

"I don't know, Derek."

A sheet of sweat coated his masculine brow, sprinkled over his tanned forehead. "Obviously you haven't seen yourself, love."

"I've seen me."

"No, I mean really seen yourself. Leesa, you're beautiful. Your hair is like spun silk with a kiss of the autumn sun. Your eyes, like a peridot sea. I could drown in them."

"Mr. Romano, your reputation precedes you. You are good with the ladies." She moved at his closeness. Her nipples prickled alert. She shouldn't be feeling this with a man-about-town. Or werewolf rather.

*Especially a were.* She certainly shouldn't be suggesting they follow Zador's perverted request, but she had to buy them another night. Then she could change and they could fight them off together. Fight whoever off. No one would ever take advantage of her again as a wolf.

She would fight her way to freedom...

Closing her eyes from the vision of handsome Derek's face staring at her, she decided she liked the sound of that. All of her dreams, all of the times she sat in her room praying for Prince Charming to come rescue her like a fairy tale were over.

Leesa had to escape and make her own way in this world. All she needed from Prince Charming was a little nibble. She opened her eyes.

Derek's gaze slanted from hers. "I've never said that to another woman."

"No?" Leesa didn't know whether to be flattered or stunned.

"No. It's true. But, Leesa, you cannot ask me to treat you that way. I won't. You don't know what you're asking. Sex with a were can get rough."

"Oh?" She felt her eyes widen at the thought of sex with a stranger. Funny, with Derek it didn't seem so bad.

"I -- I've never been with a human. It's just too risky." He turned his face from hers. Tension eased from his arms wrapped around her neck. "Besides, I can take these guys on my own."

"Yeah, like you did when you ended up thrown in here? Will you listen to yourself?" Leesa asked.

"What?"

"What? Zador is going to kill us, Derek. Dead! You know, like never come back. You can't get rougher than that."

He opened his mouth as if to say something but closed it again.

"Thought so." In a move that surprised her she lifted her mouth up to capture his.

They kissed slowly at first. Then the heat of his mouth opened to her, welcomed her, and before she knew it they were back where they'd started, Derek leaning her back languidly against the cot, kissing her.

*Devouring her.*

He wanted her and she wanted him.

Leesa moaned in his mouth, writhing from the pleasure of it under him. Letting him know it was all right to touch her. She wouldn't break.

Hadn't yet and wasn't about to start now.

Kissing him felt like a thousand boulders had lifted from her heart.

The urge to wring herself free from the embossed chains overwhelmed her. She wanted to feel him, touch him. Her fingers itched to run over his rigid back, to feel the muscles coast under her fingertips.

What had gotten into her? Leesa didn't know but she didn't want it to stop. She was enjoying the touch of a man again.

Not just any man, Derek Romano.

But as soon as she felt pleasure, the panic swam up to claim her once more. Dense claws raked down to her soul. "Stop," she screamed as she pulled away.

Derek looked down at her, confusion lining his crinkled brow.

"What was that about?"

"I -- I..." She was stammering again and she hated it. She had to get control of her life. This was her chance to break free from the constraints of her father and Witherton and she was blowing it. Totally, utterly blowing it.

"I'm waiting," Derek coaxed, wetting his bottom lip.

And by damn, she was going to do it. "We're stuck right? At least until tomorrow." Leesa swallowed. Desperate times called for desperate measures. And she'd experienced worse. *Much worse*. And the little voice swimming inside her head told her this might not be anything bad at all. "We wait it out until tomorrow night. You bite me and we'll morph, and fight them off together."

"Sounds like an easy plan. But life isn't always that easy." His expression changed as if he hadn't believed he'd said that.

"Pretty big claim coming from you."

"They have drugs, Leesa. Drugs that can knock you on your ass in ten seconds flat. How are we going to compete with that?"

She wiggled. The unrelenting tug of the chains bore down on her wrists. "I -- I hadn't thought about that."

Derek searched Leesa's face. Traces of purple formed a crescent moon under her eye. Someone had hurt her. Someone here.

Something foreign welled deep within him. Protective.

*Primal.*

He couldn't leave her like this. Hell, he wasn't untamed. He let out a ragged breath. She was right. The only way to fight the vamps was if they both could shift. He was only one were. Yeah, he knew how to fight. Sure. But she didn't.

She would be a liability. He didn't need to worry about her while he tried to fight off every vampire in the fucking lair.

Tiny puffs of breath tickled his neck. They were already sitting so close together. Derek wiggled the chains a bit but it wasn't any use.

In wolf form they'd slip right off of his wrists, but Leesa didn't have that option. She'd have to try and run until they could find a hacksaw or kill the guards with the key, which was impossible.

Yeah and then what? Send her home to a man that was going to --

He clenched his jaw hard at the thought. There was no way he could send someone back into that type of environment.

Hell, he wasn't that bad of a guy. He had a sister. *Yeah and she can defend herself. Leesa can't. Not against supernatural beings. Maybe humans, maybe not. It wasn't as if she had any combat experience.*

"You're not going to help me, are you?" she asked, an audible break in her voice.

Damn, he was going to regret this. He leaned in close, rubbed his jaw along hers, and whispered in her ear. "I'll help you, Leesa. Just don't ask me to hurt you. I -- I couldn't do that to you."

She looked up and smiled. Perfect white teeth, a beautiful smile. Fucking beautiful. The scent of her was astounding. Not as much as the scent of her arousal while they kissed.



She was attracted to him. Most women were. Hell, he wasn't being cocky. It was the way of things for him. She deserved better than him. Yeah and who was that going to be? Witherton?

Derek cringed at the thought of that man taking advantage of her over and over. Power hungry, selfish bastard. If he ever crossed paths with him, it'd be the last time the man drew breath.

"Thank you." She nuzzled her nose to his chest. Strawberry-kissed hair hung in ringlets and tickled the base of his neck. Tingles shimmied along his arms. Thoughts raced through his mind. Naughty thoughts. Primal thoughts.

*Lustful* thoughts.

His cock hardened between his legs again, aching. He wanted to possess this soft woman. What would it feel like to have a human? Would she be a gentle lover? Or would she be demanding like a she-wolf?

Could he control his lust and not hurt her when the animal in him came out?

He'd never even tried before. The animal had always won. But he'd always been with a wolf. Never a human. "Leesa."

"Hmm..." Her voice was breathless.

"I don't think we need to..." Her finger traced circles between his shoulder blades. "I..."

"What?"

"We shouldn't be... I don't want to hurt you."

She looked up. Her gaze pierced him with certainty. "You can't do anything I don't want you to do."

"Yes, I can." His throat tightened at just what he could do. "The animal, Leesa, I don't want to hurt you. Please don't ask me to."

Her expression softened. If Derek didn't know better, he'd think she felt sorry for him. She was so... so... compassionate.

Not ruthless and demanding like a she-wolf.

Soft, caring...

What in the hell was he thinking about? If Derek wanted to get them the hell out of there he had to start act like an alpha and soon.

## Chapter Four

"I see you two haven't gone anywhere," Zadur's coarse voice creaked through the air.

Leesa rolled her eyes at the return of the vampire. Did he feel an unwarranted importance if he meddled in the lives of others?

But now it was do or die time -- literally.

She was going to have sex with Derek Romano. In front of an audience no less. It was a small price to pay for freedom. A very small price indeed.

It wasn't like it would be a hardship. He was good looking and then some. Tall, handsome -- a very good kisser. In any other circumstance she'd enjoy having Derek for a lover. This wasn't any other circumstance. And she was about to be forced into having sex with a stranger.

*Werewolves can be rough.* The words rang through her mind. She had the feeling if Derek wanted to hurt her, he'd already have done it.

Zadur unlocked the cage door. His gnarled hands clutched a golden, heavily bracketed key. The scent of foul breath and pure evil seared the air and burned into her nostrils. The reaction her body had wasn't a good one, making her want to retch.

"Should I untie you two so you can better perform?"

"I'm not performing for anyone," Derek warned from between clenched teeth. Anger radiated from the strong man.

"I see you have a death wish, Romano. Willing to take the lady with you?" Zadur clucked his tongue.

"Let her go, Zadur. What use do you have for a politician's daughter anyway?"

Zadur shook his head, his cape flinging behind him, while his dagger-like fingernails dragged a line down her jaw.

It burned.

A warm stream of blood trickled from the cut and down her jaw. Zadur's tongue came out to lap the droplets, sending a slimy sensation down her spine.

*Just get me out of here.*

"Leave her," Derek warned.

"Already you've grown attached to the youngling. Good. So my request shouldn't be a problem."

Leesa inhaled a breath, trying not to draw any more attention to herself than necessary.

"I'm not forcing myself on anyone."

"No?"

"No." Derek was firm in his answer.

"No problem. We'll trade. The boys will get to see me take your place. Either way, they'll get their show."

His tongue lapped Leesa's jaw. She closed her eyes in revulsion and shuddered. "No, Derek, please," she pleaded, tears brimming. Having Zadur touch her like that would be even worse than Witherton. She just couldn't allow it again. Not again.

"Step away from her." Derek followed the words with a feral growl low in his throat.

"Oh, touched a nerve did I, Romano?" Zadur laughed wickedly. His stout breath soaked the air.

"Touch her again and consider yourself a dead man." A muscle jumped at the base of Derek's jaw and Leesa felt tension bunch in the thickness of his arms.

"I knew you liked her. Good, now don't disappoint, you do have an audience."

Leesa couldn't do anything but stare. What could Zadur possibly gain from forcing them to have sex? Then it dawned on her.

*Power.*

Power over people and power just to watch people suffer.

Derek's chest heaved. Was he about to attack?

Leesa lay still, all instincts alert to the possibility she was about to see him morph into a wolf in front of her very eyes.

He didn't. But there wasn't a doubt in her mind he wouldn't let Zadur hurt her. That much she was sure of, and more than thankful.

It wasn't as if Leesa always had to have a man to protect her. Hell, in a world without paranormal beings, a human could hold her own. *Unless she was the daughter of a politician...*

"What are you getting from this?" she asked. "Why on earth would you want to force someone to have sex? It's inhumane." The words slipped out before she realized what she'd said. Of course he was inhumane. Nothing about him was like the ordinary citizen.

"I get bored easily, my pet. It's a little reminder that I control you now. Every part of you." His eerie yellow gaze slid over her body, undressing her.

Bile rose in the back of her throat and Leesa knew that she had to give Zadur his way. But in the end, she'd win out.

\* \* \*

Vampires lined the inner cell walls to witness the ceremonious mating. It appeared this wasn't their first forced union. There must've been numerous occasions the perverted animals caused prisoners to perform the way they filed into the room and sat. Derek had a feeling it was more about power than sex. They got their rocks off by trying to force their will onto others.

Maybe that's where they messed up today, because no one would have to force him to want Leesa sexually. Hell, he'd stayed hard as a brick since he'd been around her. Bedding her wouldn't be a hardship; keeping from hurting her would.

His eyes searched hers for a sign of apprehension, because if there was one indication she didn't want to go through with this, he wouldn't.

She gave a brave smile, and her muscles tightened slightly. She was nervous and Derek hated it, but there was nothing he could do about it.

Or was there?

"Attention, fellow brothers. Tonight..." Zadur paused, gesturing toward them, "...I have a special treat. Beauty and the Beast." Zadur flipped his cape and made his way to the audience and took a seat next to a large vampire with seven or eight pierced holes in his ear. The crowd groaned and grunted in approval.

"Let the games begin." Zadur gave Derek a look of warning. God, what was he going to do?

Two guards came in and stripped them of their clothes before chaining them together again. Derek growled and nipped as their fingers touched Leesa. He clamped down on the right arm of the guard. Just as he took a bite, the guard punched him, connecting with his jaw. Anger welled inside. Fighting the beast was no longer an option. And that's when the blinding pain splintered through him. He growled low in his throat as hair prickled over his flesh.

*No, don't morph. Stay human.* He didn't want Leesa any more nervous than she already was.

He looked up at her. Fear lit in the depths of her eyes, coated with subtle determination. But beyond that, Leesa was completely, beautifully nude. What he wouldn't give to have her to himself -- without the prodding hundreds of eyes that pierced them with hungry glares.

He was going to kill Zadur for this.

Cool air swept over his sweat-glistened body. But in the midst of the chaos, he saw Leesa. Really saw her.

She was *gorgeous*.

Leesa tuned out the hoots and hollers in the background. They weren't ruining her chance at a life of her own. Blood pumped hard through her veins and for the first time in years, she felt alive. She had a choice, and she was choosing to be with Derek.

Choosing to be *like* Derek.

She just prayed he complied.

"I'm not doing this," he mouthed only inches from her face.

Great. That didn't sound reassuring.

"I understand if you don't find me attractive," she whispered in his ear. "Just close your eyes and pretend I'm someone else. Whatever we have to do to get through this. I haven't come this far to die now."

He lifted his gaze to meet hers, searching. "You think I would have to do that?"

"I don't know," she admitted reluctantly.

"You're wrong." His answer came without a second thought.

It was the greatest compliment she'd ever received.

She blushed. What would he feel like as a lover? What would it be like to be taken by someone that was gentle, loving? Could he fight the animal? "I am?"

"God, yes, Leesa. I... you're... I just can't force you to do anything. You deserve better than this. Not like this." His voice prowled over her flesh. Tiny butterflies skittered through her stomach.

For a little while, she could completely fall for him. "I want you. Please, Derek. I promise. I want you." She lifted her lips to his and prayed he felt the same.

## Chapter Five

She had without a doubt the most delicious tongue Derek had ever tasted. She wanted him all right. Her arousal lit the air, intoxicating him. He was hard in an instant, pulsing, begging to sink into her warm flesh.

"Well, it looks as if we won't be disappointed," a tall vampire cheered them on.

"Oh, no, I'm going to watch and then bed my concubine," the one next to him ground out.

God, he fucking hated this. *Hated* it. But what choice was he left with?

Concentrating on Leesa, Derek kissed a trail down her neck, nipping and tugging at the sensitive flesh with his teeth. A kitten-like moan escaped her bowed mouth. She enjoyed his touch. His cock rested close to her folds. He kissed his way up her neck to her cute chin and sprinkled kisses there, trying to ease her tension. "I'm sorry," he murmured low so the vampires didn't get the satisfaction of knowing their form of torture wasn't working.

Leesa tensed, then relaxed.

"You've been through so much." Derek's heart thumped in his chest. He felt something for Leesa he shouldn't. He felt sorry for the daughter of Tomar. She'd lived an existence beyond his realm of imagination and this was just adding to it. "I'm going to turn my body a little to try and shield you."

"Thank you." She shook her head, obviously relieved he was willing to keep the men from gaping at her. More, he shielded her from the sight of the one in the corner who had whipped out his cock and was stroking himself. *Disgusting*. The prick actually got off on this sort of thing. Zadur hadn't been lying. Well, that bastard would be the next to go. Right after they finished the task at hand.

She didn't need to see that. It would only upset her further.



He turned to Leesa's now trembling body. Shit. Derek lowered his voice, whispering in her ear. "Are you sure you want to go through with this? Surely, there has to be another way."

"I -- I'm fine," she whispered in his ear. But she wasn't fine. She was far from fine, otherwise she wouldn't be trembling.

Leesa was shaking. Literally, completely shaking. It wasn't as if she didn't want him. Lord only knew she did. More than anything she wanted him. The problem was there was an audience. She'd never had sex in front of anyone before.

Just one more time she'd been robbed of choices.

But this was the time for action. If there were things in her life she didn't like, she was the one who held the power to change them. "Derek." She said it low, soft. Gooseflesh lined his arms and she knew he felt it too.

"Yeah." He shot her a half-smile. Derek always seemed to try and ease her. How she appreciated it.

"Take me." The words escaped her mouth in a plea.

His lips coaxed hers, gently prodding them to accept his kiss. She was more than willing to oblige. When he kissed her, the entire world melted away.

"I..." He paused.

"Take me," she murmured. Blood rushed to the juncture between her thighs, tingling.

Throbbing.

Her eyes locked onto his, pleading, begging him to help her. He saw pain, despair, but most of all... desperation.

For once in his life, Derek didn't want to be selfish.

He kissed her deeply, allowing need to take him. His skin prickled with awareness. He had to temper the change, but only slightly. Part of him needed it, for Leesa. Fangs elongated in his mouth.

He'd never wanted to bite a human.

Some weres did, sure, but Derek hadn't. He tugged his puffed lips from hers, ran a languid caress over his incisor with his tongue and searched Leesa's face for any doubt.

There was none.

Derek nibbled a trail down Leesa's neck, trying to control his urge to own her, take her like the animal he was. She moaned. The vibrations of her voice tickled his lips.

Without another thought, he bit her, praying he'd done the right thing.

It burned. Not a bad feeling, but different. Sensations racked her body and she shivered harder -- not at the pain, but at the promise of a new life. One filled with power. *Freedom*. And most of all, decisions.

Derek lifted his lips from the bend of her neck, ran a quick tongue over the marks. The tingle from his moist tongue tantalizing her neck turned her on even further.

He was gorgeous. *Gorgeous*. Her nipples pebbled tight and rested against the firmness of his chest. She wanted him. With everything in her, she wanted him and when she looked back into his eyes, the entire world faded away. The prodding eyes of disgusting vampires weren't on her. Derek had all but shielded her. There was no one there but them.

She wished Derek's arms were free to explore her everywhere. His touch would feel heavenly, she just knew it. At the thought, she closed her eyes and imagined. The vampires couldn't take that from her. They wanted to see her mortified. They wanted to see her scared. They weren't going to. She'd learned a long time ago people like that feed off the pain of others. She wasn't anyone's victim... not anymore.

"Are you okay?" His words were breathless. The heat of his erection burned her leg. He wanted her. Even with all that was going on he wanted her. Most of all, he cared if she was okay.

She wanted to cry. No one had ever really cared if she was all right. But Derek did. He didn't want to hurt her and that meant more to her than anything.

She rested her head under his prickly chin. The hardness of his chest pressed firmly against her face.

"Get on with it," Zadur ordered, his voice scratching her soul.

Forget him. He wasn't there. No one was there but her and Derek.

And this man had given her the greatest gift anyone had. The gift to feed on her inner strength and become stronger, physically. She was about to repay him. She rubbed her body against his. Friction seared her skin. The promise of pure bliss lay ahead. Leesa was about to find out what an unselfish man loved like.

What a *real* man loved like.

"You heard the man," she mouthed.

Derek's eyes were heavy lidded. "I, Leesa... I can't. I can't put you through that."

Noble. The man was noble and he didn't even know it. "Listen to me, Derek. I want you. I know you want me, I feel it."

"I do," he rasped, "but not like this."

"If we don't do this now, we're not going to live. This is nothing compared to everything I've endured."

"I'm sorry," he said as if begging for her forgiveness.

"I'm not."

He pressed his lips to hers and maneuvered his body to fit between her thighs. She drew in a sharp breath, braced herself for his entrance. She was slick, her body wept to possess him. She'd never been so attracted to a man and seriously doubted she ever would again. There was just something about him. Something *special*.

"Don't you regret this," he warned as if he were trying to convince himself more than her. And then, he entered her.

She gasped as his length bore into her. Sweet bliss. Instinctively, her muscles tightened around him. She'd never had a lover fill her so completely.

Strong hips nestled perfectly between her legs. He touched her in a way she'd never experienced before. The length of his cock moved in and out of her with a pleasurable, burning slowness that made her body sing with anticipation of bliss.

"Oh... Derek. Oh..." Leesa heard herself moan. She couldn't help it. There they were in the midst of horrible creatures, and Derek made them melt away. The catcalls and hoots and hollers of the disgusting crowd even became a lull in the background. There wasn't anyone else there.

No one but them. And that promise scared her the most.

Derek shuddered as her silky wetness coated his cock. Tremors threatened his body. Lord knew he'd bedded his fair share of she-wolves. More than his fair share. It was nothing like this.

They felt nothing like -- *Leesa*.

He had to go slow. If he didn't the wolf lying deep within him would emerge and he'd become the animal he knew he was. She'd been hurt and humiliated enough.

He wouldn't add to that if he could help it.

Something fierce welled within him, gripped his heart with a strength that bordered insanity. He wanted her. Wanted to protect her. And at that moment, Derek knew he'd kill anyone that ever blocked her path.

She moved. The slightest wiggle of her hips almost sent him into an orgasm. He slowed then stopped. "You okay?" he asked again. Shit, the woman must think he was a parrot. He didn't know why, but it was important to him that she was all right. This was not his normal situation.

"I'm more than fine. God, Derek, am I a bad person for enjoying your touch?"

Oh gods, no! "If you're bad then I'm the devil, because you're the most magnificent woman I've ever met." He kissed the tip of her nose, while slowly rocking his hips forward.

She moved with him, then quickened her hips as her need grew. Feminine muscles clenched his cock, milking it. She was close. With one powerful thrust he filled her to the brim.

"Oh, God." Her voice was loud. No longer between only them. The crowd cheered and screamed, but Derek barely heard them. Their muffled cheers weren't important. She was. Damn, he couldn't believe he'd just thought that, but he had.

He repeated the motion, filling her completely. She fit him perfectly. The warm wet embrace of her pussy on his cock made him moan with every stroke. The urge to change welled up again. He fought it, but it was hard.

And just when he thought he could stand no more, she lifted her mouth to his ear. "I'm breaking into a million pieces. God, what's happening to me?"

"You're coming." And it sent him over the edge. He released himself into her, clinging to her for dear life as he let his long orgasm out.

God, if he could only free his hands completely and touch her.

## Chapter Six

Clapping echoed throughout the concrete dungeon, dragging Leesa from orgasmic stupor. Derek was a fabulous lover. She blushed at the thought of what they'd just shared. The vampire's request had been inhumane, cruel. But the sex with Derek was magnificent. A high unlike anything she'd experienced.

A cool breeze brushed across her skin. She shivered. At that moment, Leesa wanted nothing more than to put on her clothes and go home.

Wherever that was.

"Not too shabby for your first showing, Romano." Zadur turned, rousing the approval of the crowd of rogues. "Men?"

The group of vamps gave a low call of approval. Then Zadur turned back around and faced them. "Really, I think they'll want an encore later." He lapped his tongue over his bottom lip. "I'm sure you'll oblige?"

"Fuck you," Derek ground out. A sickened feeling churned the pit of Leesa's stomach. Already, he was regretting having had sex with her. Leesa let out an audible sigh.

Zadur's laughter pierced the air. His men rose and left, wearing wicked smiles and patting themselves on each other's backs as if they'd done something. Zadur winked and then left the room, leaving them alone and still nude.

Derek lifted himself from her the best he could and began to tug furiously at the manacles behind her head. She wanted to say something, but he wouldn't even look at her.

Was he that disgusted?

"Derek, I..."

"Just be still." His voice was commanding, uncaring. Nothing like the gentle man who had saved her earlier.

Saved her...

Oh my! It had occurred to her, it had, but in the middle of all of the moans and bodies together, she'd forgotten. She'd be a wolf soon -- just like Derek.

A power filled her unlike anything she'd ever felt before. She would be able to stand on her own two feet. Or would she prefer four? Did it really matter at this point?

No, she conceded to herself. It didn't. What mattered was that he'd lived up to his end of the bargain. He'd bitten her. She'd change.

What more did she want?

He moved a smidge and Leesa became aware all too soon again that they were still undressed. "Don't you have powers?"

"What?"

"You know," she said, "powers. Like can you materialize and dematerialize? Think about something and it happens... for instance, make your clothes just appear from thin air?" She heard the resignation in her voice. Felt her nipples prickle as they rested on the hard curves of his chest.

"I have some powers, Leesa, but not those kind."

Well, crap, she thought. How was she supposed to remain tied up to him all night long in the complete and painfully obvious nude and just pretend like nothing had happened?

Being this close to Leesa was driving him mad. He'd told her to be still so he could maneuver the manacles behind her head and hopefully free himself of them without being noticed by Zadur and his goons. Surveillance cameras were mounted all over the joint. If he turned into a wolf, they'd be down in the cell shooting him full of tranquilizers, and he'd be unconscious. Again. Nothing he could do to help her if he ended up that way.

He ground his teeth against the feeling of her nipples against his skin. This was wrong. Everything about it was wrong. Hell, he was supposed to take her back to her father and he'd done nothing but brand her for the pack.

Shit! His brothers would fucking kill him once they knew about this.

He'd have to protect her now. Possibly without them knowing.

What in the hell was he going to do? He peered into the emerald of her eyes.  
"Leesa."

"Yes?"

Shit, she looked innocent to the paranormal realm he existed in every day. But she wasn't completely without knowledge. Hell, she'd been through a lot in her world. And then a horrible thought occurred to him.

What if she felt pain?

He'd been born a wolf. Someone converted into one would have to go through a change in their DNA. The thought of her hurting cut straight to his gut. He couldn't stand it. She'd been through enough.

"I'm waiting." Her voice was gentle but probing. Made him feel like even more of a jackass for putting her through more.

"You might feel weird for a while. But you'll have to fight it. There... there isn't a lot of time to get used to being a wolf." He tried to be kind, but in the back of his mind he couldn't help but wonder if he'd taken advantage of her.

"Okay," she responded, drinking in his every word. She might not trust him completely, but she still knew nothing about being a wolf. How to morph and fight.

And she only had one night to learn.

Her face was filled with wide-eyed promise. If he didn't know any better, he'd swear she was looking forward to the conversion.

Hair prickled down his spine at their proximity, but he fought it off. The last thing he needed to do now was to think with his cock instead of his brain.

"Weird how?" Sweet breath fell on his neck with her words.



Derek's mouth went all cotton in about five seconds flat. "Your cells will change." He swallowed. "Your bones will move... some."

"Sounds a little uncomfortable." Her eyes widened, face paled. God, what had he done? This was going to hurt her.

*What, Derek? You have sex with the girl and all of a sudden you're her keeper?* Yes. He was her keeper. He'd marked her. Made her a Romano. He'd just have to deal with the consequences, get her to safety and find another way to get his brothers out of that damned mansion of Leesa's deranged father.

"Yeah, I guess it is." He lifted the left corner of his mouth a fraction.

"So what you're saying is I'm going to feel a lot of pain." She paused and waited for his answer.

"I really don't know."

"What do you mean you don't know?" Leesa asked. He was a werewolf, wasn't he? Derek should absolutely know whether or not it hurt to morph. Surely he'd done it thousands of times.

"Not that simple, love. I was born this way. It's all I've ever known."

"And?"

"You were born human. It will be harder on you."

Leesa's jaw dropped at the realization. She wormed around, attempting to become more comfortable, and accidentally brushed against Derek's cock. The softness took shape into a hard brick almost immediately.

"I shouldn't be reacting to you like this." His voice was gruff, full of regret, and it wasn't what she wanted to hear.

"I understand you're not attracted to me. Really, it's no big deal."

"Shit, Leesa." Even in the dim lighting she felt his glare pin her. "Is that what you think?"

She shrugged her shoulders the best she could. The manacles were cutting into her wrists by now and she couldn't wait to get them off. The upper part of her arm had gone from tingly to numb and back to tingly again.

"Oh, honey, it's not that."

What a smooth talker. His reputation preceded him well. For a moment, she'd love to believe it. She'd love to believe that someone wanted her for her. Not because of position.

"I... you..."

"Finish," she pleaded as if her life depended on it. Was this man to be her savior?

He didn't say anything at all. Instead his lips came down to sear hers with a kiss.

## Chapter Seven

Derek didn't know why he'd kissed her again. It could be because he wanted her. It could be that he selfishly wanted to experience the delight of sinking his body into hers without the prying eyes. Her scent was changing, becoming more animalistic, and his cock was getting harder with each whiff.

She tasted sweet, felt sweeter, and little moans sounded from those beautiful, kissable lips. Leesa kissed him hard, deep, sweeping her tongue into his like angry waves battering a shore. Derek closed his eyes as part of the animal in him emerged. He only let out a portion, not enough to become a full wolf but enough to bust the chains that kept him from fully enjoying this woman.

"How did you do that?" She pulled back.

"You'll be able to do it soon," he informed her, panting. He tugged at her arms, moving them from around his waist and giving her freedom. "It's dark now. Vampire eyes see pretty damned good so it's best we pretend we're still chained up until the next nightfall."

"So we should stay close? Like this?" She moved closer to him. The sweet smell of her arousal sailed into the air and Derek was a goner.

What he was doing wasn't fair to her. He shouldn't mislead her. He couldn't protect her forever. Hell, he could barely take care of himself. He had to get his brothers back. Maybe after that, he could find Leesa a nice mate. If she were mated, then the pack would no longer be responsible for her.

The thought of another wolf touching her caused the animal to surface. Fierce possession welled inside him, ripping to burst out. And at that moment, Derek knew he was in trouble.

Leesa sat up. "You didn't answer me."

"Yeah, stay close." He knew he should push her to the other side of the cell and run like the wind. But he couldn't. His cock was hard again. Painfully so, and he would do anything to be inside her once more.

"This close?" she asked, while maneuvering herself to where her warm center rubbed against his hardness.

He moved his hand to cup the softness of her breast. Funny, she felt better than he'd imagined. The tip of her nipple jutted out as he worshipped it with a forefinger, rolling and teasing the tip until he was certain Leesa felt it everywhere. Between her legs, down her thighs. Damn, her body sang at his touch and he wanted nothing more than to possess her once more.

Smiling wickedly, Derek pinching her nipple ever so slightly, rolling it with his thumb and forefinger. The center of her pussy dripped with need. The scent of her arousal permeated the air. Gods, he wanted to inhale until he was drunk with it.

Leesa leaned her head in to his, murmured against his lips, "We don't have an audience now." She did have a point.

"No," he said, breathy, "we don't."

He didn't care if five hundred men stood there or none. He'd have Leesa again. Here and now. She wanted him. Her scent didn't lie. Hell, he might even thank that asshole, Zadur, for this in the long run.

\* \* \*

Leesa couldn't believe how easily she was falling back into Derek's arms. Just knowing he wanted her meant so much to her. Not because someone forced him, but really wanted her. And that fact turned her on beyond compare. That and the fact she sat practically on top of his manhood. His breath whispered across her chest as he trailed butterfly kisses down her collarbone. Her center dripped for him.

Never in all her life had she wanted a man with such intensity. Such primal need. She wanted to feel his hard cock pump into her over and over and over until she begged him to stop.

She hissed when he took a nipple into his mouth and suckled, paused, flicked his tongue over the tip and suckled again. Damn, if she didn't have him inside her soon, she'd burst.

"Oh God," she moaned as her hand came up to cradle the back of his head. Then his hands came around to cup her buttocks while his mouth worked magic on her nipples.

She moved in a rhythm against his cock, pressure and need building in her until she almost came just from the contact. Then he stopped. Serious eyes bored into hers. The eyes of a predator and God help her she wanted to be his prey. He lifted her and sat her back down onto him.

They moaned in unison as she took his hard cock inside her dripping center. He filled her completely. As he moved inside her slowly, she felt like a worshipped woman, because that's what he was doing -- worshipping her.

Never had she felt like this with anyone. The way she fit perfect over him was amazing. His hardness entered her, all the way to the base of his cock.

Strong hands cupped her bottom and moved her up and down, guiding the rhythm of their union. Derek wasn't a small man by any means and his cock was no exception. She wanted to have him over and over.

The problem was she didn't have that much time left with him. After tonight, they'd go their separate ways.

Maybe she should just make tonight last.

Leesa lifted her hips, prolonging each descent onto his cock. The crisp hairs between his muscular legs tickled her backside as she reached the base of his cock. With each up and down movement, the inner walls of her pussy tightened, readying for release, but she held on, savoring the feel of him.

His *touch*.

Strong hands came around to cup her face. He placed a finger under her chin, lifted her lips to his. His tongue plunged into her mouth, tangling with hers. Searching. Leesa kissed him so hard, she lost all reason. All thoughts of who she was. All thoughts

of who or what she was to become. And just became one with the man inside her. Sensuously taking all of Derek into her like he filled a void.

*Completed* her.

It was exhilarating.

He tore his lips from hers and moved his mouth to her ear. The light trail of breath fell to the nape of her neck. "T-this is wrong." The truth of his words burned.

"Doesn't feel it." It wasn't a comeback. It was the truth. He made her feel. Something she hadn't done in years. She had forgotten all emotions, had them bottled in the recesses of her mind.

He made her feel good. Wanted. For a moment, she wanted to feel loved, but she dared not hope too much for anything other than sex from a man like Derek Romano.

"No," he moaned, his callused palms cupping her hips, guiding her rhythm over him. "Damn, Leesa. I... you..." He trailed off.

The firm planes of his chest teased her nipples as they rubbed against it. Up and down. The friction caused a heat to build inside her like nothing she'd ever known.

And before she knew it, she came, shuddering around his cock and screaming in his ear.

She'd thought he'd follow, his hardness a sign of how hot and ready he was for her, but Derek didn't. Instead he rolled her over on all fours and plunged deep inside her once more.

Leesa gasped at how much his cock filled her from this angle. "I thought they'd see us if we moved any more."

"Let them," he answered in a breathy voice. "I'm taking you like my kind. Our kind."

"Oh." She hadn't thought about the way wolves mated er... had sex. And truthfully the way he felt pumping into her, she wasn't about to complain.

"Do you know how crazy you're making me?" he asked as he reached around to toy with her nipple with the tip of his finger and he pulled his cock out until the head teased her entrance and then plummeted back inside her with force.

"Oh... God. No... tell me." It wasn't a request. At that moment, Leesa would've done anything he'd asked. When she thought her desire couldn't escalate any further, Derek moved from her nipple to her clit.

"You drive me mad," he said, tantalizing and playing with her clit. Back and forth movements slow, then fast. He filled her to his balls. The full weight of his hot cock pumped into her with a power that rendered her literally helpless. "I want to have you over and over." His fingers dug into her waist as he held on and rode her until she writhed under him.

She knew he was just talking dirty to her. He couldn't really feel that way about her... could he? She pressed back onto his cock, milking his thickness.

"Oh. You are divine," he moaned.

She answered by grinding her clit against his hand. He moaned again.

A smile curved her mouth in delight that she satisfied him. The magic of his fingers on her clit did it for her. Her insides tightened once more. "I'm going to come again."

"Come on me. Come on my cock."

She did just that, screaming in pleasure. She didn't slow down, though, moving back hard on his cock. "Your turn," she coaxed. He followed, exploding inside her. The pulse of his cock excited her further and she milked it for all its worth.

Nothing in her life had ever felt so right. She collapsed in his arms.

\* \* \*

A steady beam of light broke through the blackened cell. It was morning. Derek had awakened many mornings with beautiful women in his arms, but this was different.

*She* was different.

He held tight to Leesa as if she were a mere pup. In a way, she was. Tonight she would start her new life. He swallowed, fighting the emotions. Damn, he hoped he'd done the right thing.

The brush of Leesa's silky hair against his face sent a ripple of awareness through him. Not good, especially in the morning. Hell, he wasn't even tied to her anymore. There was no reason to be holding her, but for some reason it felt like the most natural thing in the world.

And that scared him.

Derek ran his hand through the softness of her hair. The silken strands threaded through his fingers like a flowing summer stream. How could anyone harm so beautiful a creature? She seemed so good. So precious.

Shit, he didn't know what he was going to do, but he knew one thing. She was not going back to live with her father.

*Never.*

Leesa yawned then woke with a start. She looked down at him with wild eyes. "We're still here." She moved from his embrace.

"Yeah, but not for long." He wished he could promise her everything would be all right. She deserved a happy ending. One where she was actually treated like the princess she was.

Derek closed his eyes against the thoughts he now harbored. God, he was turning into a sap. An unbelievable, hopeless romantic. It was dangerous to want Leesa. Crazy, but that made him want her even more.

She bore his mark. She would become a wolf tonight, because he'd converted her. It was something he took pride in. He'd done many things to many different women in his day, but he'd never marked one.

"I wish I had my clothes."

He curved his mouth in a half-smirk. "You look pretty damned good in that."

She blushed. "Thanks, but I'm getting kind of cold."

Derek opened his mouth to say *I'll warm you*, but he knew he'd taken advantage enough. There could never be anything between Leesa and him. She was good, he felt it down to his bones.



She deserved someone who could protect her, love her. She deserved someone who actually had a purpose in life other than fun, women and games. Then it occurred to Derek that partying was the last thing on his mind. Hell, it hadn't even crossed his mind since he'd had sex with Leesa. He was on a mission to save his brothers, return a politician's daughter, and most recently, save the girl. Damn, it was the stuff fairy tales were made of -- he just wasn't sure it suited him.

"Leesa." He swallowed. "Tonight, when you change, it might be a little hard to control for a while."

"Oh?"

"The animal will come out. Just remember your purpose. Remember who you're supposed to attack."

"I -- I won't lose my mind, will I?" She asked it as if it hadn't even occurred to her.

"I -- uh, no." He couldn't think like that. He just couldn't. Her change would go well. It had to. There was no way he would lose her to the wolf. Derek swallowed against the lump in the back of his throat. He wouldn't allow it.

There was definitely something he wasn't telling her. Maybe this wolf thing had been a bad idea after all. When she was in Derek's arms, all the pain melted away. She felt warm, safe and... she wished she could say loved. That was a little too much to hope for this soon. He didn't love her. But she couldn't shake the feeling he did care for her.

"I'll be strong minded, Derek," she said, not knowing whether or not she was convincing herself or him.

"Here's the plan."

## Chapter Eight

Anticipation filled every cell in her body, coupled with fear and raw energy. Hairs stood up on the back of her neck at the promise of a new life. The night smelled new and alive with hope.

The man next to her had been an unlikely savior. She wasn't really sure if he'd ever done anything selfless in his life before now, but he had with her, and that meant more than anything to her.

The sounds of footfalls echoed through the hall. Leesa and Derek quickly chained themselves back together. The guards unchained them and brought them their clothes, as well as a few crumbs of food, then left without a word.

Why, she didn't know, and that uncertainty left her a little unnerved. The dank, musty smell of the dungeon seeped into her nostrils. "I can't wait to smell fresh air again."

Derek gave her a half-laugh. "Yeah, I can't wait to dip my toes in the ocean and catch a wave." He lived a life of adventure. Rumor had it he never bedded the same woman twice. Being locked up must have him feeling caged. One woman for the rest of his life would do the same. "It's almost over. Then you can do as you please. No little girl to worry over." Leesa scoffed at her own sarcastic tone. The hard line of his jaw tightened. She would've given anything to know what he was thinking.

"It's not that simple."

Dread welled inside her, gripping her heart like a vise. When had anything been simple in her life? Never. That's when. "Oh?"

"I can't just leave you, Leesa. Your father is expect --"

"I'm not going back there. Don't even think about trying to make me." She lifted her chin in defiance.

"I wasn't trying to make you." His hand came up to rake through his hair. A two-day shadow lined his face. It was rather handsome and she found her fingers itching to play with the whiskers. She'd never really found hair on a man sexy. But today, she did.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah." Derek got up from the cot and walked over to where she was standing. "Leesa, do you trust me?"

Yes. No. She didn't know. She *shouldn't* trust him. He was there to take her back to her personal prison. But when his eyes pleaded with her, the slow lilt of his accented voice played over her senses, she lost all reason.

Damn, he was good looking and frustrating and a free spirit. Not afraid of who and what he was. She envied that in him. But it was time she captured that for herself. "Yes. I guess I do."

"You remember what I told you?"

Leesa nodded, turning back toward the target. "I do."

"Go with it, Leesa. Don't fight it. When you fight, it takes control of you." His words were more than a warning. They were a promise. And Leesa knew then, if she didn't follow his instructions to a tee, they would die.

"What else?" She'd fought too hard to die now.

"Let it happen. The change comes easy to those who don't fight. Feel the beast deep inside."

Leesa struggled but a hint of a growl teased the back of her throat. When it crawled out she opened her mouth to let out a full-fledged howl.

"That's it," Derek coaxed.

The animal was deep within. Its presence lingered ever since Derek had bitten her. She was ready for it to take control.

The guard entered the darkened hallway. The time had come for action. "Hey, come here a minute."

The man eyed her with a suspicious glare. "What d'you want?" His rough voice raked over her.

Leesa plastered on a brave smile. "I want to talk to you."

Derek lay low, sitting on the cot, idly tracing circles over the metal post with his thumb as if he were bored. Leesa turned her attention back to the guard. The man was tall, lanky and had pale green eyes that might've been pretty if they still held their sparkle. "I wonder if you might do a lady a favor."

"Heh, you're no lady," he murmured. "I saw you yesterday with the dog." He gave Derek a nod.

"Oh?" She feigned a chuckle. "So a lady isn't allowed to have sex?"

The man clunked a nightstick against the metal bars. "A lady doesn't enjoy people watching her have sex."

"I wasn't given much of a choice, now was I?"

"I suppose not." He narrowed his gaze.

She wanted to smack the bastard, but Leesa knew if she did, it would mess up their plan. "Maybe I'm not a lady then." Her voice was purposefully coy.

"Maybe I'd like to see for myself," he challenged, his gaze raking the full length of her.

"Maybe you should."

"You'll be a good little girl, won't you?"

"How good do you want me to be?" She lifted a seductive brow. "Open the door. Let me show you just how good I can be."

The guard reached for the key ring dangling from the belt loop of his pants.

Derek's wolf hearing made it easy to pick up her every word.

Derek fought with all of his might trying not to knock the damned vamp wannabe off his feet and make him eat the keys, which was ridiculous. Everything was going according to plan. The problem was he cared for her, which put them both in a dangerous position.

Would the asshole take the bait? Derek heard the keys jangle and he knew the answer. Oh yeah, Leesa was desirable and hard to resist. Even on her worst day. The trick was getting to him before the bastard laid one finger on her.

The muscles in his face clenched, his biceps bunched up, hell, there wasn't one muscle in his body not coiled. He felt a growl crawl from his chest to the back of his throat.

No one would harm her. No one.

The door swung open. "Come in. They'll see us out there," Leesa coaxed.

"No, sweetheart, I have a place for us. I don't trust the wolf there." He gave a tilt of his head in Derek's direction and reached his hand out to take hers.

Shit. This wasn't part of their plan. Surely Leesa wouldn't follow this prick. But she did, peering over her shoulder at him with a shrug.

The jailer slammed the door shut with a bang.

And that's when Derek could control the wolf no more.

## Chapter Nine

Leesa followed the guard -- Jaren. He looked slightly older, smelled funny, and had a disgusting yellow film over his teeth. The mere thought of him putting his hands on her made her want to retch. *Disgusting*, but necessary. It was the way to get the door unlocked. But it wasn't the plan for Derek to just sit there.

The dull pain of panic swam around her, but she fought it. Derek wouldn't abandon her. Not after all he'd done to help her so far.

Would he?

Oh, God. She felt sick. Miserably, utterly sick. He led her into a dark closet that smelled of sour mop water. With a familiar look in his eye, he raked a fingernail down the nape of her neck, licking his lips.

Leesa shuddered.

"You sure are a pretty thing," Jaren's breath about knocked her down. "Oh, it's all right, little darling. You shouldn't shake so. I'll take real good care of you."

A new rage, one Leesa didn't even know existed, emerged from the shadows. "What makes you think I'm going to let you touch me?"

His hand came up to capture her cheek. "Aren't you?"

No. She wasn't. Hell, no.

Jaren clamped a hand over her mouth and pressed her body into the closet wall.

Suffocating. The roughness of the callused hand rubbed her mouth. Power surged through her veins, pumping, thrumming with a current so strong she almost fell down. A steady heartbeat thumped in her ear and for a moment Leesa felt as though she were outside her body. An overwhelming power crept up from within the depths of her soul and took her.

It was exhilarating. Breathtaking.

*Furry.*

Hair prickled from her pores, coating and covering her in a secure blanket. Fangs elongated in her mouth. She dropped to all fours.

"What the --" she heard Jaren say.

Leesa growled and ripped at him. She managed to take a bite at his leg. Warm, metallic liquid coated her snarling teeth. Jaren lunged at her, grabbing her around her neck, and squeezed.

He choked her until she almost lost control of her thoughts. She struggled for the doorknob, but remembered she wasn't in human form. The world was fading, blacking out around her. She gasped for breath, but couldn't manage past the death-grip Jaren had on her throat. There wasn't anything she could do at this point, but die.

And that's when the doorknob turned.

Her golden coat shimmered under the bleeding moonlight. Her pale eyes glowed from the depths of darkness. She was beautiful.

The guard had her by the neck, choking the life from her.

"I hope you came to play," Derek warned.

"Do you really think this half-breed whore is worth fighting over? I've already seen all she has. She's only good for one thing."

Oh hell yeah, and this asshole was about to find out. Derek flashed into wolf form, letting the power he'd kept at bay for so long overtake him. Something fierce welled inside of Derek, something feral. He had to protect her. He lunged, springing for the jugular.

She was *his*.

Blinded by rage, Derek ripped out his throat. The guard didn't even blink, just stood stunned and fell to the ground as the blood drained from his body. Leesa's wolf-form slumped to the floor, her jaw resting on her paw.

*Damn, let her be all right. Please just let her be okay.*

Leesa flashed back into her human form. Derek followed. She'd never seen him in his wolf form and he didn't want to frighten her. She was human after all.

Had been human...

A lump formed in his throat as he gathered her limp body in his arms and rested her in his lap. "Hey, girl," he whispered in her ear, carefully removing a strand of loose hair from her eye. "Wake up. Come on, Leesa, wake up, honey."

She stirred, then coughed and opened her eyes. Relief washed over him and he pulled her closer.

"What happened?"

"You passed out. It's okay, I'm here now."

"No."

"No?"

"It's not okay." She lifted herself from his embrace.

"I don't understand." What did the woman want? He'd just saved her. Hell, she'd be dead if he hadn't arrived and that's what he was getting for a thanks?

"I need to be able to take care of myself, Derek."

Oh. Now that made sense. It was why she'd become a wolf. It was why he'd changed her.

"You're right."

"I am?" she asked him as if she were shocked he agreed with her.

"Yeah." A long throb ran the length of his cock. They were alone in a closet. All alone, except for the body and he didn't count anymore did he? Damn, he had to get it under control around her.

The plan had been simple. Escape the vampire compound, take her back to her father and allow the pack's escape. Then come back for her. The plan had not included mating with Leesa every time his dick got hungry. Which was a lot in the past twenty-four hours.

For a brief moment, Derek just wanted to say fuck it and take her. Ask her to be his mate. But that was crazy talk, wasn't it? He'd only known her for the span of a day.

She wanted him. He smelled her arousal. He thought he might be falling for her. God, being locked away had toyed with his mind. One woman for the rest of his life?



The scent of her sailed into his nostrils. Permeated them with the scent of a she-wolf. Shit, he was in trouble now. His cock hardened to full length. He tried to ignore it. They didn't have time for mating. They were free. They had to make a run for it. "You ready?"

"Yeah."

\* \* \*

She still felt a bit woozy. Possibly from the shifting. Possibly from being choked, but most likely it was being this close to Derek. Leesa swallowed hard at the lump in her throat. It was time to go to the compound and escape from Derek. As much as she hated the idea, she had to leave behind the only man who had actually done something for her.

She crept silently, following him, inching her way through the hall and up the stairs to the main level of the compound.

Derek turned, motioned her on.

Zadur would never let them escape alive. It wasn't his style. He'd wanted to capture her to bribe her father. But pity for him because her father really didn't give a shit about her. The only reason he'd wanted her returned was to gain votes by her union with Witherton and the power the man's family possessed. Derek reached for her hand, gave her a reassuring squeeze as they ascended the stairs. "We can do this," he whispered.

Leesa wasn't sure who he was trying to convince, but she had faith in Derek.

Derek reached for the door.

## Chapter Ten

A guard caught Derek with a fist to the jaw, sending him smashing hard into the wall. Leesa kicked the vampire in the leg, although that wasn't too successful. Thankfully, Derek made it back to his feet, attacking the vampire with a swift kick to the face, knocking him unconscious.

*Impressive.*

Derek reached out, and without a second thought she took his hand, following him through the now cleared halls of the compound.

There had to be an exit somewhere.

Derek didn't look back. She knew that this would be the last time she would see him. She wanted to go along with his plan to rescue his brothers. She owed him that, but she couldn't go back to her father -- ever. Leesa stood hand in hand with the man who'd proven to be her savior and prayed he would understand.

"Where do you two think you're going?" Zadur's voice ran over her, hateful and painstakingly brutal.

They turned. Derek put her behind him. It wasn't that Leesa was afraid of Zadur. She wasn't. It was the army of vampires that followed behind him. Even worse was her father standing alongside Zadur.

Leesa's face drained of color. Completely and utterly drained. Derek's neck muscles bunched at the sight of Tomar. That bastard had never loved his daughter. It was something Derek couldn't even fathom. Hell, Derek had been loved his entire life. If it were possible he was loved too much. Leesa's father had put his greediness in front of his own daughter's well-being. And here that bastard was allied with Zadur the entire time.

Leesa dropped Derek's hand. "Father." Her amazement was apparent, disbelief present in her expression. "What are you doing?"

"The deal's off, Romano."

Leesa looked from her father and back to Derek. He tried to ignore the tug at his heart at her obvious disappointment. "Deal?" she asked.

"Derek was supposed to return you to your fiancé in order to free his brothers, my dear."

Leesa narrowed her eyes at her father. What was he trying to pull? Derek had already told her all of that. It wasn't a surprise to her.

"I've told her, Tomar," he said through clenched teeth, "and you're right, the deal's off."

"You." Leesa moved toward her father. "You planned this with Zadur?"

"My dear," Tomar said, extending a hand to Leesa. She immediately shrugged away. "You don't seem to understand. I need Derek."

"What?"

"The vampire and were wars have gotten out of hand. The human realm is now allied with the vampire world. The opposition is in the way of our collaborative domination."

"What are you talking about, Father?"

"In short, I've developed a weapon to destroy the pack."

She wanted to respond to the ruthlessness of her father but she didn't have a chance.

Derek growled low in his throat. "Fuck you." The words radiated anger.

"Derek, I knew you were the weak link," Tomar mocked.

"Piss off, Tomar. No one asked you." Derek's jaw slammed shut after his words, his stance ready for attack.

"Heh, good thing too," Tomar continued. "Now I have all of the pack captured, waiting to test my new weapon. The war will soon end, my dear. And I will rule a peaceful nation. One where humans and vampires ally to rule Griffin Hills."

"Father." She stepped back from him. "I don't understand why you had me kidnapped."

"Well, you see, your son will be my heir."

"And?"

"I want a grandchild with supernatural powers. One I can raise and have do my bidding. It's simple really. Witherton relished the idea of being father to a shifter."

Oh. My. God. That's why Zadur forced them to mate. Emotions swarmed around her, clutching her heart. He wanted Derek to get her pregnant.

Derek's arm came around her possessively. "You will not touch Leesa again. Do you understand?"

Tomar laughed. He rubbed at his moustache and shot a wink at Zadur. "Do not presume to tell me what to do with my daughter. She has certain responsibilities."

"None of which require her to be used by you, ever." He felt a breath of air escape Leesa.

He'd never been so possessive of a woman... ever. But something unexplainable had happened. He knew at that moment he'd kill for this woman. Do anything to protect her.

*The thought of her being pregnant with his child...*

Tomar was ignorant. A wolf was sterile to anything but another --

Oh shit. She was wolf now and he'd slept with her since she'd become wolf. A human turned wolf didn't have to go into heat to become pregnant. She might be carrying his pups. Derek swallowed hard. Hell no, there was no way Zadur would touch her.

## Chapter Eleven

"What have you done with my brothers, Tomar? You'd better talk and fast."  
Derek's voice was a warning. A promise.

"Oh, I didn't leave them alone, I can assure you." Tomar scratched the top of his head.

"May I?" Zadur cut in.

"Do the honors." Tomar held an outstretched hand, gesturing toward them.

"Your brothers are in the compound. About to be destroyed."

Leesa knew that Derek must be going ballistic inside. Why didn't he just go and look for them? He should. He should just leave her and go rescue them.

Whatever her father had in store for her, she could handle it, in wolf form or not. She had a new strength now. Derek had given that to her. She turned to look at Derek.  
"Go."

Derek's gaze fell to her, a furrow lining his brow.

"Go to them, Derek. You're running out of time," Leesa urged.

"I can't leave you to them. I won't." Derek turned his attention back to the army.

"Leave. I don't want your help." Leesa's voice told him she didn't want him, but the glimmer in her eyes told him differently.

"I'm not --"

"I'll not see your brothers killed while you're wasting your time on me. I can handle them. Go."

Derek was torn. Torn between the love of his brothers and not wanting anything to happen to Leesa. Did he love her?

He couldn't. He'd only just met her, but when he was with her everything just felt... right. "Shift," he asked, pleading with his eyes.

Leesa nodded as if she understood.

"Seize them," Tomar commanded the army of minions.

They charged. Their fingernails grew into daggers. Fangs exposed.

Derek flashed into wolf form, growling possessively. He would rip the bastards limb from limb. He had to demobilize Tomar, Zadur, and the whole lot. A pretty big feat for someone who didn't enjoy fighting. He had to stop them.

And then he had to go and find his brothers.

Zadur drew a sword, leading the swarm of vamps that charged them. Tomar stood in the background.

Derek clawed furiously, growling and ripping at the vamps. He tore the flesh of one into shreds. The kill wasn't as bad as he'd imagined. Not when it was soulless creatures such as these. Zadur and the vampires weren't alive.

The sounds of swords clanking and another wolf growling let him know that Leesa was fighting there alongside him. He felt proud.

Derek fought hard. So hard he didn't feel the knife cut through his side.

He didn't feel the blood seep from the wound.

He did feel the blackness surround him and take over.

\* \* \*

Leesa gathered the sword that now lay on the ground.

"You never loved me," she informed Tomar.

"You're right. I don't. You look just like the woman who gave birth to you."

That was the reason? All this time her father resented her because she was the image of her mother? "It's not my fault she left you before she died."

"She didn't die from natural causes."

"Oh?" Dread welled deep within her, knowing what she'd always feared was true.

"I found her in bed with another man and I had her killed."

Rage lit anew in her veins, furious and certain. "You bastard!"

The image of Derek lying on the ground, bleeding, coupled with the many nights she'd lain crying, craving her mother's loving touch, seared her memory.

With a single stroke, Leesa swung the sword and cut off her father's head.

\* \* \*

"Is he going to make it?" Leesa asked Darius Romano as he paced the floor of the Griffin Hills Hospital. Dread welled inside her with ferocity.

"Yeah, he'll be fine. Derek's tough." Relief washed over Leesa at Darius's words. Darius was drop dead gorgeous. He favored Derek but his hair was dark with a sprinkle of sun-kissed highlights. Leesa had been so relieved when the members of the Romano pack had escaped the prison in the compound and rushed to Derek's aid.

Derek was lucky to have a family like that.

Nothing like her own family.

God, her family had done nothing but cause them trouble. Darius must hate her for being Tomar's daughter. Not that she could blame him. It was a fact she'd hated for many years. There wasn't anything she could do about it. No matter where she was or what she'd become, she'd always be Tomar's daughter.

Even though the Romano brothers had made sure Witherton and Zadur had been locked away, the recent memory of their terrorizing still burned fresh into her mind. She swallowed hard. Killing her father was horrible. But he'd have hurt others if she hadn't.

She couldn't ignore the amusement in Darius's eyes. She could tell he'd been dying to ask her questions ever since they'd left the compound but refrained. "Can I see him?"

"Sure. Don't stay too long, though. He's lost a lot of blood."

The thought of Derek lying in bed, helpless, caused a sadness to clasp around her heart and squeeze. "Okay." She gave Darius an apologetic look before turning.

"Just so you know, it wasn't your fault."

Oh God, had he just said that? Somehow it made her feel worse.

"I mean that. Derek is a big boy. He knew what he was getting himself into. It wasn't as though he had a choice. The pack takes care of each other."

"He almost died to save us," Leesa said, a tear welling in her eye.

"I'd have done it for him in a heartbeat."

"You are lucky to have such a good family." The realization that she'd never have a family to love her enough to risk their lives for her smacked her in the face. How truly blessed the Romanos were. Truly.

Darius was quiet as she turned and entered the hospital room.

Derek was so pale. He lay there, his lower body curtained by a sterile white sheet. His muscular torso was bandaged at his bottom ribcage. His lids were closed, long lashes rested on his colorless cheeks.

If Leesa's throat tightened any more, she'd choke. She moved to his side. She laced her fingers through his loose hair. He let out a small moan and rustled a bit before his eyes fluttered open.

"Hey there." Leesa tried not to sound dismal. He looked horrible, hooked to an IV and in a hospital bed. He was too perfect to be hurt. Beautifully perfect.

"Hey." Derek kicked up the side of his mouth into a smile.

*Be brave, Leesa. Come on, be brave enough to say goodbye.*

"I really don't know how I can thank you enough for all you've done for me." She realized she was still stroking his hair. She removed her hand and straightened up her posture.

Derek pushed himself up on the hospital bed, grimacing at the movement. He smiled. "I can think of ways."

She could too. But that wasn't what she was here for. She wanted to thank him and move on. It pained her to think of a life without Derek, but the best thing she could do was allow him time to heal, to return to his worry free lifestyle.

*Without her.*



"I just wanted to..." Don't look at him, Leesa warned herself, averting her eyes. She knew if she looked at his handsome face she wouldn't be able to let him go. Not for a minute.

"Yes?"

"See how you were doing," she lied.

"I've had better days." He shot her a reassuring wink, raised up even further in the bed, causing the sheet to sink further around his hard hips. Oh, she wanted to curl up beside him, nurse him to health in ways he'd never dreamt possible.

But she couldn't.

She had to say goodbye to the most kind-hearted man she'd ever met. He didn't love her. It wasn't fair of her to pretend he did. He'd helped her because he hated her father for what he'd put the pack through. Not that she blamed him. "Derek, thank you."

"For what?"

"What do you mean for what? Thanks for helping me with my family problems." Family, now that word held multiple meanings. She no longer had a family. Not that she'd ever had one.

"My family was in trouble too, Leesa. It really wasn't a problem."

No, she supposed it wasn't. "Darius said you were getting better. I'm glad."

The room was awkwardly silent. "Yeah." He grinned. "He told me your father was killed and the entire lot was locked away."

"He was and they are."

Derek wanted to ask her how she felt about that. He wanted to ask her what she was going to do next, but it wasn't the time. That would come later. Hell, he'd gotten used to Leesa in the short period they'd been together. The thought of her going out into the paranormal world as a new being made his insides twist even further.

"Derek, I came to tell you thank you for your help."

Where was she going with this? "You're welcome, Leesa, but it's just beginning."

"Oh?" She furrowed a brow, folded her arms across her chest.

"Yeah. Someone has to show you the ropes. You're just a baby."

"I can't stay."

"Oh?" He wanted to beg her to remain with him. Tell her he didn't want her to leave his side, ever. Somehow she was beginning to feel natural to him. Like she belonged by his side. But she'd just gotten her freedom. The chance to make it on her own. That single bite had taken it all back.

She'd hate him when she found out the truth.

He scoffed inwardly at himself. That was crazy. No woman had ever had that effect on him. It had to be the injury playing with his mind. Yeah, that was it, he was hurting. There was no way he was in his right mind.

"I've made a few calls. I'm going to rent an apartment for a while. Just until I get on my feet. I've even found a job." She looked pleased. Happy even.

So why did Derek's chest feel like it was about to explode? Derek knew she was right. They couldn't be together. It was crazy. But he wanted it more than anything. And he'd never wanted or needed any woman.

Leesa wasn't just any woman. She was marked now, a pack member. She couldn't be too far away from the protection of the pack, whether Leesa liked it or not. "Come here." Derek reached for her hand. She took it along with a seat next to him. Boy, he didn't feel up to being the one to tell her she'd won her freedom only to fall into the protection of the pack. Hell, Rydan would shit golden bricks if he knew that he'd brought another woman into the pack.

He'd been upset enough about Nina, their younger sister, mating with a vampire. There was no way he'd stand for Derek mating with a human.

*But she's not human.* The thought needled in the back of his mind. *She's a were now. And you are perfectly capable of taking her as a mate.* Was that why he felt this tug every time he was around her? Was she to be his mate?

*Stop it, Derek! This is crazy talk.*

*Mate.*

It was a word he'd never thought he'd ever think about in the same sentence as his name, but there he was, wishing Leesa could be his. And she sat there, patiently waiting for what he had to say. "Leesa. When I bit you..." He trailed off as a slice of pain ripped through his wound. He winced.

"Can I get you something?"

"No." He rustled around in the bed. Damn, he couldn't get comfortable. "When I bit you," he began again, "you were marked."

Her hand loosened its grip on his and the confusion she wore on her face let him know she didn't realize the importance of his words. "Marked?" Leesa lifted her hand to her fading bite mark.

"Yeah."

"I don't understand why that matters. It will heal, Derek."

"That's not what I meant." He reached for the large mug full of water that rested on the nightstand.

"What do you mean? You're not making any sense."

Derek set the mug back on the nightstand and reached for the marking on her neck. Part of him felt proud she wore his mark. The mark of a Romano. The other part of him cried out for her. What if she didn't want the protection of the pack?

What if one of his brothers wanted to take her as his mate?

Oh God, he'd never thought about that.

Something foreign welled inside him. He'd marked her Romano, not them. If anyone in the pack was to have Leesa, it would be him. It was a thought that surprised him. And in that instant, Derek knew that Leesa would be his. "Leesa. You're a pack member now. You have the protection of the pack for as long as you live."

Leesa could scarcely believe his words. She'd never had a family to look after her and there Derek was offering the family protection to her. It literally took her breath. There he was, lying in the hospital bed, wounded, all because of things her father had done, and at the same time offering her a new family.

It was crazy.

The worst part of it was Leesa wanted to say yes. She wanted to follow Derek, to learn what it was like to be part of a pack.

But she couldn't.

She couldn't stay with someone out of forced obligation. She just couldn't.

The thought of never seeing Derek again tugged at her heart. She'd finally get to be on her own. The funny thing about it was now she didn't want to be. She wanted...

She wanted...

Derek. The realization slammed into her like a gust of wind. "I have to go. I just wanted to tell you goodbye."

Derek moved his feet to the side of the bed, wincing and grabbing his side. "So you want to leave?"

She cast a glance to the floor. She didn't *want* to leave. She knew she damned sure wouldn't leave if she kept looking at his handsome face. "I have to. You've done enough already."

He didn't beg her to stay. He didn't shower her with declarations of love. He just sat there as she turned and walked away.

## Chapter Twelve

It was strange the first few days without Derek. Leesa had thought the constant void in her heart and the calling of her body for him would decrease with time. It had gotten worse. Every moment she was without him, she felt drained. Her body craved him more and more. She was becoming one with the animal and the animal wanted Derek.

She had no idea what to do with the cravings and urges in her body. Even scarier, she didn't know how to control the wolf. She didn't know if she'd harmed anyone while in her wolf form or even what she did.

There was no memory of becoming a wolf. All she did know was strange markings appeared around her wrist and upper left thigh and she had no idea what they meant or even how they'd gotten there.

She'd found she enjoyed being a waitress at a local restaurant and was pretty good at it. She had her regulars. Mostly bikers passing through Griffin Hills. They'd offered her more than a tip an occasion or two but she was never interested.

Mostly she felt -- sick.

The scent of the freshly cooked food made her want to retch.

Many times she'd thought about picking up the phone and trying to find him. Didn't her babies deserve to know their father?

What if he was back with Cara? What would she do then? Let them have visitation with their father and some woman she didn't even know?

No, it was better to handle this on her own. If Derek wanted her, he would've come for her by now. Sometimes she could swear she felt his presence or would catch a whiff of his scent, but when she'd turn around -- nothing.

She'd always feel the disappointment that followed.

Leesa wiped down the table and refilled the sugar and swayed to the southern mixture of music playing in the old-timey juke box.

Since she'd realized she loved Derek Romano it was hard to think of much else. But by now he would have moved on to another woman and forgotten all about her.

"Miss me?" A voice sounded from behind her.

Leesa stopped, stood upright. *More than anything*, she thought but she dared not admit it.

"So I was thinking..." He paused. "Do you think you can turn around so I can look into those beautiful eyes?"

A smile crossed her face. He was ever the charmer. "Why are you here?" It was best to cut straight to the point. One part of her wanted to rejoice at the sight of him and the other wanted to flee.

"I told you the pack would watch after you, didn't I?"

Fabulous. He was just carrying out pack duties. She'd become more of an obligation. He really didn't want to see her because he wanted to.

He looked good. No, make that damned good. Clean shaven, his hair combed back and tied behind the nape of his neck, he wore a black button down shirt, dark jeans and work boots. "I'm okay. You can leave now."

"I don't want to."

"Derek, I have a lot to do. My shift doesn't end for another hour and then I have to clean when I get home."

"Wow." He smiled.

"What?"

"You really have made it on your own, haven't you?"

The notion that he was proud of her made her beam inside. "I have responsibilities, yes. And why are you still here? Go back to what's her name, Cara?"

Derek's eyes widened. "Cara? Oh you mean..." He blushed, no doubt remembering their first encounter when he'd kissed her. "I've not seen her since we..."

he trailed off. "Listen," he began again as he reached out and touched her arm. "I miss the hell out of you, Leesa."

"You do?"

"Yeah, you're pretty hard to forget."

A tear prickled her eye, then trailed down her cheek. Damned emotions and hormones were out of whack.

Derek reached up and swiped it with the pad of his thumb. "Don't cry, Leesa, I love you."

Then it got worse. She was literally sobbing. "I love you too."

He swept her up in his arms and whirled her around the room.

"Whoa," she said, looping her arms around his neck. "I'm going to get sick."

He furrowed a questioning brow. Then his gaze dipped to her slightly expanded stomach. "Are you... you're not..."

She shook her head. "I am."

"My God, Leesa, why didn't you come for me?"

"I thought you wouldn't want them... us. I guess I was foolish."

"No. I should've stopped you that day at the hospital. I guess I was afraid to admit how much of an effect you had on me."

She smiled. "Mate with me."

"See, baby, that's the thing. You missed me so much because we already are." He lifted the sleeve of his shirt to show an intricate tattoo. "These are the markings of a mated wolf."

"So that's where that came from." She chuckled. "I thought I'd had a wild night."

He squeezed her even tighter in his arms. "You will tonight."

"Promise?"

"Oh yeah." Then Derek Romano kissed Leesa Romano in front of an audience -- again.

## **Kell Casey**

Kell Casey makes her home in Montana, despite being allergic to horses, cattle, and sheep. One day she'd love to climb the mountains, just as soon as they put elevators in. She does, however, love to volunteer at the local big-cat sanctuary and hear from her readers. You can contact her at [kell@kellcasey.com](mailto:kell@kellcasey.com) and visit her website at [kellcasey.com](http://kellcasey.com).