

Wolf Tales 3: Anton

Kate Douglas

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Chapter 1

Anton came fully awake between one heartbeat and the next. He lay still in the darkness surrounded by the warmth of the two people he loved most in the world. Stefan curled beside him in wolverine form, while Alexandria, all warm and sensual woman, sprawled across his lower torso. Her soft lips, slightly parted in sleep, rested against his belly.

Anton listened to the steady beat of hearts, the comforting rush of blood through veins and knew something else had dragged him from slumber, some shift in the air, some sense of disquiet in his mind.

Almost two weeks of odd, intermittent dreaming. Now, three nights in a row. He couldn't blame three nights of strange dreams on Oliver's cooking.

He closed his eyes and concentrated, shifted his senses beyond the human range to grasp the part of him that always remained the wolf.

Nothing.

A lingering sense of unease, the visceral memory of a terrible scream? He wasn't sure. The sensation passed, his eyelids grew heavy. He stroked Alexandria's tousled hair, rested his other hand on Stefan's furred shoulder and willed his body back to sleep.

* * *

Keisha Rialto stared at her clasped hands and tried desperately to believe her therapist. The woman's soft voice, trained to soothe and comfort, rolled across her tense shoulders without any of the desired effect.

"The dreams are a manifestation of your anger, your fear... and your pain. You've blotted out the worst of the attack. That's how the mind protects us. You didn't kill those men, Keisha, no matter what your subconscious wants you to believe."

Dr. Wilson, the therapist, leaned closer and placed a comforting hand on Keisha's shoulder. "We're dealing with two separate incidents. Your beating and rape had nothing to do with the fact a rival gang chose that particular time to attack the men who harmed you. Though unintentional, that very attack may have saved your life. You were an unfortunate witness to a brutal triple homicide, but, no matter how empowering it might be for you to believe it, you're not the one who killed the men who assaulted you. They were killed by vicious dogs, animals trained as weapons."

Dr. Wilson paused and her choking swallow was audible in the small room, her voice barely a whisper. "Horrible, vicious dogs."

Keisha raised her head and caught the look of horror on the therapist's face. She knew the woman had seen police photos of the apartment, knew exactly how awful the scene had been. Dr. Wilson must be remembering those pictures now. The carnage was imprinted on Keisha's mind with a stark clarity she'd not been able to forget, images of the torn and bloodied bodies of three men, the men who had held her captive and repeatedly raped her, who had subjected her to unimaginable atrocities over a twelve hour period.

She'd barely regained consciousness when the police broke through the door, yet the images of those eviscerated, mutilated bodies were burned into her mind. The room covered in gore, herself a battered, bloody mess, her once tightly braided hair hanging in blood-soaked tangles around her face. The police were amazed the dogs hadn't touched her. They'd killed her attackers in what had to have been a maelstrom of terror without harming Keisha.

The images were the thing of nightmares... but her nightmares were worse. In her dreams, she was the killer. Each night she replayed the same visuals, of herself rising up, turning on her attackers, changing into a huge rampaging wolf, an intelligent agent of death, all claws and teeth and powerful muscle.

She still tasted the hot blood, felt the joy of the kill, the thrilling satisfaction of strong teeth tearing throats, of powerful jaws ripping apart the bodies of the ones who

had hurt her. Each night she repeated the heinous acts, acts made no more acceptable by the fact the men had practically killed her with their assault.

She gestured frantically at the therapist. "I know what you're saying must be true, but the dreams aren't going away. If anything, they've become clearer, more graphic... more like a memory than a dream." Keisha grabbed the doctor's hand and held on as if to a lifeline, her coffee-brown fingers a stark contrast against the other woman's pale flesh. "Last night I awakened in the garden. I was naked and there were scratches on my arms and legs. Scratches, as if I'd been running through thick brush. I have vivid memories of streaking through Golden Gate Park -- only I wasn't human. I was a wolf."

Dr. Wilson blinked in surprise and stared down at their clasped hands. "Goodness! You haven't mentioned somnambulism, though sleepwalking isn't uncommon during periods of extreme stress. Has this happened before?"

Keisha slowly released the grip on her therapist's hand. "I don't know for sure. At least two other nights... I don't know anything, anymore. Look at my hair!"

Her expression one of pure confusion, the woman stared at Keisha. "What about your hair?"

"I have it braided by a professional. It's supposed to last for at least a couple weeks. The mornings after I dream, the braids are undone. It's always been curled really tightly... it's getting straighter. It's longer. What's happening to me? What am I going to do?"

Blinking owlishly, obviously at a loss for words, the doctor glanced down at her notes. "Have you gone back to work?"

Keisha felt the subtle withdrawal, the woman's struggle to remain professional.

"I see you're a licensed landscape architect. You have your masters degree in..." She paused a moment, reading through her notes. "Ah, here it is, landscape architecture and design with a strong background in botany." Dr. Wilson smiled gently at Keisha and took a firm hold on both her hands. "You've spent seven years training for your profession, so you must obviously love what you do. I would think the beauty of

working with growing plants and flowers would be every bit as healing as talking to me. It's going to take time, dear. I can't ask you to forget an event that's obviously too powerful to be forgotten, but I can ask you to accept the fact your life was spared, that you're mentally strong and in good physical health. Your body is recovering, your mind will heal as well and at some point the dreams will go away." She patted Keisha's hand. "I want you to work on those exercises I gave you. Keep a record of any other nocturnal events should they occur. Just jot down whatever you recall when you awaken." Dr. Wilson sat back and folded her hands in her lap, a sign their session had ended. "We'll talk again next week."

* * *

Keisha stood silently on the corner of Polk and Van Ness in the heart of San Francisco and waited for the bus. People of all ages passed by on either side, some smiling in her direction, others brushing past as if she didn't exist. They didn't know. None of them knew what horror she'd seen, what fears still filled her heart.

She knew she looked perfectly normal, knew she projected an air of success, of control. She'd better... she worked damned hard at it. Anyone who noticed her would see an attractive young woman of color, tall and slim, professionally dressed in a neat navy blue pantsuit, her shoes and bag perfectly coordinated and obviously expensive, her hair tightly braided back to a neat little bun at the nape of her neck.

Not a hair out of place. Everything under control.

Professional. Successful... *normal*.

Little did they know.

Dr. Wilson said she would heal. She'd have to if she wanted more than a pale imitation of life.

The bus pulled to a stop and Keisha climbed on board. She paid her fare and moved to an empty seat near the middle of the bus. A supermarket tabloid lay on the seat and she shoved the newspaper to one side.

The graphic photo and even more graphic headline leapt out at her, left her skin clammy and her heart pounding a staccato beat.

Werewolves Kill Rapists, Spare Victim.

The photo covered the top half of the front page with the snarling visage of a rabid wolf superimposed over the grainy black and white. Keisha recognized it immediately and knew it must be a picture from the police files. The faces and torn throats of the men were obscured, but it was obvious they'd been badly mutilated before they died. There was little to identify the location. She didn't need any more than this.

Keisha would never, not for the rest of her life, forget the filthy apartment where three men died an unspeakable death.

The same place where Keisha Rialto lost her soul.

* * *

Alexandria Olanet stretched herself awake, eyes narrowing against the bright sunlight streaming through the window blinds. She reached for the man beside her and found thick, coarse fur, instead. The huge wolf raised his head, amber eyes twinkling in the morning light. With a wide yawn, he rolled over on his back and stretched.

Front legs rippled and took form, becoming hands, back legs lengthened, shifted until they were sleek and muscular with long, narrow feet. Finally, the wolven head slowly morphed into the human visage of the man Xandi loved most of all.

She leaned over and placed a very chaste kiss on Stefan Ararat's lips, a kiss that shifted, just as his body had done so easily, into something deeper, more sensual.

Something hungry and demanding. Stefan's lips were warm and mobile beneath hers, his tongue searching, exploring the space between her lips and teeth, tangling with her tongue and finding a rhythm that mimicked the lovemaking that had kept them busy most of the night.

Busy with Anton.

Xandi pulled slowly away from Stefan. "Where's Anton?"

"I'm here."

Both Stefan and Xandi turned as one. Anton lounged in the open door, his shirt unbuttoned and hanging open, his soft denim jeans hugging his slim hips and muscular thighs. He held a steaming cup of coffee in one hand, a newspaper in the other.

Xandi rose up on one elbow and smiled. "You're up early."

Stefan leaned over and nipped her shoulder. "Why don't you join us?"

"Please, Anton?" Xandi held her hand out to the wizard.

He hesitated a moment, then shook his head and smiled with the expression of a man who has willingly lost his battle. He set his coffee and the newspaper on the bedside table, slowly eased out of his shirt, then unzipped his jeans and slipped them down over his hips.

Xandi licked her lips as his dark thatch of pubic hair came into view, then the solid length of his partially erect cock. Damn... so beautiful! His body was all silk and steel, smooth skin over taut muscles, the body of a predator.

She'd tasted him last night. She'd tasted Stefan as well, two men of very similar appearances but totally different flavors. Stefan was fire and hot spice while Anton reminded her of dark forests and musky woods.

Anton discarded his pants and sat on the edge of the bed. He leaned over Xandi's shoulder and kissed Stefan, but his palm found Xandi's breast and his stroking fingers brought her nipple to a tight peak. Xandi reached for Anton's growing cock, sighed and lay back against the cool sheets, sandwiched between her men.

Anton's tongue tested Stefan's smooth lower lip then found entrance into the hot, wet cave of his mouth. Alexandria's breast filled his palm, her hands were doing wondrous things to his cock and balls and Stefan's tongue dueled gently with his.

He tried to recall what had brought him into the bedroom in the first place, but Stefan's hand suddenly found his ass, squeezing him hard, drawing his body closer to Alexandria's. She tilted her hips just so, her grasp on his cock tightened and he shifted just enough to help her guide him into her warm pussy.

Her mouth found his nipple and she suckled, hard, nipping him almost to the point of pain. Stefan broke their kiss just as Anton felt her soft gasp of breath. He knew Stefan had entered her backside, easing his way slowly inside that tight opening.

Anton fought every instinct that told him to thrust hard and fast into the woman. Instead, he held still, sensing her muscles clenching and stretching around him, feeling the shift and twist of her body as she accommodated Stefan's huge cock as well as his own, each finding a home in its own, separate sheath.

Anton felt the smooth glide of Stefan's cock riding against his. A shudder raced through him at the pure, unadulterated pleasure of a woman's hot sheath surrounding his cock and the unbelievable sensation each time Stefan thrust slow and deep into her backside. Alexandria moaned and sucked harder on his nipple. Her hands clutched him around the ribcage as Anton found his own rhythm, alternating stroke for stroke with Stefan.

Stefan swept his hand along Anton's thigh, across Xandi's back, then turned her just enough so he could suckle her breast. There was a soft *pop* as her lips broke suction with Anton's nipple. She arched her back, giving Stefan better access to her breast.

Anton leaned close and drew her other nipple into his mouth. Neither he nor Stefan had shaved this morning. Their beard-roughened chins scraped Alexandria's pale breasts as each man sucked and nipped. Anton matched Stefan's rhythm, driving deep inside Alexandria as the other man withdrew, then slowly eased back inside her hot sheath.

He'd long had fantasies like this, fantasies where he loved both a man and a woman at the same time, but nothing he'd imagined came even remotely close to the reality. Anton drew Alexandria's nipple deep into his mouth and wrapped his tongue around the taut flesh, sucking hard. He felt her stiffen, heard the soft, keening cry as her first orgasm claimed her, felt the thick slide of Stefan's cock against his own as the other man buried himself completely inside his mate, buried himself so hard and deep his balls pressed against Anton's and his muscled arms drew both Anton and Alexandria into a tight, shuddering embrace.

Anton let his mind open, found Stefan, found Alexandria, felt the passion in their hearts, the hot rush of need, the multiple sensations of Stefan's cock buried deep inside Alexandria, the smooth rush as his own cock slipped deeper into her pussy.

Connecting their minds, Anton shared the sensual images surrounding him, the wonder of his cock sliding against Stefan's, the even greater wonder of Stefan and Alexandria's love, a love that made room for a man without a mate of his own.

Anton wanted to last, he tried to hold out, but the trembling woman in his arms, the hot rush of her fluids bathing his cock, Stefan's deep groan as their balls pressed together when he hugged the three of them into a tight, hot, shivering mass of flesh catapulted Anton into his own release.

He arched his back and drove deep inside Alexandria, her tight pussy an even tighter sheath with Stefan's cock pressing hard against his own.

Too much!

Once more... please... once more!

Gasping, crying out, Anton felt his testicles contract, felt the hot coil of life-giving seed burning the length of his cock, felt each spasm and contraction deep inside Alexandria's hot sheath. The sensitive head of his cock found the hard opening of her womb as he filled her. She cried out once more, her thighs clamping hard against his, her pussy milking every last drop of seed, taking him deep inside, taking Stefan, holding both of them.

Loving both of them.

Heart and mind. Body, soul... still, it wasn't enough.

She was Stefan's mate.

She was the leader of their group.

She would bear a child only for Stefan.

Stefan.

Shuddering, still trembling in the aftermath of orgasm, Anton slowly withdrew.

Aware, once more, of the reason he'd come back to their room in the first place.

Chapter 2

Anton poured himself another cup of coffee and leaned against the counter. Both Alexandria and Stefan, freshly showered, were mesmerized by the article in the cheap supermarket tabloid. Finally, after a long moment, Alexandria raised her head and swept the thick fall of auburn hair back from her eyes.

"You think she's one of us, don't you?"

Anton nodded his head. "I've awakened a number of nights now with the sense that something is wrong. Not a true nightmare, just a strange sense of unease. I saw this when we picked up groceries yesterday and felt a strong compulsion to buy it."

Stefan grinned. "What? And here I thought this was your regular reading material."

Anton groaned. "Right... like I want to read about four-headed babies and alien abductions? I don't think so. This..." He pointed at the lurid headline and photo and took a deep breath. "This sort of thing gets my attention. What if the woman is the wolf? What if the stress and fear of the attack forced her to shift? Imagine her now, alone and traumatized, possibly even unaware it happened?"

"That's awful." Alexandria shook her head. "I can't imagine the horror of this attack, if it's real."

Anton nodded. "I think it's real. I also think it's what has been disturbing my sleep. I believe she is able to shift and I somehow sense when it happens." He carefully set his coffee cup down. "Enjoy your breakfast. We're flying out to San Francisco in about two hours. You'd better get moving."

* * *

Xandi shook her head, grinning, as she, Stefan and Anton left San Francisco Police Department headquarters with the name and address of the rape victim. "Your powers to mesmerize the detective were, to say the least, mesmerizing."

Anton smiled and winked at her as he carefully folded the slip of paper and put it inside his wallet. "Hey, when you're good, you're good. Don't ever doubt it, woman. I am good."

Stefan punched him lightly on the shoulder. "Don't get cocky. He was so busy looking at Xandi he wasn't even paying attention to you."

"That's how I got him." Anton rubbed his fingers over his chest. "I convinced him Alexandria was the victim's sister and was desperate to get in touch with her."

"She's black, Anton. I'm not." Xandi shook her head, amazed. Sometimes Anton's powers appeared limitless.

Anton stopped, his look serious and somewhat withdrawn. "In a way, my dear, if I'm right, you *are* sisters. I believe she is *Chanku*. She is also recovering from a horrible trauma. I hope that not only will she accept us as family, she will also allow us to help her."

Xandi slipped her hand around Anton's arm, linked her other with Stefan and hugged both men close to her. "Take us to her, Anton. We'll figure out how to help her once we find her."

* * *

Nibbling on a long strand of yellowed grass she'd plucked from a planter in her studio, Keisha stared blankly at the drawing in front of her. The job of a lifetime, the design for a memorial garden in Golden Gate Park, and all she could see were the terrified eyes of men awaiting their own brutal death.

A small, filthy apartment, awash in blood and gore.

A nightmare vision from the wrong point of view -- not through her own eyes, but through the eyes of a berserk predator -- a snarling wolf gone mad.

The men deserved to die. She wondered if she would ever move beyond the horrible memories -- memories of their violent, horrible acts that left her bruised, torn and bleeding. They'd planned to kill her. She knew that, felt it with every bit of her soul, but why did she continue to believe she was the one who had turned the tables and murdered them instead?

Impossible.

Late afternoon sun streamed through the French doors of her workroom, casting long shadows across the clutter and comfortable bits and pieces of her work... her life. What had always brought her peace now merely distracted. She rubbed her sweaty palm across her forehead and bit back a sob.

Therapy wasn't helping. The comforting words of friends and coworkers merely reminded her she was still a victim, still worthy of handling with kid gloves.

She was not a victim. She refused to be a victim. She'd worked too hard all her life, paid too many debts, fought too many battles to get this far.

Her father might have been an excellent gardener, a job he loved until the day he died, but he'd never been respected for all his skill and knowledge. She was a landscape architect, a licensed professional already gaining notice in a very competitive market. It hadn't been easy and damn it all, she was not going to lose sight of her goal now.

Success lay so close, the designs spread across her drawing board, the key to the prize she'd worked for since the first time she'd seen a professionally designed garden and fallen in love with the beauty of nature.

Nature shaped by the hand of man.

And the hands of men have taken it all away.

"Damn." Flinging her pencil to the floor, Keisha stood up and paced about the room. Suddenly aware she was pacing in the pattern of wolves in the zoo enclosure, she came to a trembling halt.

A bell chimed on the ground floor. "Who the hell?" She brushed her hand across her forehead, threw the mangled piece of grass she'd grown in the habit of chewing on into the trash and straightened her work smock before heading down the stairs. She

looked through the small peephole and saw an attractive young white woman on the front porch. The woman appeared to be alone.

Keisha slowly eased the door open. The woman smiled and held out her hand.

"Ms. Rialto? My name is Alexandria Olanet."

Keisha nodded, aware the tiny hairs on the back of her neck were standing upright. Her heart leapt into overdrive. The hand she held out to the stranger trembled, then stilled as the woman's fingers tightened around hers. She stared at her fingers, firmly clasped in the woman's grasp, and was aware of a sense of calm, of peace she hadn't felt now in weeks.

Wide-eyed, she raised her chin and studied the stranger.

The woman's voice was soft, well modulated. "You don't know who I am and you have no reason to trust me, but I'm here to help you." Without waiting for an invitation, she stepped into the brightly lit foyer. "I probably should have called, but you would have told me not to come."

Keisha stepped back, allowing the woman further into her home. "Why? What do you want with me?"

"I know what happened in that apartment two weeks ago. I know how those men died. You need to know the truth."

Keisha's blood ran cold. She backed against the wall, her breath lodged in her throat and it was all she could do to keep from screaming. "I think you'd better leave before I call the police."

"Please." Alexandria held her hands out as if in supplication. "I mean you no harm. You're kin to me and I want to help."

"Kin? Shit, woman. You're white. We're no more kin than..."

The woman didn't look crazy. No, she looked as if she meant what she said. Maybe she was one of those religious fanatics who went around trying to save people from the devil.

"We're sisters of the heart, you and me." She stepped closer to Keisha. "I've not suffered as you have, but I know about the wolf."

This woman was definitely nuts. "What wolf? That's all tabloid garbage. It was pit bulls. Trained fighting dogs who killed those men. That's all it was."

The woman nodded. "I know that's what you want to believe. In your heart you know differently."

"No." Keisha's throat seemed to constrict around the word. "The police report said..."

"The police report is wrong. You killed those men. They deserved to die and you killed them."

"No!" Keisha backed away, edging slowly toward the phone in the hallway.

The woman merely shook her head and sighed. "I should have thought this through... figured out a better way to approach you..." She smiled, almost self-consciously at Keisha. Then she started to melt. That's the only way Keisha could explain it. She melted, right there in the marble foyer of Keisha's new townhouse apartment.

Keisha opened her mouth to scream. No sound emerged. Her legs began to shake, her hands trembled so that she couldn't grab the phone and if she'd thought of it in time she would have closed her eyes. Instead, they were open wide and saw it all, saw the beautiful auburn-haired woman sort of ripple and melt and fold in upon herself until there was a pile of clothing on the floor and a full sized she-wolf standing in the foyer.

Keisha did what any right-thinking young woman would do under similar circumstances.

She fainted dead away.

* * *

"Maybe that was a bit abrupt." Xandi slipped the work smock over the young woman's shoulders and loosened the top buttons on her blouse to make her more comfortable on the soft leather couch. Anton had carried Keisha's limp body into the

living room within seconds after she fainted, reacting instantly when Xandi's mental cry of alarm brought him practically crashing through the door.

Stefan sat across the room, his fingers steeped under his chin, his amber eyes thoughtful. "There really isn't another way. Poor thing has had a horrible experience, one shock following another. Tell me one easy way to explain that she's also a shape-shifting wolf who just ruthlessly killed and partially devoured three men. Personally, my love, I think you did just fine."

Xandi brushed a few loose tendrils of Keisha's dark hair back from her eyes. The woman's eyelids fluttered but remained closed. Xandi sighed and shook her head in dismay. "I came into my heritage in a world filled with love. Keisha hasn't had that option. It's been forced upon her, violently. Her body still hasn't recovered from the assault, her mind doesn't accept the attack. We need to proceed more gently with her. I really blew it."

Anton moved closer, gliding silently to a spot beside the couch. He knelt beside the unconscious woman, his entire demeanor one of worry and solicitude. "She's so beautiful, so frightened. She doesn't understand any of this. She wants to... she's very intelligent, very open to new ideas, but all of this scares the hell out of her."

"How do you know?" Xandi cupped Anton's jaw in her palm. "I tried to read her but her mind is closed to me. Do you understand her thoughts?"

"This close, her mind is practically melded with mine." Anton shifted back on his heels but his palm still brushed Keisha's hair. "I think we've had a partial link for the past couple of weeks, hence the dreams keeping me awake. I feel her thoughts, her fears. She's terrified of the truth, afraid that what you told her actually happened. She doesn't want that. She's not violent by nature, or so she believes. That's why the idea of the wolf in her is so frightening."

"Can you calm her?" Xandi studied the woman's face. She looked almost as if she'd been caught in the midst of a scream... her jaw was tense, her lips twisted. "I keep thinking she'd be more comfortable with a woman, especially since her assault, but not if we can't link. Can you help her, Anton?"

He nodded his head. "Leave me alone with her. Take Stefan and go see the city. Golden Gate Park is only a block away. Enjoy the gardens... whatever. Don't try to link with me. I need time completely alone with her."

Xandi nodded. Stefan rose to his feet and held out his hand. She placed hers within his firm grip and followed him to the door. "We'll take about an hour, Anton. You've got my cell phone number if we wander too far for a mental connection. If you need us sooner, just call."

Just call. Such simple words to a man who had spent most of his life alone. Anton stroked Keisha's shoulder, but his thoughts followed the couple walking down the long hallway. Stefan and Alexandria. Mates, lovers, two people with enough love to share not only their bodies but their hearts and souls with a loner like Anton.

Who would have guessed? He projected peace and warmth, calm and contentment to the unconscious woman, but part of his thoughts remained with Stefan and Alexandria. He wasn't actually jealous of what they'd discovered with one another, but damn if he didn't want the same thing for himself.

He sensed their love and laughter, their concern for Keisha, even their concern for him as they strolled the busy streets of San Francisco. Smiling, basking in the feelings still so new to him, he turned his mind back to the unconscious woman. She was beautiful. Her skin was very dark, an all-over coffee brown with hair that was black and thick, braided into neat little rows of braids stretching back from her high forehead.

He wished she'd open her eyes. He hadn't seen them yet. Wondered if they were the same amber as his and Stefan's or deep gray like Alexandria's. Whatever color, he knew they would be perfect.

Everything about her cried out to him.

Chanku.

Anton raised his face to the heavens for a brief prayer of thanks. He had found her and she would survive. How many of their kind were out there, lost and afraid, unaware of the power just beyond their fingertips?

Unaware of the sense of brotherhood, of family?

He tried to focus on specific images in her mind, but found only a jumbled litany of fear, nightmarish snapshots of the faces of her abductors, the bloodied room and torn bodies, all of it intermingled with the beauty of her work and the lush gardens she designed.

He took her limp hands in his, concentrated on her thoughts and projected a sense of belonging, of brotherhood, of peace and acceptance.

He felt her slight flicker of awareness, the tightening reaction of fear, then heard her sigh quietly. Her tongue slipped between her full lips and she licked first the upper, then the lower one, moistening them. Anton thought his heart might stop altogether as she slowly, cautiously, opened her eyes.

Anton smiled when he recognized the flash of green in their amber depths. Hers truly were the eyes of a wolf.

It took her a moment to focus and he used every one of his mental tricks in that brief span of time to reassure her, to make her feel safe and protected. He felt the tension go out of her grasp and knew it was working, at least for now.

"Are you all right?" Anton kept his voice pitched low, professional. He kept a firm but comforting grip on her hand.

Keisha scooted back on the couch and sat up, looking around as if trying to find the wolf, but she left her hand within his grasp. Held it, in fact, as if it were a lifeline.

"Who...?" She glanced down at their hands, then back up at Anton.

"The others have gone. I asked them to give us some time. I know you have a lot of questions." Anton stroked her hand, projecting soothing thoughts. "Alexandria felt terrible about frightening you, but she knew of no other way to convince you."

"You mean... I really did see what I thought I saw? That woman turned into a wolf?" Her voice squeaked on the word.

Anton smiled. "Yes, you saw her turn into a wolf. It was not a parlor trick, not a figment of your imagination. It's something all of us are capable of doing."

"Us who?" Carefully, Keisha extricated her hand from Anton's grasp.

Regretfully, he let her go.

"*Chanku*. We are all of that race, an ancient race... you, me, my friend Stefan and the woman you saw, Alexandria. Others as well, though I've not located them yet. Long before I read the article in the paper, I had sensed your existence. The tabloid story merely pointed me in the right direction."

Keisha stared at him as if she still thought he might be totally nuts. Anton let his thoughts surface in her mind.

Maybe this will help. Our people can communicate over short distances with the power of our minds, longer distances under certain circumstances. I know you can hear me. See if you can answer.

"Holy shit." Keisha shook her head. "I hear you in my head."

You can speak to me this way as well. Try it.

How? Her simple question touched his mind, an erotic feather-stroke across his senses. Anton shivered at the brief contact.

Just like that.

Her eyes grew round and wide. *You mean you can hear me as well as I can hear you? How come I've never been able to do this before?*

Most likely, you've not had anyone listening. Do you believe me now?

Well, I'm beginning to think either you're totally nuts or I am. She smiled.

Anton realized she was so caught up in the magic of telepathy she'd forgotten her fear. He silently reassured her, built on her sense of achievement.

He'd never seen anyone more lovely, not even Alexandria in all her wolvern glory. He told her so, let Keisha see herself as he saw her... skin like dark silk, sparkling yet wary amber eyes, a lush and sensual mouth that begged to be kissed, full breasts he wanted to nuzzle and taste.

Keisha arched her eyebrows and scooted away from him. The artery at her throat fluttered with her increased heart rate. Anton sensed her fear and immediately clamped down on his sensual thoughts.

I'm sorry. I was out of line.

She stared at him, obviously not certain whether he was worthy of her trust.

He shook his head, held his hand out to her in apology. "I am sorry. I have no right, especially after all you've been through. You're a beautiful woman and I let my thoughts go a bit astray. The *Chanku* are a very sensual race."

Keisha nibbled on her upper lip a moment, then seemed to come to a decision. "Tell me more about this ancient race of yours. I'm of African descent... one hundred percent, as far as I know. I can trace my ancestors back to the Ivory Coast in the mid 1700s. Both my parents are gone now, but as far as I know, there aren't any white people in my heritage. How can I be part of some other race I've never heard of?"

"I don't know. Somewhere in your past is the blood of *Chanku*. There's not a lot of information about the race as a whole, but I sense it very strongly in you." Anton stood up and paced about the room, gathering his thoughts. "I learned of my own heritage practically by accident. I was a magician, a very good one. I wanted more. I wanted to be a true wizard, a master of the arcane arts. To achieve this goal I studied. I went to libraries all over Europe, read scrolls in their ancient languages, immersed myself in the writing of scholars and practitioners of wizardry."

He leaned against the edge of a large table, crossed his ankles and folded his arms across his muscular chest. "A lot of it is pure, unmitigated bunk. Even the old stuff. However, some of what I learned led me to Tibet where I was allowed to access some very old records of ancient civilizations. There was a single reference that caught my eye. It was the word *Chanku*. I felt as if that word unlocked some secret part of my mind -- it literally stopped me in my tracks."

Chapter 3

Keisha understood the part about being stopped in your tracks... watching this absolutely drop-dead gorgeous guy pacing around her living room as if he owned the place was a surrealistic experience. Though she couldn't control her intense fear of men when he was close enough to touch her, she could certainly admire him from across the room.

His dark hair fell well below his collar and his eyes were the same unusual shade of amber as her own. He had the high cheekbones and shadowed jaw of a top fashion model and he moved with the grace of a dancer, all long limbs and lean body. His shoulders were broad, stretching the dark knit of the shirt he wore, and sleek muscles rippled along his arms, across his chest. As tall as she was, he was so much taller, so much stronger.

She wondered if she'd ever be able to let a man come close to her again. The image of her abductors slipped, unbidden, into her thoughts and she shuddered.

"Are you okay?" Anton knelt in front of her, his look one of concern and caring.

"Yes... I was just thinking..." Her thoughts drifted, her heart pounding as Anton drew closer. He smiled and backed away.

It's okay. I respect your need for space. I want you to know I will never hurt you. None of us will. We understand your fear. With time, we will make it go away.

I don't know if I'll ever be the same again!

Anton stood up, still smiling, as if Keisha's cry had never entered his mind. "Once you fully understand *Chanku*, you'll realize you need never fear again. You will discover new strengths within yourself and within the links you share with others of our kind. We are strongly connected and just as strong individually. Like the fabled werewolves, we have the power to shift our bodies from human to wolf and back again.

It's nothing paranormal, not supernatural. We don't need a full moon or any type of spell, nor must we remain under cover of darkness. It's due to a physical anomaly, a small part of the brain near the hypothalamus, an extension of that organ, actually, that exists only in the *Chanku*, an organ that, without certain nutrients, loses its ability to function."

Keisha stared at him for a long moment, weighing the veracity of his words. "If what you're saying is true, how could I have shifted? How could I have suddenly, without any warning, turned into a wolf?"

"Fear. Adrenaline. The body's need to survive. I don't really know. For the rest of us, it takes a special diet. When I was in Tibet, I learned there were plants once common to the area that have the ability to draw certain nutrients from the soil in precise percentages -- nutrients perfectly formulated to stimulate the special part of the brain which in turn exerts influence on the functions in the body needed to shift. I was drawn to the plants, not realizing my body craved what they offered."

A small shipment of exotic shrubs and grasses sat, at this moment, in the little greenhouse in her backyard. Some even grew in the decorative planter in her studio. Shrubs and grasses common to the lower reaches of the Himalayas. She'd seen them at a demonstration, had felt oddly drawn to them... had created her entire memorial design around varieties of plants she'd never before heard of.

Could something in her own genetic make-up have forged the immediate connection she'd felt for the odd selection of plants?

No. Absolutely not... but, what if? The suspicion lingered in her mind.

She took a deep, steadying breath. "I'm a landscape architect. I work with a lot of imported varieties. Possibly some of those..."

"Only if you eat them." Anton shrugged, but there was a twinkle in his eyes. "Been nibbling on your plants much?"

Keisha felt the tension slowly ebbing from her body. Whoever and whatever this man was, he was handsome and sexy and trying so hard to help her relax.

“Actually, yes.” She stood up, took a moment to gain her balance and walked slowly toward the backyard, immediately feeling more at ease. “I tend to nibble when I work. Come see if anything looks familiar.”

She sensed his attraction to her as she brushed past him. Her muscles tensed when she felt the warmth of his body, the reaction involuntary and irritating. Her insides felt twisted, tied in knots. He was attractive, intriguing. She was drawn to him, wanted to know more about him, but at the same time was repulsed by his very maleness.

Before her attack, she’d always thought of herself as a sensual woman. She liked sex. Always had. She wanted to want someone again, wanted to know that rush of sexual excitement, the tingling awareness of her own sexuality. Frustration stiffened her gait as she led him to the back of the house and down into the small garden.

Had her sexuality, her need to touch and be touched, been beaten out of her forever? Sighing, Keisha knelt down and brushed her hand across a soft, yellowed grass growing in tangled clumps around the low steps leading to the greenhouse. “I liked this so much, I planted some of it in my own yard and even have a planter of it in my studio. The rest is for a project I’m working on, a small memorial garden in Golden Gate Park.”

Anton rolled a few blades of the grass between his fingers, looked up and smiled, then followed her into the greenhouse.

Immediately, the space seemed too small, the air too heavy... damp and warm and close. Keisha backed away from Anton. He stepped away as well, giving her more space. She sighed and shook her head, well aware he knew why she’d reacted the way she did. “I imagine it will take time. I’m still recovering. I’m sorry. I don’t want to feel like a victim, but even more, I don’t want to make you feel like a pariah.”

“I understand, but more importantly, I know this is only temporary. You will heal.”

Anton turned away and stared intently at the rows of flats, each one filled with familiar soft grasses, stunted and twisted shrubs and small, flowering ground covers. When he raised his head, he was smiling once again.

“Your choice of plants alone would convince me of your heritage. Each one of these, in very small amounts, is an integral part of the *Chanku* diet. I have most of them growing at my own home. Do you have any idea what made you choose these particular varieties?”

His eyes sparkled and the smile broadened, changed his entire face. She’d thought him handsome at first but hadn’t realized the man was downright breathtaking. Literally. Damn. It was such a stupid cliché, but Keisha had to remind herself to breathe.

“I... I don’t know exactly why I chose them.” She did though. She knew exactly why she’d picked these particular plants. They’d felt right. That was all. When she’d gone to the wholesaler’s and looked across the vast array of growing things, this selection of plants had practically called out to her.

Her choice of just the right plants for her various designs had brought her numerous awards. Keisha had always figured it was her extensive knowledge after years of education and training. Was it merely that odd sixth sense she’d always wondered about? Something beyond her normal, human skills?

Was she merely fulfilling the needs of *Chanku*?

Startled by her weird train of thought, she looked away, knelt down and patted dirt around a small bush. Her heart fluttered and she felt terribly self-conscious, unbearably aware of the fact her mind was in turmoil, that she was alone in a small, isolated greenhouse with a stranger. She concentrated on the grains of sand clinging to her fingers instead of the powerful man standing, once more, almost close enough to touch. “The garden is a memorial to a group of Sherpas who died leading an expedition of local climbers. I thought plants from the region seemed apropos.”

“Very apropos. Yet the ones you selected are all specific to the *Chanku* diet.” He held his hand out to her. “I realize you don’t know me, but please try and trust me. The

others are returning. I sense them drawing near. You might be able to sense their arrival as well.”

Keisha stared at his hand a moment, gathered what courage she had left and wrapped her fingers around his larger ones. His olive skin looked pale against hers, the size of his fingers dwarfing her hand. He tugged her easily to her feet, pulling her up with a single, graceful motion that drew her close to his chest.

She tried to sense the others. Sensed only Anton. Felt the beat of his heart, the soft exhalation of his breath. Smelled the clean, musky scent that made her own heart rate speed up.

She dropped his hand and stepped away. Only then, when she’d put some distance between herself and Anton, was she aware of the others coming up the front steps, the sound of their footsteps ringing in her mind, wisps of conversation floating, barely heard.

She glanced quickly at Anton, then practically ran out of the greenhouse. “Your friends are back. I guess I should let them in.”

She heard Anton’s quiet laughter as he followed her across the yard.

Chapter 4

"I know it's asking a lot of you to come with us, but please consider it." Alexandria set her coffee cup down on the placemat in front of her and smiled at Keisha.

"I have my work... I don't know any of you..." Keisha held on to her cup, clutching it with both hands as if it were a lifeline.

Stefan took a swallow of his coffee. He looked so much like Anton it was just plain eerie, but the men insisted they weren't related, other than their shared *Chanku* heritage. "You said the designs are almost complete. If I remember correctly, you also said they have to go through an approval process that should take about six weeks. Come with us, just for a month. Give yourself a chance to know us, give us a chance to find out more about you, to convince you to join us. Whether you like it or not, you are one of us."

He's telling the truth, Keisha. We all are. Please, look into our minds. We're all completely open to you. Look into our minds and see that we mean you no harm.

Keisha's hands trembled. To have Anton enter her mind so easily... she closed her eyes and took a deep breath. The connection was both frightening and at the same time comforting. With her eyes still closed, she tried again to sense the thoughts of the others in the room.

As if a veil had lifted, she suddenly caught their conversation flitting through her mind.

She's been badly traumatized, Stefan. It's not fair to push her.

She's a lot stronger than she looks, my love. She needs us as much as we need her.

Alexandria's right. We will not force the issue. I don't want her hurt. If she says she's not ready, we're not going to push her. This must be her decision, and her decision alone.

Anton! Alexandria worried about her, but Anton was the one willing to give her space, the one who saw her troubled soul and understood. For Anton, she would make this decision. Nodding slowly, she looked at each of the three people in the room.

"I will go, but only if you promise me a room of my own, a quiet place where I can be by myself, and a return ticket if this doesn't work."

"It's yours." Anton slowly held his hand out to hers, not to grab it but to shake and seal the agreement.

Keisha took his hand, felt the warmth, sensed the innate honesty of the man. Beyond that, she felt his need, his desire for her. She almost slipped her hand free, but she looked into his eyes and stilled.

Need. Such need and naked vulnerability she thought her heart would break. Where she feared, Anton needed. Where she worried, Anton wanted.

She fought the urge to pull her hand free, almost turned and ran, but a small whisper of thought entered her mind.

Anton needs you. We all do, but Anton most of all. He is the one to rediscover the Chanku, he is the one who brought Stefan and me together, who brought all of us together. You need to find yourself, and Anton should be the one to help you. Please, join us?

Keisha jerked her head in Alexandria's direction. The woman's face held no sign of their discussion. It had been totally private, words between two women. Kindred. She felt a warmth under her heart she'd not known before. Alexandria nodded, an almost imperceptible movement, but enough to let Keisha know it had indeed been her speaking.

Keisha glanced once more in Anton's direction. He studied her, his eyes wide open and yet so sad she wanted to cry. He thought she would turn them down, would change her mind, though she'd already accepted. He was afraid of losing her.

Slowly, Keisha nodded her head. "I will go with you. I need to know you. More than that, I need to know myself."

* * *

"It's lovely." Barefoot, dressed like Xandi in a soft, blue silk sarong tied over one shoulder, Keisha stared out over the vast mountain range, tinged with pale gold and silver in the last glow of evening. She and Xandi shared a quiet moment on the large deck surrounding the western side of the house. "I've never been to Montana. I thought it was all cowboys and buffalo."

Xandi laughed. She'd shadowed Keisha since their departure, a comforting presence with so many new experiences. "It is beautiful. This is my favorite time of night. After dinner, Anton, Stefan and I usually shift to our wolverine forms and run. We've explored every inch of the forests around us."

"You really do shift, don't you?" Keisha turned and leaned back against the deck railing, her wine glass clasped between her fingers. "I still can't believe it, though after seeing what you did yesterday I know I have to accept. Will you run tonight?"

"If you don't mind being left alone. Oliver will be here, but the three of us might be away for hours. Otherwise, we can stay here until you feel more settled."

Keisha took a deep breath. "I think I would like to see you shift. I want to feel what you feel when it happens. It might make it easier for me to accept."

"Are you sure?" Xandi's eyes practically bored into hers.

Keisha nodded. Immediately, Stefan and Anton joined them on the deck, and she realized they'd been listening to the conversation.

Anton stepped close to her. "I don't want you to fear us. There's so much for you to learn, but I admire your willingness to see something that, for want of another word, is impossible." He smiled, then slowly began to unbutton his shirt.

Keisha glanced quickly away, in Xandi's direction. She was already naked, having only a silk sarong to unwrap. Stefan was slipping out of his pants, his shirt and shoes neatly folded on a deck chair.

"What?" Her hand went to her throat and she choked back a nervous giggle. She hadn't expected them to undress first, hadn't really thought of anything, but suddenly she was surrounded by three of the most beautiful people she'd ever known, all naked and grinning at her.

"We can shift while wearing clothes, but it makes a big mess. I hate to iron." Xandi laughed, then suddenly it was happening all over again and she was melting, shifting, stretching and reshaping. It happened so fast Keisha forgot to link to her mind, but she twisted around and caught Stefan's thoughts as he went through the same process.

It all made sense. Strange and unusual, so hard to imagine, but when she linked to his mind as he shifted, Keisha realized she'd done this before.

She was the wolf.

She truly had killed three men.

She spun around to watch Anton shift, but he stood beside her, still in his gorgeous human body.

"Are you all right? I can stay here with you."

Compassion flowed from him in waves. Compassion and warmth, so strong, so loving, Keisha basked in his healing strength.

"No. I want to go with you. I want to shift." She felt a sob catch in her throat, realized the two wolves standing beside her, the man directly in front of her, were caught unaware by her decision.

Are you sure? You don't have to, not so soon, but if that is your wish, we'll help you. All of us.

Xandi's soft question washed away her fear. "I know how to shift. I've done it before, though I must have blocked the memory, but I remember doing it, now. I remember the power of the wolf. I want that power again."

Shift with me. Link with my thoughts, feel what I do and let your body flow. It will be disorienting. You may experience a bit of nausea. Just relax and follow my lead.

Keisha nodded, her mind so completely linked with Anton's she no longer sensed the other two, no longer felt the wooden deck beneath her bare feet. Slowly, she loosened the knot holding the sarong over her shoulder. It drifted to the deck, brushing her bare feet with shimmering coolness, a cobalt blue puddle of silk. She stood

shivering in the warm evening, more aware of the molten heat in Anton's eyes than her own nudity.

His look was pure male appreciation, but he quickly banked the smoldering lust in his eyes and took Keisha's hands in a light grip.

She felt the first tingling awareness that something about her body was changing. Following Anton's lead, she concentrated on the shifting of bone and muscle into new lupine directions. It happened so quickly, so completely, she was hardly aware of the shift completing before she was sitting on the deck, blinking at the coal black wolf staring back at her.

Fascinated, she held up her front paw, turning it this way and that to study the thick pads, the sharp claws. Her fur was dark, dark brown, as dark as Anton's was black, though she noticed a reddish glint when she moved, as if there were fire hiding in the depths of her coat.

Her heart pounded. She wanted to run. Wanted to leave Keisha Rialto behind, wanted to outrace the victim and find this new self in the darkness of the nighttime forest.

Stefan leapt first, sailing over the railing and landing in the thick lawn that circled the house. Xandi followed him, her muscles bunching as she cleared the three-foot fence with ease. Anton nudged her shoulder.

What the hell? Keisha followed, amazed her brain knew how to make this strange shape function with such fluid beauty. She landed in the soft grass beside Xandi with Anton coming down just ahead of her.

He yipped, turned and nipped Keisha on the shoulder and took off running.

The night was clear and warm, the forest scents intriguing, the strength and power of her wolf body a pure, unadulterated joy. Speed, unbelievable speed as they raced through the woods, leaping over creeks, slipping beneath brush and following trails barely visible along creek beds and canyons.

And always, always the link, the constant flow of information, one to the other. Sharing the scent of live things rushing out of their path, sharing the pure joy of the

hunt. Keisha had never felt this sense before, of being one with the pack. Had not realized the power inherent in the pack link, the sensual beauty of streaking through the dark forest with eyes that pierced the night, with a brain that understood each different scent, each rustling sound and tiny squeak or chirp.

They ran for hours, their bodies finding a rhythm that gave them strength. Keisha wanted to go on forever but Anton's quiet presence beside her was a reminder she should take care, at least this first time. Still, the pale rays of dawn streaked the sky when they finally flopped down on the damp grass in front of Anton's huge home, tongues lolling, eyes sparkling, tails too tired to hold high.

Stefan rolled over on his back, his shaggy gray-streaked coat matted and dirty from their rush through a boggy swamp. With a teasing glint in his amber eyes, Anton leaned over and nipped Stefan's shoulder.

The act was rife with blatant sexual overtones, a sense of dominance and submission.

Xandi did the same to Anton, leaning her furry body close to his, then nuzzling Stefan as well. Keisha sensed it then, the strong, linked sexuality among the three of them. Anton turned and looked at her, his eyes wide, his mind open.

He shared the intimate relationship he had with both Alexandria and Stefan. Shared the sensual connection among all within the pack, the physical intimacies that were as natural to them as the shift from human to wolf and back again, the almost hedonistic rush of desire that followed each time they ran through the forest together.

Keisha understood and accepted, aware at once of her own sense of heightened sensuality, her recently dormant libido raging almost beyond control. Somehow shifting, taking the form of the wolf, had reawakened the sensual side of her nature. A sensual side she was still unable to accept.

She felt no jealousy, only a sense of sadness, an awareness that what the other three shared so freely was not for her.

She wasn't ready. Not yet. The assault was too recent, her body too newly healed.

Exhausted, she pulled herself to her feet and padded up the stairs to the deck. In a fluid motion, as if she'd shifted for years, she regained her human form and picked up the sarong she'd left the night before. She wrapped it lightly around her torso.

Her hair fell forward. She reached up to push it out of her eyes and realized it now cascaded in loose, corkscrew curls to her shoulders. Her hand paused over the unfamiliar texture. Gone was the short, coarse, tightly kinked hair she'd known all her life.

Her laughter sounded shaky even to her own ears and she knew her smile was just as wobbly. "Well, I guess this explains why I can't keep a braid 'do for any length of time. They keep working themselves loose. It must be the wolf in me." She bit her lips and blinked back the tears that filled her eyes. Everything was changing... her body, her mind, even her hair. It was too much, too intense. Too fast.

She took a deep breath and stared solemnly at Alexandria, Stefan and Anton, not even sure where to begin. "Thank you. Thank you all for something more amazing than anything I ever imagined. It's going to take me awhile before I can really accept what has happened here tonight. I need to shower, now, and sleep. I want to replay every second of the night." She started to leave, then turned around, grinning. "And I wanna do it again, okay?"

Anton shifted and raced up the stairs. He grabbed her hands in his and held them firmly. "Are you okay? We didn't mean to upset you. Our feelings for one another are so natural, so much a part of who we are... I didn't think. The last thing I want to do is make you feel uncomfortable."

Keisha laughed and slowly looked him up and down. His body was streaked in mud and wet grass, his cock partially erect and jutting out from its nest of dark hair. He was masculinity incarnate, so beautiful she wanted to touch him.

When she was ready.

"Yesterday, seeing you like this would have terrified me. Today it makes me miss what I'm not quite ready for. You're not making me uncomfortable, Anton. You're

helping me feel again.” She cupped the side of his face in her palm. “Give me time, please? Just a little bit of time.”

He leaned over and placed a very chaste kiss on the side of her face. “For you, anything. Good night, Keisha. Sleep well.”

Keisha left Anton standing on the deck and went straight into the bathroom. Smiling, she turned on the shower and stepped beneath the spray. Her cheek still tingled from the tender brush of his lips.

Chapter 5

The sun was just peeking over the mountains when Keisha finally crawled between the cool sheets. Her room was off by itself, a beautiful space of peace and quiet with a huge window and a view of the forest.

She still couldn't believe she'd run through that forest, keeping pace with three beautiful wolves, their sleek coats rippling, tongues lolling between powerful jaws. She missed the feeling now, the sense of family she'd shared from the moment she became the wolf. Sighing quietly, snuggling into the thick down comforter, she let her mind drift, searching for Anton's already familiar touch.

She found him, his mind seeking hers much as she sought his. The realization that he looked for her made her smile.

Where are you? Would he answer?

I'm getting into bed. We ran far last night and I'm tired.

Are you alone? Now, why would she ask that?

There was a long, thoughtful pause.

No. I no longer sleep alone. Xandi and Stefan share their bed with me.

She knew that. She'd sensed the link between the three, though not completely accepted it for what it was. *Oh.*

Would you like to join us?

Join them? Sleep with three strangers. Never, no she couldn't do anything like...

Not physically. Mentally. Maintain the link with me. Share the love with me. Stay there, in the privacy of your room, but feel the love the three of us have for each other... and know that you can be a part of it whenever you're ready.

You would allow that? I would feel like a voyeur.

Keisha sensed the sound of his laughter. Knew Xandi and Stefan shared the emotion.

You would be a voyeur. Is there anything wrong with that if you've been invited to watch?

It doesn't feel right. But it did. Dear Lord, it felt so right, that she be a part of whatever the other three shared. Keisha wrapped the blanket tighter around her shoulders.

No matter how it feels, we will share with you. You are our sister, Keisha. Our sister, our lover, our newest mate. Be with us tonight. Not in body. You're not ready for that. Share with us in spirit.

She was still trying to comprehend Anton's words when Keisha realized she was in the room with Anton, Xandi and Stefan. The window was open and the drapes floated softly on the morning breeze. Sunlight filtered through partially drawn shades. She saw through Anton's eyes, knew he shielded her connection from the others though they were well aware she was with them.

It was Stefan who moved first, leaning over Xandi and kissing her, his mouth moving over hers, his tongue parting her lips and slipping inside. Anton lay beside Xandi, close enough to encircle her in his arms as she and Stefan kissed.

Keisha realized, though she watched through Anton's eyes, she identified with Xandi. She felt Anton's growing passion, realized he was moving closer, his hand stroking Stefan's lean flank, his mouth searching out Xandi's taut nipple.

I want to be with Xandi. Do you think...

Anton's laughter was a gentle sound in her head, then Xandi was laughing with him.

Link with me, little sister. I have more fun than either of these guys.

Before she could compose an answer, Keisha was aware of Stefan's lips on hers, of Anton's mouth suckling her nipple. She felt the hard length of his cock pressing against her thigh and Stefan's equally hard penis poised at the mouth of her pussy.

Her body stiffened, began to tremble. Her heart pounded a staccato rhythm and she was flooded with images of her assault, images of terror and pain and...

Xandi's soothing thoughts overpowered her fear. *Keisha. It's okay. Take a deep breath. It's not your body they're touching. It's mine. Keep the separation clear in your mind. Relax... you're alone in your room. It's my body they're taking. Remind yourself, you're just a little bug on the wall, watching.*

Keisha sighed, her taut muscles relaxed and she nodded her head against the pillow, knowing full well Xandi couldn't see her but would know her feelings. *A little bug on the wall. I can do that.*

I know you can. Stay with us. Enjoy. Experience love without fear, the touch of two men who want nothing more than to please a woman. Let yourself be the woman, through me. No one will hurt you.

Rationally, I know that. It's hard to accept.

Rationally, did you ever think you'd take the form of a wolf, racing through the forest? Gentle laughter followed Xandi's dry comment. *Sweetie, if you can accept that, you can accept anything.*

Darn!

Keisha heard more laughter. *Look what's happened... while I've been talking to you, the guys have found other things to do.*

Once more Keisha *saw* through Xandi's eyes. Stefan and Anton lay facing one another, embracing, their mouths locked together in a passionate kiss. Anton's back was to her, his muscles rippling with each tilt of his hips. Xandi focused on the smooth line of Anton's buttocks, followed the crease to the deep, dark red tip of Stefan's engorged cock, sliding between Anton's muscular thighs, riding smoothly in the slick sweat generated by their heated, straining bodies.

Mesmerized by the vision she saw through Xandi's eyes, Keisha lost herself in the eroticism, the sensual magic of two strong men loving each other. Their bodies were beautiful, glossy with sweat, all lean, hard muscle and masculine perfection. Stefan's cock slipped between Anton's thighs, the head larger, dark like a ripe plum, the tip

glistening with the first drops of fluid. His fingers splayed across Anton's muscled back, holding the other man close to him as the two rocked together in perfect rhythm, buttocks clenching, bodies straining.

Keisha felt the first stirrings in her own body, the tension in her belly, the needy ache in her womb. Still caught in Xandi's view, she reached down between her legs and found that she was wet, the tissues of her labia thick and unbelievably sensitive. She smiled to herself when she discovered even the once tightly woven nest of curls between her legs felt softer than it had before. Slowly, she stroked back and forth over her swollen clit, matching the rhythm between Anton and Stefan.

Xandi shifted her position near the men, moving behind Stefan so that Anton's face was now visible. His eyes were closed, his lips parted, still damp from Stefan's kisses, so lost in passion that Keisha knew at once how he would look thrusting into her. Now, though, he jerked his hips faster, harder, matching Stefan's tempo. Xandi changed her focus, showing Keisha the taut line of Stefan's buttocks, the dark, moist head of Anton's cock riding between his lover's thighs.

Xandi slipped lower on the big bed, reached down and raked her fingernails across Stefan's buttocks, flicking a nail over the head of Anton's cock. She scooted closer and slipped her hands between Stefan's legs. Gently, she squeezed his testicles, then found Anton's and massaged his as well.

Joined by a strangled cry, both men stiffened, pumped hard against each other and climaxed. Keisha could practically feel the pulsing, throbbing orbs in her own hands. Panting, Stefan rolled away from Anton and both men lay on their backs, laughing, gasping for air. Xandi straddled their legs, a hand wrapped around each cock, and slowly brought them down with smooth pumping strokes, using their own semen to lubricate her erotic massage.

She leaned over and ran her tongue the length of Anton's cock, then did the same to Stefan. "Okay, boys... our turn."

Anton raised his head, one eyebrow cocked. "Our turn? Our who?"

Practically sobbing with frustration, Keisha thrust her fingers deep inside her wet and swollen pussy, then trailed them across her clit. So close! She was so close to coming, just from watching Stefan and Anton make love to each other. Watching them through Xandi's eyes. She'd never dreamed two men together could be so damned sexy.

Sexy and dumb as a pair of stumps.

Our who? *Who the hell did he think she was?*

"Our, as in me and Keisha. She's still with me."

A slow smile spread across Anton's face. Keisha suddenly felt his familiar touch in her mind. *I thought you'd gone. I didn't feel you with me anymore.*

I was with Xandi. I've never shared anything remotely close to what you and Stefan just did. I had no idea it would...

Turn you on? Make you hot enough to want to share yourself with us? Stefan thinks you're absolutely gorgeous. You know I want you, Keisha. I've wanted you since the first moment I saw you.

The need in his mental touch sent shivers across her flesh. Shivers as much from desire as the latent fear she'd not been able to shake. *I'm not ready, not yet... not ready to let you touch me, but I am ready to feel what Xandi feels.*

Anton's soft chuckle trickled across her senses, followed by a slow, mental drawl. *Then we'd better make sure Xandi feels real good, don't you agree?*

Xandi's laughter rippled into their thoughts. *I think Xandi's going to like that very much. Hang on, Keisha... the boys appear to have recovered.*

It was more than a little decadent, lying in bed with morning sunlight filtering through the blinds, her body naked and wanting, two fingers buried deep between her legs in anticipation of another woman sharing sex with two men.

Keisha practically laughed aloud when Xandi's thoughts surfaced once more in her mind. *This isn't decadence... this is...*

Stefan's thoughts interrupted. *This is for you, Keisha. From all of us. Call it a welcome home gift.*

He leaned over Xandi, his long hair undone and trailing across her breasts.

Keisha quivered as the silken strands touched Xandi's nipples, followed by Stefan's hot mouth. Fighting the terror, the sudden urge to withdraw from Xandi's mind, Keisha held on to the link, mentally worked her way through the fear and allowed herself to feel with Xandi, to experience every touch, every kiss, each subtle stroke and lick and taste.

Xandi had told her Stefan was, like Anton, a magician. Right now his mouth was working pure magic on Xandi's breast. Keisha arched her back as Stefan's tongue flickered back and forth across the sensitive tip, then moaned when he suckled the swollen nipple deep inside his mouth.

Hands stroked her thighs, swept the length of her calves, teased closer and closer to Xandi's waiting pussy. Keisha held her breath, so caught up in the sensation of Anton's hands separating the folds between the other woman's legs that she actually moved her own fingers out of the way.

She heard his satisfied chuckle in her mind, knew this was exactly what he hoped would happen. Grasping the sheets on either side of her, Keisha arched her hips against the cool morning air. Anton's fingers penetrated Xandi, in and out, spreading her juices, slipping along the crease between her buttocks.

Stefan suckled Xandi's other breast, plucking at it first with his fingers, building up his own rhythm. At the same time, Anton spread her legs wider apart, leaned close and blew his hot breath over her clit.

His fingers slipped deeper between her buttocks, penetrating her behind just as his firm lips found her clit. Alternating strokes between his tongue deep inside her pussy and two fingers thrusting slowly in and out of her ass, he caught Stefan's rhythm... he also caught Stefan's growing cock in his free hand, connecting the three of them physically, the four of them mentally.

This time there was no thought of anyone or anything other than Xandi, Stefan and Anton. No fear beyond the unknown, the fact she'd never experienced anything remotely like this in her life. Keisha twisted and undulated against the sheets, her body

reacting as Xandi's did, her sex pouting and swelling, the fluids dampening the dark nest of curls between her legs.

Her breasts ached, her nipples tingling with the shared sensations of Stefan's lips and teeth and tongue, of his fingers rubbing and plucking, his mouth suckling.

Anton's tongue speared into her, over and over again. His fingers stretched her backside, slipping in and out, deeper, further with each thrust. Xandi's back arched, her keening cry filling the room, her mind completely linked with Keisha's. Keisha cried out as well, her breath caught in her throat, her mouth stretched wide as she gasped for air, sharing each pulsing shudder of Xandi's climax, sharing her own with the rest of the pack.

Sobbing, gasping, laughing, Keisha lay alone in her bed, struggling to catch her breath. Her pussy clenched and released, her breasts ached for more of Stefan's touch and she wanted Anton's lips back where they'd been, suckling Xandi's pulsing clit so she could feel more of the same.

Xandi's soft chuckle flitted through her mind. *Again?*

Oh God yes! I've never...

Neither have I. That was pretty spectacular. Would you like to join us?

Keisha tensed. *I don't...*

There's no rush, little one, Anton's soothing voice gently intruded. Let us love you through Xandi for awhile. When you're ready, you can join us.

Keisha immediately relaxed. There was no feeling of pressure, no anger. Merely pure acceptance.

Unconditional love.

She stayed with Xandi as the other woman rolled Stefan over on his back and took his fully erect cock into her mouth. She savored his spicy flavor, tested the ridges and textures with her tongue, felt the hard testicles within his sac when Xandi rolled them gently between her fingers.

When Xandi straddled Stefan's lean thighs and lowered herself on his straining cock, Keisha gasped at the sense of fullness, the slick entry so deep inside that the smooth crown of his penis brushed the mouth of Xandi's womb.

She sighed with the other woman, felt her settle her hips and adjust to the man inside her, then wondered what was coming next as Xandi leaned forward.

Anton knelt behind her, his cock riding in the crease of her ass. She felt him stroking her backside with his cock, knew he held himself in his hand as he slipped a condom over his erection. Xandi knelt forward, still impaled on Stefan. Keisha gasped when she realized what Anton had in mind.

He thrust his fingers inside Xandi, finding entrance alongside Stefan's cock, finding her lubricating moisture as well. He rubbed it slowly, sensually around the sensitive tissues of her behind, once again slowly forcing entrance with first one finger, then two. He stretched her further, all the while rubbing back and forth with the head of his cock, teasing the entrance, then slipping past.

He paused for a moment and Keisha realized he was stroking lower, finding Stefan's testicles and including them in his sensual massage as well. She held her breath, waiting to see if he was going to take Xandi the way she thought he might, wondering how much pain there would be.

Suddenly, like a dark fog, memories overwhelmed her. Sensations, fear remembered, the terror of her assault, the pain, the wrongness of everything associated with her body, with the act of sex.

She wanted to scream, wanted to tell them no, that this was wrong, that this same act, without love, without care, had been part of her brutal assault, part of the incentive to bring the wolf to life.

She'd been brutally raped by three men. Three men who'd taken her at the same time, forcing themselves into her mouth, her vagina, her rectum, tearing her flesh, ignoring her agonized screams, hurting her, laughing while they...

We love you, Keisha. You are one of us. There will be no pain. Only love. If it hurts you to share this, we will stop, but we won't sever the link. You are with us. Let us help you heal.

Keisha heard Xandi's voice, but she sensed Anton and Stefan as well, knew they were waiting, giving her time and strength.

I'll try. I promise. I'll break the link if I can't handle it...

Whatever you wish. It will always be your choice.

The sensual massage began again. The feather-light touches, the sense of fullness from Stefan's cock held tightly within Xandi's warm sheath, unmoving, waiting.

Once more she felt Anton's fingers rubbing circles between her buttocks. Keisha forced herself to relax, even though it was Xandi waiting for penetration. The soft, damp head of Anton's sheathed cock found the opening, bumped slowly against the taut muscle, pushed and released, pushed again and released, forcing entrance but never to the point of pain.

Xandi leaned forward, adjusting her body and burying her head on Stefan's chest. Keisha heard his heart beating, felt the love surrounding the three of them... the four of them. She was there, in everyone's thoughts. A part of their lovemaking.

Anton breached Xandi's tight opening and his cock slipped slowly inside, trapped by the taut ring of muscle. He moved forward, mere fractions of an inch, then retreated. Forward again, finding space within Xandi's body, pressed close against the thin tissues separating him from Stefan's cock -- two men, loving her, wanting her... making love to her.

Without pain. Gently, with love, with compassion and caring... and totally without pain.

Keisha sobbed, her body rising to the gentle thrusts of both Stefan and Anton. She realized she'd rolled to her stomach, buried her face in her pillow and raised her buttocks, mimicking Xandi's position. Mentally she took both men, sensed Xandi's growing climax, realized the tension in her body was no longer fear, was instead the growing, gasping need to come, to give herself over once more to another mind-shattering orgasm.

Stefan climaxed first, followed quickly by Anton. Xandi was next, her body rippling and shaking with the power of her orgasm. Keisha shared each climax, each

peak of unbelievable passion, her body tightening, straining for release, struggling to break through the anger and fear that held her apart from the pack.

We love you. Be one with us.

Three separate voices speaking as one, three very special people, claiming her as their own.

She felt it, then, starting deep in her middle and spreading out to her toes, her fingers, the top of her head... all-consuming, a spinning vortex of heat and lust and incredible, unbelievable rapture.

Keisha raised her head and screamed. This time, the cry ripped from her heart, a profound, agonizing wail of innocence lost, of passion and pain, fear, acceptance and overwhelming love.

Gasping, sobbing, her entire body convulsing with the power of her orgasm, Keisha pressed her face against her pillow and collapsed into the twisted sheets. She drew her knees up close to her chest, her tears flowing uncontrollably, her body shuddering and trembling as she rocked herself back and forth.

Dimly she heard the door burst open, sensed Anton's presence, his worry and concern as he gathered her up in his arms, held her against his chest like a baby and rocked her. Instead of fear she felt comfort and knew, even in the deepest wounded part of her mind, that part still suffering the trauma of rape and assault, that this man loved her. Loved her and would always protect her, would never harm her in any way.

Slowly she felt the tension flowing out of her body, realized her arms were rising, winding around Anton's strong, solid shoulders. She pressed her cheek against the soft skin where his shoulder met the column of his throat and felt the rapid beat of his pulse. When she raised her hand to cup his cheek, she found his face wet with tears.

Anton?

Don't ever frighten me like that again.

I'm sorry, I didn't...

I love you, Keisha. I felt the pain, the horror in your soul. I never meant for...

No! She turned in his arms and held her palms against the sides of his face, forced him to look directly at her. "All I have felt for the past weeks since the attack is fear... fear and loathing, not only of every man I've seen but of myself. You three have brought me back, given me that sense of who I am, of the woman I thought might be gone forever."

She pulled his face down to her and kissed him, very softly, very briefly, on the mouth. Before he could respond, she backed away. "I still have a long way to go, but I know now that I can heal. You've given that to me. You, Stefan and Alexandria, but most of all, you."

Anton wrapped his fingers around her right hand, brought it to his mouth and kissed her palm. "We have all the time you need."

Very gently he set her back on the bed, straightened the twisted sheets and fluffed up her pillow. "Sleep. It's been a long night and you need at least a couple of hours' rest. I'll call you later for brunch."

Keisha crawled between the cool sheets as Anton turned away. Morning sunlight caught the smooth line of his back, the curve of his buttocks, the strong muscles of his thighs and calves. He was beautiful, not merely in body but in spirit. She felt his compassion, his love, his heartbreaking need.

Need for her. Anton was every bit as alone, just as lonely, as she'd ever been in her life.

Without giving herself time to think of the consequences, Keisha pulled the sheets back beside her. "Don't go. Please. Stay with me?"

Anton halted in mid-step, turned slowly around and stared at her. There was nothing sexual in the naked desire she saw in his eyes, nothing to frighten her or make her feel threatened. There was love, pure and simple.

"Are you sure?"

Smiling, she shook her head and smoothed the down comforter back across her legs. "No. I'm not at all sure. I know I'm not ready for sex, at least not for anything physical. Not yet. Knowing that, are you willing to stay?"

Smiling, Anton slowly crawled into bed next to her, pulled Keisha into his arms and tucked her head under his chin. "Just try and get rid of me, sweetheart. I'm yours, whether you want me or not. I'm yours and I'm staying."

She inhaled, drawing his now familiar scent deep into her lungs. She heard the steady beat of his heart, sensed the flow of blood in his veins and knew she'd come home. Sighing, Keisha relaxed within the strength of his embrace.

There was nothing more to say. Nothing that could make this moment more meaningful, more powerful for her. She sensed Alexandria and Stefan, hovering just beyond her consciousness, concerned, loving, aware of the man holding her so protectively.

Surrounded by the pack, Keisha let her worries go and drifted off to sleep.

Anton felt her body relax, heard the soft sigh as she gave up her struggle for consciousness. He let his thoughts touch hers and found only peace, the quiet of a mind at rest.

There would be no dreams, no nightmares, no frightening shifts from human to wolf and back again without her own determination and knowledge. He carefully adjusted his body around hers, protecting her, holding her close against his heart.

Need for her simmered just beneath the surface, a need so strong it frightened him with its intensity. His cock throbbed, hard and erect, but he willed the poor beast into submission. Keisha would tell him when she was ready. Only she would know when she was healed enough to want the physical expression of his love.

He imagined they would be spectacular together. Knew, already, she would welcome both Alexandria and Stefan into her bed as well, when the time was right. She was capable of great love, great passion, and already felt a strong bond to him. Smiling, nuzzling the tousled curls spilling across her pillow, Anton finally allowed himself to relax.

Keisha filled an emptiness he hadn't known existed. He'd never felt such emotion for another person, not even Alexandria or Stefan, two people he loved more than he ever imagined himself capable.

Keisha sighed and snuggled close against his chest. A slight smile curved her lips. In sleep, her hand stroked the length of his back, trailing fingers along his thigh, coming to rest on the curve of his hip. She tilted her pelvis closer, bringing herself into contact with his suddenly wide-awake cock.

Definitely, they were going to be spectacular together, when the time was right.

Holding that thought, holding Keisha in his arms and her love in his heart, Anton drifted into sleep.

The End... for now

Wolf Tales 4: Keisha

Still suffering the trauma of her assault, Keisha slowly accepts her role as a member of the pack. With Anton's love, can she learn to embrace the role of mate, as well?

Kate Douglas

Kate Douglas writes contemporary romance, romantic suspense, romantic comedy and erotic romance.

For over thirty years Kate Douglas has been lucky enough to call writing her profession. She's produced ad copy for radio, flown over forest fires in a spotting helicopter as a photojournalist, drawn a weekly comic strip for a worldwide health agency, co-authored a cookbook and written numerous freelance articles. She's won three EPPIES, from the international authors' organization, EPIC -- two for Best Contemporary Romance in 2001 and 2002, and a third for Best Romantic Suspense in 2001. Kate's also won EPIC's Quasar Award for Cover Artists.

She and her husband of over thirty years live in the northern California wine country where they find more than enough subject material for their shared passion for photography, though their grandchildren are most often in front of the lens.

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