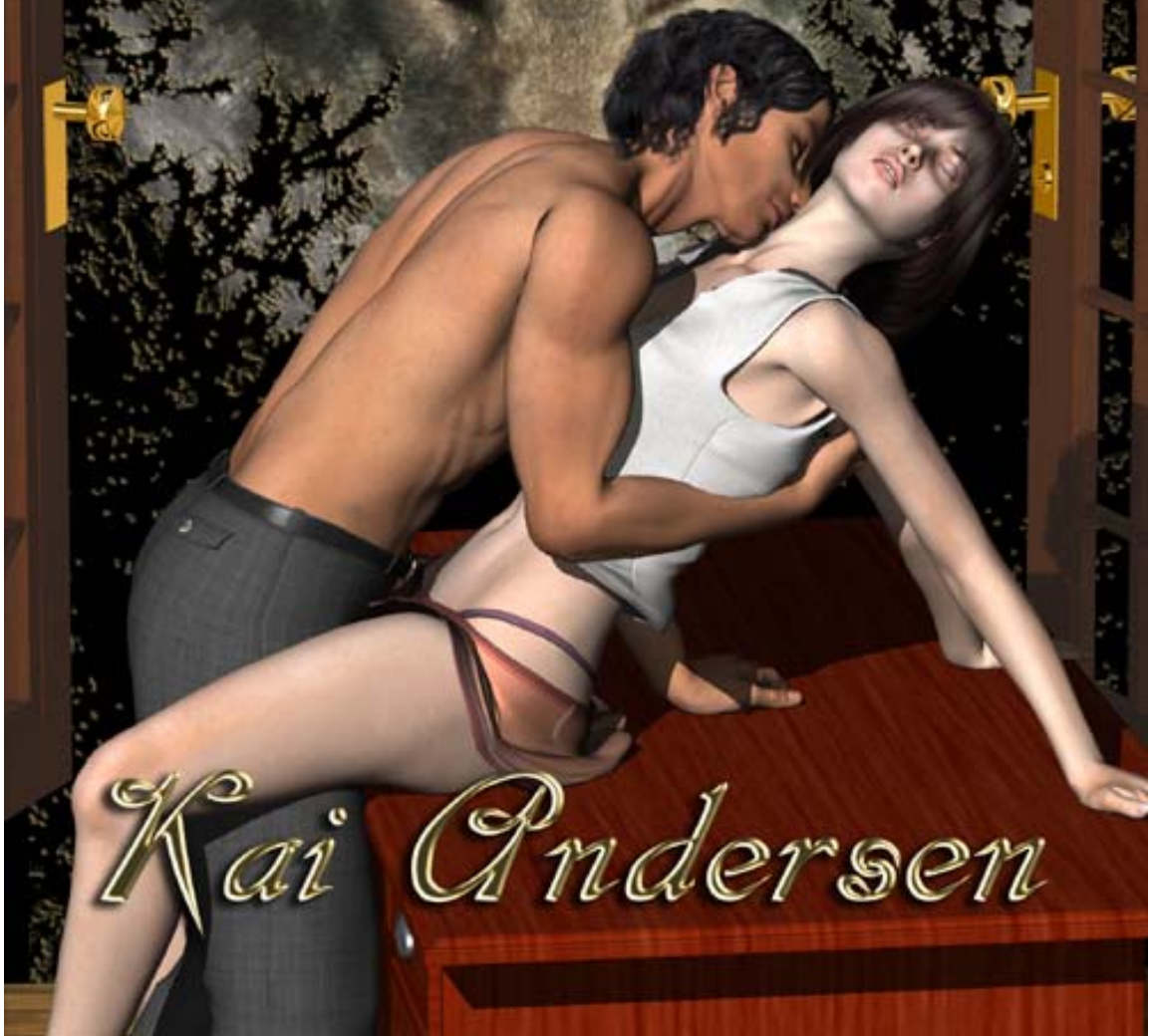


*Heart
of the
Wolf*



Kai Andersen

Praise for the writing of Kai Andersen

Tales of Enchantment 1: The Question of Royalty

This story was surprisingly hot, enough so that Kai Andersen will be added to my auto-buy erotic list... I'd recommend *Tales of Enchantment 1: The Question of Royalty* on both the romance and erotic scenes, and especially on how well the relationships were shown between characters.

-- Tara Black, *The Romance Studio*

Ms. Andersen does a fine job in taking the idea of the fairy tale and making it into an erotic tale. She is able to keep the whimsical qualities of a fairy tale and imbue them with the sexy story content that brings it a unique and very readable twist.

-- Kim, *Coffee Time Romance*

Tales of Enchantment 2: The Quest

The Quest is a well written fantasy romance. Kai Anderson is very talented in writing the imagery of these fantasy lands.

-- Holly, *Euro-Reviews*

I liked this second installment of the story even better than the first. The writing is smooth and literate, neither too spare nor too florid – in fact, it's just right!

-- Jean, *Fallen Angel Reviews*

The use of family, court politics, enchantment, and beautifully written sex made *The Quest* an exceptional book, and one I can recommend to anyone.

-- Anya Khan, *Just Erotic Romance Reviews*

The Question of Royalty and *The Quest* are now available from Loose Id.

HEART OF THE WOLF

Kai Andersen

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This book contains substantial explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations that some readers may find objectionable (ménage, violence).

Heart of the Woolf

Kai Andersen

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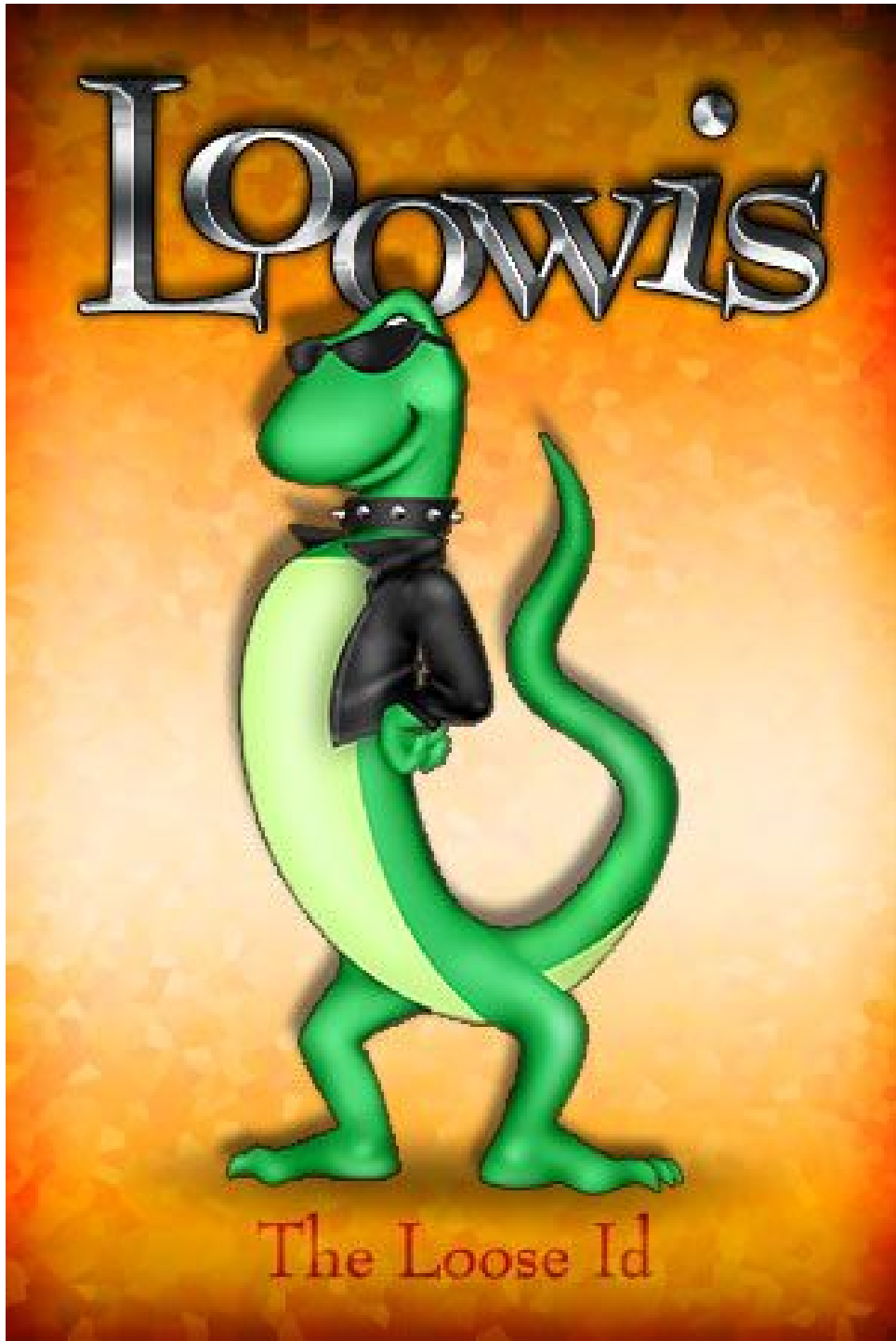
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Prologue

Slamming the door behind him, Jake strode into the apartment, discarding his tie and dumping his briefcase on the first available surface. “Lila! Honey, are you ready? We have to go!”

Silence.

He walked quickly into the kitchen. “Lila!”

Damn, where was she? They were cutting it short as it was.

“Lila!” He threw open the bedroom door and stared in shock.

The wardrobe doors were open, displaying the empty space where her clothes used to hang. Lila’s myriad bottles and vials, which normally rested on top of the dressing table, were gone, leaving circular imprints in the dust. A small piece of black paper lay in the middle of their double bed, standing out in stark contrast against the white satin sheets.

He walked toward the bed in a daze, heart pounding. He wanted to run in the opposite direction, but his feet drew him inexorably forward. He picked up the paper. The message, written in silver ink, read:

Ciao, honey. I've decided that living with a werewolf just isn't my style -- even one with oodles of money such as you have. Have a good life. I intend to.

-- L

He crumpled the paper in his hand. Shaking with rage and despair, he balled his hands into tight fists. He turned, punching the wall with such force, his knuckles throbbed, echoing the pain in his heart.

Closing his eyes, he threw back his head and howled.

Chapter One

Close to 3 months later ...

“It’ll only take me a few minutes to go over the changes we’ve discussed. Why don’t you sit down?” Jake Woolf, head of Creative Minds’ Consumer Business Division, gestured toward the chairs in front of his desk. His gaze lit on her for a second before he looked down, focusing on the file in his hands.

Adrienne Lee could’ve sworn her boss’s gray-brown eyes had glowed.

She took one of the proffered seats. Her bearing straight, she sat near the edge of the chair with her hands coolly folded on her lap. She assumed the same pose every time she “visited” her boss in his office, creating a picture of the icy, elegant businesswoman she wanted the world to see.

That she especially wanted her *boss* to see.

In her high stiletto heels and coal-gray blazer with matching skirt, the kind of outfits she termed her “power suits,” Adrienne knew she succeeded in creating the cool image she wanted to project.

Because there were some things that she wanted to hide ... and bury forever.

Unbeknownst to him, she harbored a secret crush on her new boss of two months. “Crush” sounded childish, but her crush was accompanied by a lust so intense she dripped with her own juices after every meeting. Nothing childish about that.

She studied him, as he studied the document. Why the strong attraction? He certainly wasn't her usual type of man. Maybe it was his head of raven-black, slightly curled hair, giving him a dark, haunted look. Or maybe it was his unusually colored eyes, with their enigmatic expression, hinting at deep secrets. Or his full, kissable lips? His instinctive command of authority?

Across the desk, Jake flipped through the final draft of her marketing proposal, his forehead wrinkled in a frown.

As assistant manager, Adrienne's usual role was to supervise her team's marketing efforts and accompany the junior staff on negotiations they wouldn't be able to handle on their own. Recently though, a potential major -- as in *very big, gargantuan and would probably be responsible for their fat bonuses this year* -- account landed on their doorstep, and the big bosses sent down a directive stating they must close the deal on this account, or else! Hence, Adrienne was handed a plum account for her personal portfolio ... *if* she could secure it.

Jake leaned back in his chair and flipped to the next page. His lips pursed. His pink tongue peeked out from between his teeth.

Heat hit her low in her belly. Her pussy clenched.

Damn, but the man, already oozing with sex appeal, got sexier every time she saw him.

She smiled suddenly, the answer to the question of what attracted her to him becoming clear. His tongue, and the endearing way he held the tip between his lips when he was deep in thought, never failed to affect her.

Adrienne bit her bottom lip to keep the moan from escaping, but she couldn't control her eyes, which were riveted on his mouth. Her heart thudded, her pulse in overdrive. Cold

sweat lined her forehead, yet a slow burn swept through her, and a surging wetness pooled between her thighs.

Lust -- old-fashioned, basic, raw lust she kept with extra diligence from her boss.

Tension pervaded her body. A strong, yet familiar yearning caught hold of her, making her want to ... soar like an eagle with wings spread wide, break free of the restrictions she put on herself, give voice to the passion riding her veins ...

That pink tongue was really driving her crazy.

She leaned forward. Her lips caught hold of it, drawing it into her mouth. Wet and rough and sandy, the friction rubbed against the smoothness of the insides of her mouth. So hot, scorching her like the noonday sun. All heat and power and might. She drowned in the strength of his arms and in the hardness of his body. She was surrounded by him, his male scent, his warmth, his virility.

She wanted him, above her, below her, inside her. Her pussy clenched at the thought of gripping him ... encasing him ... Her panties were soaking from the wetness pooling at her opening.

Beneath her clothes, her nipples tightened, aching to be touched. His hand brushed against the taut peaks. Electric bolts of desire sizzled through her. She leaned into his hands, yearning for him to cup and squeeze her breasts.

She sucked on his tongue, loving the rough, warm taste. She gripped the table edge for balance as she leaned closer and their mouths fused in a voracious kiss. So much passion ... What a gad-awful waste of two months! If she had only made her move earlier ...

“Adrienne ...” His voice seemed to come through a long tunnel.

“Hmm ... Jake ...”

“Yes, well ... Adrienne ...” Why did his voice sound hesitant? “Adrienne ... are you okay?”

Why did he pull away? Was she such a lousy kisser?

“Okay?” Her eyes focused. She saw the papers in his hand and the confused expression on his face. She snapped to attention. Oh, God, oh, God, oh, God! Cold sweat broke out all over her body. What had happened? Damage control first. Make that disaster recovery. “Of course, I’m okay! How can I not be?” Oops. Enough. There was something about her answer that smacked of “thou doth protest too much.”

The last vestiges of his stunned expression faded away, to be replaced by a curious little smile that hovered around his lips. He quirked his brow and asked, “Then why are you looming over me?”

Her full pink lips parted, tempting him to taste her.

Jake watched in amusement as Adrienne sat back in her seat, semi-gracefully. She had always been a little clumsy -- endearingly so -- especially when she was flustered. Like right now.

“I, uh, you were taking so long I decided to pressure you into hurrying up. Did I succeed?”

He almost laughed out loud at the thin excuse, but he decided to play along. “Maybe.” He returned his attention to the marketing proposal, afraid he’d be tempted to turn her thoughts into reality, considering his briefs had suddenly become a bit too tight in the last few minutes.

If she ached for him to touch her breasts, he *was dying* to see them, to fondle them. Would her nipples be dark brown or pink? Would her breasts fit his hands? Or would they be too small, too large, too ... *right*.

He clenched his fist beneath the table.

If she yearned to grip him with her pussy, he *longed* to pound into her and be held by her honeyed tightness. If she sashayed past him one more time in those ridiculously crazy high heels, he wouldn’t be responsible for the consequences. His cock was inflamed as it was,

aroused to the point of no return. All he needed was another one of her sultry looks, and he'd jump her.

She wore no perfume, but her scent, uniquely Adrienne, drifted over to him. His half-canine nose greedily sniffed her fragrance.

As an empath, he usually put up his shield; otherwise he'd go crazy from all the emotions running amok around him. Yet, Adrienne's desire broke through the barrier and called out to him, with its intoxicating mixture of sweet, wild, and forbidden. He could hear her thoughts and see the images in her mind, learn of her lusty fantasies with the two of them taking center stage.

He wondered how she'd taste and how she'd look the morning after. Would she still maintain her cool façade and that perfectly coiffed hair, even without her suit and those high heels that had always driven him mad with longing? Or would she be wantonly displayed against satin sheets, with slumberous eyes and lips swollen from kissing?

He was seriously considering throwing her onto his desk and having his wicked way with her, fucking her until she screamed with pleasure or fainted from exultation. The wolf in him demanded his right to such a succulent morsel, especially one who was ripe for the picking, who wanted him so much she was wet after every meeting with him.

His cock twitched, hungered to thrust into her wet warmth, to be encased by her hot cocoon ...

Until thoughts of the past intruded.

Adrienne groaned inwardly. Oh God, did he *know*? How much had she given away? For that matter, what had come over her? She had never been so caught up in her fantasies before that she --

"Adrienne, excellent work as usual! Except for some changes here," he said, flipping a few pages to the front and scribbling a few lines on the margin of the page, "and here, I think

we've got it! If you prepare for the presentation tomorrow, do you think you'd be ready to show the client the day after?"

Boy, he wasn't giving her much time. She did some mental calculations. She could really use more than a day to prepare for such an important deal, but in the queer way life worked, more time was something they could not afford. They needed to strike while the iron's hot, so to speak.

Adrienne nodded. "No problem."

"Great!" Jake handed over the sheaf of paper. "I'll make the appointment with the client then."

A dismissal.

She stood to go, but the intense look in his gaze checked her movement. He was practically *devouring* her with his eyes. For one long, infinite moment, she stayed motionless, like a fly caught in a spider's web. Was that an appreciative male once-over he was giving her?

Her breath caught.

Her boss? Her secret fantasy?

An answering heat flooded her groin, a heat that never really went away when she was in his presence.

Naked desire flared in his eyes, and a taut expression stretched across his face. A different alertness emanated from him, like that of a wolf hunting his prey. The atmosphere was fraught with tension. His eyes glowed. He started to stand.

She blinked.

Her fantasy image cleared.

Jake wasn't standing behind his desk with an expression of raging passion on his face. Instead, he was looking at her with that *strange* little smile hovering around his lips, his hands arrested over the telephone. "Yes, Adrienne?"

She backed toward the door, almost tripping over the leg of the chair she had been sitting on just moments ago. “I, uh, I’ll work on this right away, boss.”

She slipped out of the room. Walking quickly to her own office, she reached it in a few seconds. Instead of going in, however, she rested her forehead against the wall for awhile, willing her heartbeat to slow. The familiar gray paint was soothing to her disturbed senses.

Adrienne, you are becoming crazy, a schizophrenic! You can’t even distinguish reality from fantasy anymore --

Shut up!

Great, now she was starting to have conversations with herself. Fantasies about her boss were obviously not good for her mental health.

Marcy’s dark head popped out from behind the half-closed door. “Adri, you’re back!” She dragged Adrienne inside the office. “How was it?”

Grinning, Adrienne turned to face her. “Great!”

“Woo hoo!” Marcy’s exuberant hug nearly crushed Adrienne’s ribs. Pushing her favorite librarian-style spectacles -- the ones that gave her an innocent-yet-naughty, sensual look -- up her nose, Marcy pulled back. “You’re made, girl!”

“Not so fast, friend. The deal’s not closed yet.”

Marcy waved a negligent hand in the air. “Oh, but --”

“It’s not a done deal until the contract’s been signed.”

“Fussy.” Marcy made a face. Then, her light gray eyes twinkled. “Oh, all right. At least you got to have personal time with Mr. Jake Woolf, our dreamboat of a boss.”

“It’s strictly a business relationship.”

Marcy sent her a mischievous smile. “I see you don’t deny it. He *is* dreamy. Have you ever thought of jumping him --”

“Have *you* ever thought of jumping Logan?” Adrienne adroitly changed the subject to Marcy’s current favorite topic of discussion. Adrienne turned and moved to take her seat behind the desk. Nudging the mouse to bring the computer screen back to life, she prepared to make the revisions Jake had noted on the pages.

Marcy flopped into a chair in front of the desk.

Adrienne glanced at her idly, wondering how Marcy could move so gracefully, without rumpling her clothes, given her generous figure. When *she* flopped, her skirt would ride up, and her blouse and blazer would be askew. But then again, she never flopped; to do so would ruin her carefully cultivated image.

“Countless times.” Marcy sighed. “Not that it’s doing me any good. The man’s hopelessly in love with my housemate.”

“You’re too good for him, Marce. Find another man.”

“I know.” Marcy sounded glum.

The computer hummed and a few seconds later, the screen appeared. Adrienne called up the file she’d been working on earlier.

“But you’re not changing the subject on me again, Adri. I’m wise to your tricks now.”

Adrienne glanced over to see Marcy sporting a smug grin. Though only two years younger than Adrienne, Marcy had a tendency to act like a teenager at times.

“Hmm?”

“We were talking about our hunk of a boss and the increased *personal* time you got to spend with him. So how, uh, *personal* has it been, huh?”

“Don’t you have some work to do?” Adrienne continued with her revisions, although she found herself getting increasingly distracted. She didn’t mind talking about Jake -- in fact, she’d love to talk about him -- but she was afraid of revealing too much. The fact Jake figured center stage in all her fantasies was something she didn’t want anybody else to know. “Jake might object to finding his secretary idling time away chatting.”

“Oh pooh, I’m your secretary, too. Anyway, office hours are almost over.”

“Almost isn’t *is*.”

“You just don’t want to answer my question,” Marcy said. “Which makes me wonder what you’re hiding.”

A knock on the open door halted the conversation. Tielan, one of the most creative members of Adrienne’s team, entered the room at Adrienne’s behest. She bore a slim rectangular package. “Boss, package for you!”

Adrienne breathed a sigh of relief at the interruption. “Thanks.”

Marcy sat up, her eyes bright with excitement. “From whom? A secret admirer you’re not telling me about?”

Tielan’s eyes were wide and round. The light caught the red tints in her long dark hair, which was tied back with a ribbon. With her round, baby face, she looked too young to be working. “How exciting!”

“I have no idea who would send me a package.” Adrienne turned the box around and examined it from different angles. “No card attached, either.” Finally, she loosed the pink ribbon that was laced around the box. The irrational part of her mind whispered, *Could it be Jake?* At the thought, her heartbeat quickened. She started to lift the lid. “Maybe he *or she* doesn’t want to be --” Her voice dropped to a bewildered whisper. “-- identified?”

Nestling against a backdrop of white tissue paper and among artfully designed sprigs of baby’s breath lay a single black rose.

Adrienne drew in a shaky breath. “So nice of someone to give me such a rare flower.” Terror started to creep up on her. With great strength of will, she forced the fear aside. This was just someone’s twisted idea of a joke. It must be.

Silence hung heavy in the room.

“This is no laughing matter, Adri.” Marcy was still staring wide-eyed at the flower, which looked so innocent against a background of pure white. “It’s a black rose, for heaven’s sake. Doesn’t black portend death or something?”

“What about that black suit you’re wearing?” Her heart pounding, Adrienne made her tone as dry as she could. She would not panic over nothing.

Marcy made an angry sound, obviously impatient with Adrienne’s dissembling. “Roses come in red or white or yellow or pink or blue. Not black!”

“I’ll have you know that true black roses are the holy grail of plant breeders worldwide. The best anybody has been able to come up with is very dark red.” Adrienne picked up the rose gingerly, mindful of its thorns. “As you can see, if you look closely at this one, it’s not really black, but a very, very dark red.”

“Don’t touch it!” Marcy’s shout came a little too late. “Put it down! What if it’s poisonous or something?”

“Marcy, stop being so dramatic. Someone thought I would appreciate such a rare flower and sent me this. He -- or she -- is right. See what a long-stemmed beauty this is. Be a dear and find me a vase --”

“Boss.” Tielan said, her voice fraught with tension and something else ... fear? “You might want to look at the top of the box.”

Adrienne looked up, taking in the other women’s white faces. Tielan’s gaze was glued to something on the top portion of the package. Adrienne glanced down and saw the missing card tucked into the top right corner on the inside of the carton. It had come into view when she had taken the rose, together with the tissue, out of the box. Why would someone place it in that particular spot? And upside-down, too?

Adrienne turned the package around, and the neat typewritten sentences slipped into focus. The message made her blood freeze.

Don’t think you can get away with it. I’m coming after you.

Chapter Two

Marcy went hysterical. She jumped up from her seat and wrung her hands. “We’ve got to tell somebody. The police! The SWAT team!”

Goose pimples broke out on Adrienne’s arms. Still, she tried for the voice of rationality. “I think it’s just someone’s idea of a sick joke --”

“Girl, your sense of self-preservation stinks!” Marcy leaned across the desk and shouted in Adrienne’s face. “That’s no joke! It says he’s coming to get you. If that’s not a direct threat, I don’t know what is!”

Adrienne didn’t want to get the police involved. Once this was reported to them, they would dig and dig and dig ... and then all hell would break loose. She would have to run again. She was so tired of running.

Tielan offered in a small voice, “It’s certainly not romantic.”

Marcy burst out laughing, but the laugh was totally lacking in mirth. “That’s the understatement of the century.”

Her own fear and Marcy’s panic threatened to overwhelm Adrienne, but she forced herself to concentrate on her breathing. After all, the note could really be harmless, one

more prank played on her by -- she threw out a wild suggestion. "If you will just look at the note from a different light, it doesn't have to be ominous-sounding, you know."

"Oh yeah?" Marcy challenged, a little calmer, although her breathing was still too fast.

"Yeah. I may have something of his that this person who sent the note just wants to get back." Adrienne managed a rueful smile. "At the moment, though, I can't think of what it could be. I'm not exactly the type to bring home what's not mine."

"I don't buy it, Adri." Marcy's mutinous look was reminiscent of a dog stubbornly hanging on to its favorite bone. "I still think we need to tell someone. All right, if you don't want to talk to the police, let's tell Jake. Then he can do something to beef up security in the office."

"I don't think it's enough to warrant --"

"Take your pick, Adri. Tell the police or tell Jake."

"Tell me what?" Jake entered the room, his tall, athletic body clothed in a dark blue long-sleeved polo shirt and black trousers. A bright yellow tie served as a direct contrast to his shirt. His overpowering presence filled the room, which suddenly seemed smaller. His enigmatic gray-brown-eyed gaze met Adrienne's, before moving on to Marcy and Tielan.

Adrienne's icy mask slipped into place. "Nothing." She assumed a pose of brisk efficiency, shoving the box into the wastebasket at her feet, and then shuffling the papers on her desk into one organized pile.

"Adri ..." Marcy's voice held an agonized note.

"There's nothing to tell," Adrienne repeated. "Tielan, you may go back to work. Thank you for bringing the package over."

Tielen filed out, and Jake closed the door behind her. Damn. Even his backside had the ability to burn her into lust. She had read plenty of romance novels describing the hero as having broad shoulders that tapered into slim hips, but Jake's was the only real life male

body she had seen that looked like that. Her fingers itched to caress his butt, to hold onto his ass as he rode her.

He sat beside Marcy, assessing Adrienne with his intelligent dark eyes. There was none of the passion that she had imagined earlier, none of the naked lust that made her want to tear away his clothes and make fierce love to him.

Still, he had the power to affect her. Fire raged within her, making her aware of yearnings that had long been plaguing her.

He was also very sharp. His intelligence matched hers, surpassed it even, which was one of the things that attracted her to him. Given enough clues, he would be able to put all the puzzle pieces together and fill in the missing blanks to get the whole picture.

And her secret was one puzzle she didn't want him working on.

"Jake, did you come to see me about something?" Cool and efficient.

"What's this about a package?" Jake lounged back in his seat, giving the impression of the relaxed executive.

Without hesitation, Adrienne showed him the card and the black rose. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Marcy's surprised expression.

"I didn't want to mention it earlier, with Tielan here and all, but I suspect I might be the butt of another practical joke." Adrienne turned to Marcy with a rueful smile and said, "Which was why I didn't want you calling the police. Imagine my embarrassment when they find out it's all a gag."

Jake fingered the card. He frowned. "Practical joke?"

Marcy smacked her lap with one hand. "Why didn't I think of them earlier?" She rolled her eyes. "*The Mean Girls*, you mean?"

Poor Jake looked even more bewildered. "Mean Girls?"

"I don't know how the name stuck, but yes, I do mean them, no pun intended." Adrienne turned to Jake. "What I'm going to tell you is strictly off the record."

He nodded.

“Some of the marketing associates were ... let’s just say, dissatisfied with my promotion to assistant manager. The reasons being that one, they were here longer than I; and two, the fact that now, instead of being on the same level, they have to report *to me*.”

His small pink wedge of a tongue slipped out again.

Adrienne stared at his mouth, fascinated. In the space of a heartbeat, her arousal level shot up, leaving her wet and breathless and hungry.

“I see how that might rankle. But you were promoted based on leadership skills.”

“Nobody refuted that. They know better. If they said anything, they’d probably lose their jobs.” Adrienne decided to be blunt. “They’ve been calling me the ‘boss’s pet’ behind my back.” She gave a snort. “Instead of confronting me to my face, they play these silly jokes and pull these stupid stunts. No guts.”

“Tell me who they are.” There was a hard glint in Jake’s eyes. “I’ll have a talk with them.”

This was what she was afraid of. “No, Jake. I didn’t tell you so you’d confront them. Some of them are my team members, and I’ll handle them the way I see fit.” Her voice was firm and brooked no arguments. “Moreover, I’ve known them for far longer than you. I’ve been here for more than a year, while you started here barely two months ago. I only told you the background so you’d understand why they were playing these practical jokes on me. They want me to go, but I won’t give them the satisfaction. If they truly want me gone, they’ll have to do better than pulling a few mean-spirited pranks.”

“What have they been doing?”

“Sending me messages like: ‘You won’t last on this job’ and ‘Pets don’t think; they only obey,’ those kinds of things.” Adrienne left out a few of the others. *The boss’s whore* and some equally degrading remarks. “Harmless things, like I’ve told Marcy. So long as I don’t let them get to me, they can continue sending whatever they like.”

Marcy shook her head. "I don't understand why you don't just put a stop to it."

"It's simple." Adrienne lifted her hands in a helpless gesture. "I don't have proof it's them. I can't link the messages *directly* to them. This is all conjecture, but enough clues are there for me to suspect that it's them."

Jake shifted in his seat. He leaned forward and rested his hands on top of her desk. His strange piercing eyes bored into hers. "How many of them?"

Adrienne shook her head. "No, Jake." Damn, but his male take-charge attitude both attracted and irritated her. It made her feel safe and taken care of, but she could darn well look out for herself, thank you very much.

He held up the card. "So, with this message, you think the 'it' they're referring to is your assistant manager position, and that after two months, they still can't accept being passed over for promotion. Hence, they are out to get you."

"Yes."

"So, what's with the black rose?"

"What do you mean?"

His forehead was knotted. "It's a rare flower, one that doesn't come cheap. Why dole out money -- good money -- to scare someone? The message would have been enough."

Adrienne was stumped. This was one angle she hadn't thought of. Jake was probably the only one who could outthink her, and if she didn't come up with something fast, he'd become suspicious, and he'd continue digging and digging until all her secrets were revealed.

"I -- I don't know." Her brain whirled, trying to come up with a passable reason to satisfy Jake so that he wouldn't even think of going to the police, like Marcy had suggested just moments ago. Her hands busied themselves, arranging the sheaf of paper that was her proposal into a neat pile. "But if they were thinking to make me lose face by calling the police, being scared enough by the black rose to do it, then they just might spend that money

for the authentic threatening feel. Not only would I be embarrassed, but the firm might even punish me harshly for the negative publicity.”

“But it’s perfectly within your rights to call the police,” Jake pointed out. “Creative Minds has no authority to punish you for calling in the law; in fact, that’s what you should have done. The police can get to the bottom of this for you.”

Which is what I’m afraid of. They might get to the bottom of who I am, too, and then I’d be running again. David, too. I can’t uproot him when he’s settling down so nicely ...

“Please, Jake,” Adrienne tried to persuade without begging. “This is my personal problem. Let me handle it the way I want to; just give me a little time. I promise, I’ll settle this with them within the month.”

Jake held her gaze for a few seconds more, as if weighing her capabilities. Finally, he nodded. “All right.” His lips twisted. “I didn’t know we have such petty and vindictive people on the team.”

“Not everyone is as well-rounded as I am,” Adrienne said dryly, trying to inject a light-hearted tone into the whole scenario. Yet, the questions Jake raised left a disquieting doubt in her mind.

Jake stared at her, and then his lips broke into a huge smile.

Marcy gasped. Adrienne could relate, as thoughts of a sheet-rumpled bed, their bodies reaching and limbs entwined, rioted within her. Lord, the man *could* smile. If they could patent and manufacture it, they could easily make a billion in a year.

His eyes twinkled. “Have you finally let your hair down and made a joke?”

“I didn’t know I was so stiff.”

“Not stiff. But too serious most of the time. You need to lighten up. Remind me to show you how.” The look in his eyes had turned intimate, and his voice warm, as if there were only the two of them in the room.

Adrienne stared at him, disconcerted.

Jake, flirting with her? Was he suggesting what she thought he was suggesting?

Or was she in fantasy mode again?

“Will you show me too, Jake?” Marcy cooed beside him.

Adrienne gripped the thick sheaf of paper so tight her fingers grew numb. She wanted to lift it high and slam it down on Marcy’s head with all the force in her slim body. A moment later, she was appalled at her violent thought. Marcy was her friend! The only one who had stayed a friend through all the petty jealousies in the office; how could Adrienne fall out with her over a guy, a guy she had no intention of letting in on her secrets?

Jake grinned down at her friend.

Maybe Adrienne would slug *him* instead, take out his eyes so that he wouldn’t be able to see anyone but her. But then, he wouldn’t be able to see her either ... *Darn*.

The file hit the desk, crashing down with unnecessary force. Both Jake and Marcy jumped, their expressions startled as they turned toward her.

“Now that that’s settled,” Adrienne said, managing a cool smile despite the turmoil boiling within her breast, “what was it you came to see me about, Jake?”

Jake’s eyes narrowed, but he didn’t contradict her. “I’ve set the meeting with the client. Be ready to leave by two in the afternoon.”

Adrienne lifted an eyebrow. “Tomorrow?”

“The day after.”

* * * * *

After only half-listening to his eldest brother, Jared, ramble on and on for what seemed like hours, Jake suddenly grew aware of the unexpected silence. Startled from his thoughts, he looked up to find Jared glaring down at him. Jake immediately went on the offensive. “What?”

Jared wasn't the least bit cowed. If anything, his frown deepened as he adjusted his feet a little for more balance. The chair that he was sitting on was poised precariously on its two back legs; only his feet resting on the low table in front of him kept it upright. "You dare to ask? Okay, repeat everything I've said."

Jake didn't need his empathic ability to know Jared was mad. Fuming mad. Most likely due to Jake's absent-minded monosyllabic responses. He had to admit, he hadn't really been listening. He'd been surprised when he received a call from Jared that afternoon, requesting an urgent meeting at the homestead regarding a recent case Jared was investigating. Jared had never asked for help before, as the cases were confidential, so this made the request for a meeting doubly curious.

They had seen the family off before settling down in the family room to talk; Mom and Tracy were going to take advantage of the last day of the great summer sale, while Dad and Jason were attending the long-planned car show. They had the privacy and peace to talk, but Jake couldn't concentrate; his thoughts were full of Adrienne.

Admitting defeat, Jake shrugged his shoulders.

"Jake, damn it! Here I am, talking serious business with you --"

Jake reached over to land a light punch on his brother's arm.

Jared's chair wobbled. "Hey, watch it!"

"Sorry, Jar. Things are a bit hectic at the office these days and --"

His brother aimed a knowing smirk in his direction. "Who is she?"

Damn! Jared had always been too perceptive for his own good. Jake thought of pretending he didn't know what Jared was talking about, but knowing Jared, he'd find a way to force it out of him. Literally.

"She's my assistant manager."

"Your assistant, huh? Makes things pretty easy for you."

Something in Jared's tone caused Jake's anger to rise, quick and true, within him. He kicked out, aiming a swift, strong and well-aimed foot at one of the precariously-balanced chair legs.

The chair toppled over, and Jared along with it. Jake caught the surprised look on Jared's face before he fell on his side on the floor.

"Hey!"

Jake jumped up, towering over Jared. "Don't you dare talk about her like she's some common whore!"

Jared sprang to his feet. He growled low, the sound issuing from deep in his throat. He crouched into a fighting stance. A feral look dominated his face. His canines started to elongate. His eyes were narrowed and glowing.

Chapter Three

Jake imagined his own eyes were as bright. The sudden fury had caught him by surprise, yet fueled him to the aggressive wolfish behavior of protecting --

He shied away from completing the thought, not certain he wanted to face it.

As quickly as his anger had heated, Jared cooled down. He clapped his hand on Jake's shoulder. His eyes bled back to gray-brown, and were full of sympathy. "I didn't mean any disrespect."

As the alpha male and pack leader of their clan, Jared "ruled" with a firm but understanding hand. The other males were allowed to stand up to him and challenge him, especially when it concerned their own lives. Jared had always maintained that the days when one ruled with an autocratic hand were over and the pack had to grow with the times. However, when pack law was violated, Jared's decision was upheld over everyone else's protests and differing opinions.

Jared continued, "Have you told her about our heritage?"

"No," Jake responded tightly. Fear that Adrienne would reject him for his werewolf blood knotted deep in his gut. Just as Lila, in the final moments, had done. "Why, Jared? Why is it that all these years since the treaty was signed, we're still treated as if we're

monsters? Weres, vamps. My friends tell me how people still exclude them from gatherings and bar them from organizations. Parents warn their children not to play with our young ones. Hell, I myself daren't tell my bosses that I'm half were!"

"The time is not long enough, I fear, for people to get over their prejudices." Jared sighed and squeezed Jake's shoulder in compassion. "In my opinion, ten or so years is way too short. I think we're looking at several hundred years before humans stop seeing us as a threat. I guess people are afraid that now we're openly acknowledged in society, we'll abuse our powers and wreak havoc in their lives. At least, before, they could ignore us and pretend we didn't exist." Jared barked a short laugh. "Like ostriches with their heads in the sand, if they don't see the threat, the threat doesn't exist."

"That's why The Council was formed, to monitor us and keep us in line --"

"That helps, of course. But you can't force people to be accepting. Subconsciously, you also know that. That's why you won't tell your board of directors that you're a werewolf, even though you hold a management position, right?"

Jake knew the answer. It was exactly as Jared had said.

"But who knows? Maybe if you get to know this assistant of yours better, you'll find out she's one of those rare humans who has a heart big enough to accept us."

"That's a very big 'maybe.'"

"I never said life was more of a certainty for us weres than for humans." Jared paused. "Is she a virgin?"

Jake shook his head. "She didn't smell like one."

"Then --"

Jake walked over to the bar, turning his back on the conversation. He knew what Jared was going to say. *Fuck her, and get over her.* "Why don't we talk about this case of yours? It certainly sounds more interesting than mine."

“So interesting that you didn’t hear a word of it.” Jared’s voice was laced with amusement. “Anyway, the gist of it is that my client wanted me to look for his ex-employee, who apparently stole something very important from him.”

Jake poured two measures of Scotch. He gulped it down then placed the glass on the bar. The liquid burned a fiery trail down his throat, but he relished the warmth. He turned to face his brother across the room. “Sounds fishy.”

Jared snorted. “I know. And he wouldn’t give me any more details right now. So, I thought I’d find the lady and get the full story from her, instead.” His lips curled in a fiendish smile. “Or, I can always pick my client’s brains later.”

Jake threw him a sharp look.

“I do have ethics, you know.” Jared’s annoyance showed in the tone of his voice and the curl of his lips. “Most of the time, I don’t get to use my talent at all, more’s the pity.”

On a scale of one to ten, Jared’s “talent” scored an eleven. He had the ability to persuade people to do what he wanted, “persuade” being a very relative word.

“Yes, do remember that you’re the pack leader.” Jake kept a straight face as he teased. “You have the responsibility to uphold the family name and serve as a good example to the younger generation.”

“What younger generation?!”

“Oh, they’ll come when they’ll come. In the meantime, you need the practice.”

“I may be the pack leader --” Jared laughed. “-- but I can never out-say you.”

“So, why are you discussing your case with me?”

“The trail dead-ended at the company where you work.”

Jake’s eyebrows shot up. “Creative Minds?”

“We’re not sure yet whether the lady works there or she knows someone who works there. Can you help?”

Jake hesitated. “The most I can do is to keep my eyes and ears open. But we’ve got hundreds of employees at Creative Minds. Are there any clues to narrow it down?”

“The person that we’re looking for came all the way from the United Kingdom.”

* * * * *

Adrienne couldn’t help it. The moan escaped her lips. “Ahhhh ...”

His magic hands were wonderful on her body, touching all the right places and inducing lethargy. She was lying face down on the bed, and her eyes had closed of their own accord many minutes ago. He was above her, shifting with silent grace from the tips of her shoulders down to her toes. His rigid cock brushed her naked back as he methodically moved southward.

His cool fingers knew just where to pinch and exert the correct pressure to release the tight knots of tension that had collected in her body. Thank God for Lucien. If not for him and his skillful massage, she would be suffering from blinding headaches by now, brought on by the stress at work and ... from the need to hide her secrets.

God, if Jake would only ...

She hungered for him, yearned for his hands to touch her, to know her body, to cup her breasts and recognize their fullness, to realize that her nipples hardened for him alone. She imagined his mouth closing over the tight nubs ...

She cried out.

She was in pain. She ached for his cock to fill her, for his body to slam against hers ... oh God, this terrible need ...

She moaned, writhing sensuously on the bed. Her juices flowed, readying her for completion, for the moment of penetration.

His hands palmed her buttocks and squeezed them.

Her hips lifted of their own accord, leaning into his touch.

One finger slipped between the crack of her nether cheeks and moved toward the enticing wetness.

She whimpered. Her breath caught and held ...

His finger dipped into the midst of her thick cream and skimmed her craving folds.

Not enough! More ...

Adrienne flipped over onto her back, panting with need and excitement. Her eyes opened, seeing Lucien's shaggy hair and limpid brown eyes. Her heart plunged in disappointment; for a moment, she had truly believed that it was Jake making love to her.

She spread her legs. "Fuck me, Lucien."

His huge cock nudged against her thigh. "Gladly."

Gasping breaths and clumsy fingers accompanied the sheathing of the condom on his straining erection. He positioned himself at her opening.

Adrienne looked up the long line of him, from his condom-encased cock up his flat abdomen to his face, which was ruddy with passion and exertion.

Their eyes held.

He winked. Slowly. Without warning, he plunged into her steaming cunt and slammed his body against her clitoris. Hard.

She screamed. The sensation cut through to the bone; the friction of his cock inside her pussy was sheer heaven and pure madness. She pushed and ground her pelvis against his crotch, hungry for the excruciating pleasure. She arched, her back coming off the bed. She panted. "Lucien ..."

He was buried to the hilt within her. "Relax, baby. I know what you need." He wrapped her legs around his waist. "Hold on. It's going to be a rough ride."

He drew a little bit out of her and thrust into her in a burst of rapid, short, shallow stabs. The series of quick onslaughts rubbed against her clitoris, stimulating and electrifying

the tiny nub. The tension swiftly built, increasing with each stroke. She was greedy for release, and yet, she wanted this agonizing pleasure to go on and on ...

A mouth latched on to her nipple and bit. Pleasure-pain combined with the need for satisfaction. Yet, she held on, denying herself, eagerly soaking up each luscious stroke and each stinging smash of their bodies.

This was Jake driving his body into hers, Jake possessing her, stamping his brand on her ...

Harsh breathing reached her ears. But it wasn't hers nor was it from the man above her.

Driven to the sound, she turned her head blindly.

Her eyes encountered a naked man standing a few feet away, his hand moving briskly on his throbbing cock.

She screamed with urgent, desperate need. "Paul!"

The man walked with rapid strides across the room. Lust flaring in his eyes, he shoved his fat cock into her waiting mouth.

It was the last straw.

She lost control and lifted her hips to meet each of Lucien's thrusts, the screams blocked in her throat as the waves of pleasure rose and crested in her. Wanton pleasure invaded her entire body, even her mind, as satisfaction rendered her unable to think, unable to focus on anything but the erotic sensation of her pussy walls clamping down on his cock. Her lips moved convulsively around the cock in her mouth, her teeth biting down lightly on the thick appendage. Orgasm after orgasm whammed her.

She screamed again, but the sound was muffled. One hand came up to encircle the stiff rod as she sucked. Her pussy still pulsed, renewed by the carnality of having two cocks in her.

Paul groaned and thrust into her mouth. Lucien continued to plunge into her, the tightness of his breath evidencing the nearness of his own climax.

“I’m going come, baby,” Paul rasped, his voice deep and guttural. He buried his hands in her hair and choreographed her head movements. “Make me come.”

Excitement flared anew within her. Oh God, she would kill for another orgasm. She fought the lethargy invading her limbs. She dipped a hand into her pussy and stroked Lucien’s cock as she smeared her hand generously with the moisture that had gushed out from between their bodies. She took Paul’s engorged dick out of her mouth and pumped it vigorously, licking it and tasting her own juices.

Lucien moved, and Paul’s cock slipped from Adrienne’s hand. She gasped as Lucien staggered back off the bed, bringing her with him. He carried her back, until they hit the wall. Cradling her by the thighs, he pushed deep into her, causing her to ground down on him. His voice husky, he echoed, “Yes, make me come, too, baby.”

She pressed her lips against Lucien’s in a voracious kiss. His hands moved to her buttocks and squeezed, slowly prying them apart for Paul.

The cold mouth of the lubricant hit her hot anus. She gasped. An excited whimper escaped her lips when Paul squirted the contents of the tube into her. A moment later, his fat cock poised at the entrance of her anus and entered in one hard, determined thrust.

She sobbed. “Oh, God, oh, God, oh, God …” Searing lust flashed through her. Her anal muscles adjusted to the invasion, closing around Paul’s hard, fat cock. She rocked against them, wanting both their cocks to move, to fuck her.

Lust permeated the air. The smell of sex heightened the web of intimacy and passion saturating the room.

They settled into their long established rhythm. As Lucien surged into her pussy, Paul withdrew. Their cocks rubbed against each other through the thin tissue separating the two

passageways, increasing in tempo as each man found his pace. The resulting friction threw her into a spin, pleasure upon pleasure spiraling up within her until she exploded.

She screamed. She bit down on Lucien's shoulder. Her pussy convulsed with violent contractions as their cocks erupted within her.

Long moments later, they all slumped on each other against the wall, breathing hard, sweat covering their bodies. Paul's seed dripped from her ass. They moved to the bed, where Adrienne lay sandwiched between the two men, loving the feeling of warmth and safety the position engendered in her. She sucked on Paul's nipple, unashamedly speeding up the process for the next bout of wild sex.

Lucien touched Adrienne's cheek, bringing her attention to him. His eyes were filled with sympathy. It was the last thing she expected to see from him. "Why don't you go after him, baby?"

She avoided his eyes and leaned forward to place kisses on his chin. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"You do, baby." He wrapped her in his arms, his hands strangely soothing at her back. He rested his chin on the top of her head. "I'm not complaining about the rewards I'm reaping on his behalf, but you should, baby. You should go after him."

* * * * *

Adrienne woke. One minute, she was asleep, and the next, she was wide awake. She yawned.

God, what a night! The perfect end to a stress-filled day full of fake death threats and unrequited lust. Well, almost perfect. Perfect would have been Jake driving his thick rod into her core and a nameless, faceless someone loving her at the same time.

She quivered at the thought.

Her first sexual experience was a threesome, and now that she thought about it, that encounter rewired her psyche such that it changed her sexual orientation forever. It left so deep an impression on her that although she could still be satisfied sexually with one man (she'd tried it before), she still felt that something was ... *missing*, as though there was a hole in her that wasn't filled. She smiled at the thought. *No pun intended*. Several relationships later, she realized that two men could *fulfill* her in a way that one lover never could.

But while making love with Jake was still a fantasy and not having yet met the other man who could make her heart beat faster, she thanked God for her weekly massages, given by the professional masseur Lucien and his assistant, Paul. They had started out innocently enough, but passion had overridden her once, and they had all become lovers. She had then suggested for all of them to be naked during their weekly sessions; things were thus done with less fuss and everything became more convenient. Lucien and Paul were also good outlets for her intense but unresolved attraction to Jake. Sometimes, she felt twinges of guilt for using them to relieve her physical frustration, but everyone understood theirs was a "no strings attached" arrangement.

But what Lucien had said last night disturbed her. She had never told anyone about her attraction to Jake. Was her unfulfilled desire so apparent? Long after they had left last night - or, rather, in the wee hours of the morning -- she had lain in bed, thinking about Lucien's comment. His suggestion made sense, actually. Since Jake was the one who left her frustrated, why not let him scratch her itch? Maybe she wouldn't need her masseur then. Except for the usual purpose, anyway.

One hour later, she was out the door and on her way to the office. The weather was lovely; cloudy blue skies with a hint of the sun. She had always enjoyed early morning the best.

But since arriving on Tolidet Island, which was one of the small islands in the south Pacific Ocean, fourteen months ago, she hated being outdoors. The air and noise pollution in the city were terrible, so different from the cleanliness and tranquility in Edinburgh! One

had to experience both to understand. God, she didn't know how the locals were able to take the awful stench of garbage left by the roadside and the carbon monoxide emitting from vehicles that clogged up the streets.

However, her experiences on the island were not all bad. For the most part, the locals were a friendly and hospitable group of people, fun-loving and easy to get along with. She never felt like she was a foreigner in their midst, despite her oh-so-English accent and different way of thinking.

The receptionist smiled and nodded at her. "Good morning, Miss Lee."

Adrienne smiled back. "Good morning, Anna."

She made her way to her office, noting that Marcy's desk was empty. The door to Jake's office was ajar, though. *Marcy's probably taking dictation*, Adrienne thought wryly. Jake was really such a workaholic. If only he would put all that energy to another use ...

She opened the door to her office. Flipping on the lights, she immediately noticed a brightly covered box with a red ribbon on top sitting on her desk. A card read "Happy Birthday!" in bold, bright red letters.

"But it's not my birthday," she muttered to herself. Could the Dispatch Section have sent the package to the wrong employee? It could be for someone whose name was similarly close to Adrienne Lee. Maybe Adrian Li or something ... But no, a card, which was almost hidden by the ornate bow, bore her name. So it was for her, but someone had gotten her birth date wrong, which wouldn't be for another couple of months.

She was reaching for the tape that was holding the top of the box in place when her hand stopped and hovered in mid-air. What if the box contained another prank? Or another foul message?

Adrienne shivered, remembering the threatening note she'd received yesterday. Despite the bravado she'd displayed in front of Jake and Marcy, she was more disturbed by it than she realized.

After a second, her spine straightened. No way was she going to allow those dissenters to get the better of her. This ridiculous situation had gone on long enough. She'd open the box and confront them with their craven deed and show them in no uncertain terms that she's not going to tolerate any more of their mischief.

After placing her handbag on the visitor's chair in front of her desk, Adrienne neatly removed the tape. Once that was done, she took off the top --

A bloodcurdling scream tore from her throat.

Chapter Four

Jake's heart stopped beating at the terrified scream. He swayed as a massive wave of overwhelming fear crashed into him. His shields slammed up. Cursing, he rushed out into the hallway, with Marcy hard on his heels. He pushed between the mass of people starting to congregate outside Adrienne's office. "Let me through!"

He took everything in at a glance -- the multicolored box sitting at odds with the somber décor of the room, the discarded cardboard top on the floor, and Adrienne ...

Adrienne had backed herself into the corner, bracing herself against the wall. Her dark eyes were wild and haunted and staring at things only she could see. Naturally fair, she had turned paler and her lips were white. She was taking in rapid, shallow breaths. He felt her shock in palpable waves. Alarm emanated from her.

Stirrings of anger rose up in him. He looked inside the garish package, and the contents made him turn away. He would put a stop to this, whether she liked it or not. But first ...

He walked slowly toward Adrienne, one arm outstretched so as not to alarm her. In the back of his mind, he was aware of the gaggle of people crowding the doorway, of their bated breaths and wide-eyed expressions, of their low-voiced murmurs and questionings. But they were the least of his concerns.

He cupped Adrienne's cheek gently.

She flinched.

"Adrienne, it's me, Jake."

She looked at him uncomprehendingly, her expression like that of a lost child.

It pained him to see no trace of the capable and efficient woman who tormented him endlessly with her sexy stiletto heels and figure-hugging business suits. He grasped her by the shoulders and shook her a little. "Snap out of it, Adri." He decided to tease her. "Hey, is this how you fight back against the boss who nags at you and who won't let up until you reach your targets? Cold treatment doesn't work with him, I'll have you know." He let humor leak through in his voice. "You need to shout and rant and rage at him --"

"Jake?" Sanity returned to her eyes. "Jake!" She hurtled herself into his arms, the tears replacing her former stupor. "How horrible; all that blood and -- and -- a puppy, Jake, a poor defenseless puppy --"

How she thought it was a puppy was beyond him, for it was mangled and sliced up beyond recognition, blood and entrails poured out of the big cut in the middle of its body. Its dark red blood marred the box's pristine whiteness. It was messy, grisly and a terrible sight for even the most strong-stomached individual. Jake tightened his hands on Adrienne's shoulders.

"Someone take the box away!" His harsh voice broke through the sounds of her weeping and the shocked silence that had descended.

A large man, whom Jake recognized as a new recruit, walked forward to gingerly scoop the box from Adrienne's desk.

Jake looked down at the woman in his arms. She was like an object wrapped in layer upon layer of packaging, and he was removing them one by one to get to the real Adrienne beneath. It was an exciting process, and he wondered what he would find at the end of the journey. For now, he discovered that her fierce exterior hid a soft heart that could be her

undoing, which was most likely the reason she had forced her true self behind a no-nonsense attitude.

“Marcy!” he said. “Take care of Adrienne.” He gently handed her over to his efficient secretary.

The anger that had been teasing the edges of his emotions now flared into full bloom. He allowed the fury to wash over him, but he retained control. He didn’t want to go berserk, to give in to the werewolf that wanted to howl with grief at the mangled sight. He didn’t want to give his subordinates the chance to see any weakness and make them lose their respect for him.

He fixed the staff still standing at the doorway with a cold glare. “Go back to your desks.”

Everyone started shuffling away on silent feet.

Leaving Adrienne and Marcy huddled near Adrienne’s desk, Jake strode to the common room where most of the workers’ cubicles were located. He walked down the center of the aisle, his wrath emanating from him in waves. No one dared to meet his eyes. He felt them shrink away from him as he passed.

Good.

When he reached the end, he turned around and faced them. He stared at each one in turn. He let down his shields a little and allowed their emotions to leak through. There was fear, horror, and yes, guilt. So, Adrienne’s hunch was right. Some people in the office were so idle that they had time to play all these practical jokes on her. And now, he knew who they were.

His fists clenched.

From one lady in particular, he sensed remorse. His eyes narrowed. She looked familiar. Oh yes, she’d been in Adrienne’s office yesterday.

“I’ve heard most of you are fun-loving, but what I saw in there was *no fun* at all. Let me tell you what was in that box.” His voice was cold. “Lying in that pool of blood and guts, lay what was once a living, breathing creature. Some sick, twisted individual murdered a helpless animal, cut it up, and its insides were put on display. It doesn’t matter that it was only a dog; tell me that when it is *your dog*.” The whole office was silent -- the uncomfortable silence of the guilty. Each staff member stood beside his or her cubicle; the brave and innocent ones met his eyes, but a few looked down at their feet. “What I don’t understand is what you have got against Adrienne. Are you punishing her for being more capable and qualified than you? Hurting someone who has never done anything to you, who is even now protecting you? Are your hearts made of stone or what?!”

He took several deep breaths. Triggering consciences in people who have no conscience was a waste of time. “I don’t know who did this and previous other mischievous tricks; you may have heard about the black rose yesterday. I don’t want to know who’s responsible, but here’s one thing I do know: *This has to stop now*. I will not allow any more funny business in this division. Believe me, you don’t want to know what will happen should I learn of anything like this again in the future.” He paused to let his words sink in, to let them know that he was taking a personal interest in this situation and that if anyone dared to do mischief again, they would be doing it in direct rebellion to his order. “Everyone understand?”

Mumbles and nods.

“By the way, if anyone has a twinge of conscience and wants to own up, you know who to look for.” His lips twisted. “And it’s not me.”

* * * * *

Adrienne was exhausted, but her heart felt light and free. Although she couldn’t really thank God for the grisly package she received this morning, at least the unspoken tension in her team had been resolved. Some of the women had approached her individually to express

their regrets and hope for an amicable working relationship. Some had even owned up to the particular trick they had played, although no one claimed the black rose and the dead puppy.

She shuddered. She needed to stop thinking about it. Instead, she wanted to think about Jake and the masterful way he had taken charge of the situation. Though she hadn't wanted him to intervene on her behalf, this time she had been grateful. She didn't think she could've handled the situation as well as he did, considering how shaken she'd been. She made a face. *Yeah, and while you're at it, don't forget about the fact that he disappeared soon afterwards.*

She sighed. Better to concentrate on her presentation. Everyone had already left the office hours ago, and if she were wise, she would too, even if she were driving. The island's peace and order situation was not at its best at the moment, with increasing incidences of criminal activities sprouting up here and there. In the fourteen months that she'd been living on Tolidet Island, the prices of basic goods had skyrocketed tremendously due mostly to certain macroeconomic factors such as the escalating prices of oil. From reading the newspapers, she realized that many of the lower-income families were affected, and some of them even turned to criminal activities in order to augment their declining income or to feed their hungry children. It was sad, the way things had turned out.

Maybe she should flee again, to a less troubled country, like Taiwan or Singapore. Or maybe Malaysia or Australia. But that would mean uprooting David, when he was already settled in where he was and happy ...

God, she missed him. Maybe she could go see him tomorrow, after work.

She packed up her things, intending to finish her work at home. At this hour, traffic shouldn't be heavy; she should be home in about thirty minutes. The idea of a hot bath invigorated her, and within moments, she was locking up the office and making her way down the stairs to the basement where she had parked her car that morning.

Soon, she was on the highway, humming along to the song blasting from the radio. She signaled to make a left turn. Checking the rearview mirror, she saw a brown Toyota right behind her.

She frowned. A car had been behind her ever since she had left the building, but was it the same one? She was able to identify the Toyota only because it was directly standing under the street light. Maybe they just happened to be going in the same direction ...?

She slowed down.

The Toyota went past her and then turned right at the next corner.

She sighed in relief. She couldn't be too careful these days. Yesterday, a car also seemed to be tailing her, but she lost sight of it when she neared her home. She didn't know if both cars were one and the same. Under the dim street lights, it was hard to tell for sure.

Within minutes, she reached her two-bedroom apartment. She was just about to go to the bathroom when the phone rang. She changed course and went to her bedroom, where the phone was located.

She picked it up on the fourth ring. "Hello?"

A click, and then someone spoke, a heavy male voice she didn't recognize.

"Hello, Adrienne."

Fissions of alarm raced up her spine. Something about the voice sent goose bumps up her arms, such that her voice came out sharper than intended. "Who's this?"

"You don't need to know, my dear. How did you like my gift this morning?" Cackles of laughter reached her ear.

Anger on behalf of the pup cleansed away her fear. "What sort of twisted mind have you got that you would do such a thing? Who are you?!"

"Tut, tut, my dear. Is that the way to talk to someone who knows --" His voice trailed away in a sinister whisper. "-- your secret?"

A sick feeling of dread gripped her. She reached for the edge of the bedside table to steady herself. No, no, he couldn't ... He had to be bluffing. She mustn't fall into the trap. She mustered her courage. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Of course you do." His voice held a tone of rebuke. "He is someone very dear to your heart. Very, very dear." The last three words were spoken slowly.

Fear sliced her cold in the gut. "Is this Christopher? It's not funny anymore, Chris. Stop it."

"You know it's not Chris, Adrienne." Amusement laced his words. "In fact, you know very well that I'm not any of your colleagues."

She tightened her grip on the phone and screwed her eyes shut. Her world came crashing down as the truth reverberated in her head, a truth she had wanted to deny: Those terrible pranks ... It wasn't her colleagues ... It wasn't them! The real villain was here, on the phone. Somewhere out there, on the loose. He knew her, but she didn't know him!

She swayed, feeling faint. He also knew her secret -- but how? She had been so careful. But he knew. He knew. *He knew about David!* "I'm going to call the police!"

She must keep David safe. She must keep David safe.

"And tell them what?" Malicious laughter laced every word.

Yes, and tell them what? Her frantic mind recognized the futility of such an action. What did she know about this disembodied voice? Nothing. She had no way to tie a nameless, faceless stranger to the grisly gifts and death threats.

"By the way, did you like the rose? I spent a lot of time finding one with such beauty and elegance. Such a pretty flower." His voice turned almost musing, yet the threat of menace was there. "But so fragile. In the blink of an eye it can wither and die. Think on that, my dear. Think on how fragile ... life is."

"Don't play games with me! What do you want?! Is it money? I'll give you everything in my bank account!" Fear goaded her into shouting, her voice frantic. "What --"

Click.

He hung up on her. He actually hung up on her.

Adrienne looked at the phone in her hand then slowly put it back into its cradle. The acrid taste of fear burned on her tongue. Panicked thoughts crowded in her brain. *I'll take David and run to ... Australia, yes, that's far enough.* Why not make it Antarctica to really ensure that he didn't find them? Hysterical bubbles of laughter rose in her throat.

She took a deep breath, struggling for calm. The caller hadn't actually mentioned David by name, but the evil man had implied he knew something when he'd mentioned "someone very dear" to her. But was he referring to David? She wasn't sure.

She took several more deep breaths and felt her mind calming, her heartbeat slowing. With it came clarity of thinking. She sat down on the bed and reviewed their conversation.

He never *actually* threatened her. He mentioned the rose and the puppy, as though taking credit for some kind of brilliant ideas.

Her lips twisted. Some people sure had warped minds.

His threats were all implied, subtle digs hidden in his tone and his words. Like the analogy of the rose and of life, both being fragile --

She sucked in a deep breath as understanding dawned.

-- and at any time, its very existence could be snuffed out.

She was in danger. But what possible reason could he have for wanting to kill her?

Someone dear to her ...

David! Oh God; Oh God, David was in danger, too! He could only be referring to David. Oh God.

Life snuffed out ...

Who was this madman?!

Suddenly, she stilled. How did he know *when* to call? His timing was so right she refused to believe it was a coincidence. Could he be the one following her the last two nights?

She shivered.

She had lived with fear every day -- fear of discovery, fear of having to start all over again in an unknown land -- but nothing compared to this all-too-real fear that had taken hold in her breast. Fear had taken on a voice. The coppery taste of dread was strong on her tongue. Her heart beat in an uncomfortable rhythm. To her surprise, she was sweating, cold beads of sweat that made her feel clammy.

The doorbell chimed.

She started, one hand going to her throat. Her eyes went wide with terror, and her heartbeat picked up. Through the open doorway of her bedroom, she stared unseeingly at the entrance to her apartment.

Could it be him? Come to ... kill her?

Chapter Five

The doorbell chimed again, insistently.

Sanity returned. Logic forced the fear out. A short burst of laughter slipped from her lips. Of course it wouldn't be the killer. What killer would advertise his arrival?

But he hadn't proved the normal sort of killer, with his cunning and subtlety. He wasn't a man to get what he wanted through brute force. But what if he had changed his tactics to catch her off-guard? What then?

Adrienne's head ached from trying to second-guess her tormentor's motives.

She needed to answer the door. Yes, if she could get her feet to move.

The doorbell chimed for the third time.

All right, Adrienne. Be logical. There's a peephole, right? You look through the peephole and see who's there. If it's not someone you know, you don't open the door.

Reassured by the practicality of her own thoughts, Adrienne finally forced herself to her feet and walked toward the door. She peered through the small mirrored hole. Shocked, she involuntarily turned the knob. "What are you doing here?!"

Jake's hunky body was illuminated by the bright light in the corridor. He started to smile, but it faded before it could reach full bloom. "What happened, Adrienne? Why are you so pale?"

Relief at seeing a familiar face brought a genuine, unfettered smile to her face. That it was Jake caused her heart to beat in triple time. "Everything's fine, Jake. I was just surprised to see you. What brings you out so late at night?"

"I thought you'd be up later than usual preparing for the presentation, so I brought you some authentic local food --" With a sheepish grin, he held up a paper bag. "-- for your pre-midnight snack."

"Really?" Not even for one moment did she think to hide behind her usual tough exterior. Her voice was high with curiosity. "What did you bring?"

"Some *puto* and cassava cakes."

"Oooh! How did you know I love those steamed cakes -- *puto*, right?" She knew she sounded like a little girl being handed a most coveted prize, but she didn't care. "Do they have those salted duck eggs on top?"

He grinned. "Yes, and some others with cheese."

"Great!" She grinned back. "This definitely earns you the right to enter my humble domain." She stepped back and opened the door wide. "Come in."

Jake realized there was a lot he didn't know about her. Although he could read her thoughts and emotions most of the time, the lady could put up mental shields worthy of any full-powered empath, making him wonder if she had any powers of her own. Like right now, he thought she looked like she'd seen a ghost, but he couldn't sense anything from her. As he stepped into her apartment, he hoped that it would provide clues to the real Adrienne.

Her home was warmly furnished and decorated. The walls were painted in cream tones and the sleek-lined upholstered furniture set on the far side from the entrance was a rich

burgundy. A large coffee table had been stationed in front of the couch, and a DVD component system sat on a low cabinet against the opposite wall. Three racks crammed full of CDs indicated a healthy interest in music. Jake itched to flip through them and discover her tastes. He looked to his left, scanning the dining room, which contained a glass table and six chairs. Two doors led off from the main hall, which he guessed were the bedrooms.

“Here, have a seat.” Adrienne pulled out one of the dining room chairs. “I’ll get my things and we can polish up tomorrow’s presentation.”

She was a bit different tonight, warmer and less stiff. Was it because she was playing hostess? Or was it the office environment that forced her to adopt a more business-like attitude? Or maybe, she was finally ready to face her ... feelings for him?

He sat down absently on the chair, placing the bag of food on the table in front of him.

Ever since their first meeting when she’d been introduced as one of the team leaders in his division and he’d shaken her hand, he’d been sensing her lustful vibes. She hadn’t been the only one to feel an instant attraction. He had taken one look at her and fallen into lust with her. Even her short bob looked sexy on her heart-shaped face. He would surreptitiously watch her sway into his office for meetings and openly watch her sway out, his eyes drawn to her small waist and the come-hither movement of her provocative hips, luring attention to her deliciously soft tush.

Recently, he was receiving not only vibes, but seeing whole mental pictures of erotic scenes of the two of them entwined in a passionate kiss, their *naked* bodies entangled in ways that couldn’t be mistaken for anything but what they were -- heated, sexual romps. As the images rolled through his mind, hot blood rushed through him, stirring his quiescent penis to life.

“Here we are.” Adrienne placed a folder in front of him. “You can take a look at the PowerPoint slides I’ve done, but the ‘impact-ful’ conclusion that I’m looking for is eluding

me at present. Maybe something will occur to you. In the meantime --” She smiled impishly as she took out the food from inside the paper bag. “-- I’m going to enjoy my snack.”

Adrienne ate the last of the *puto* from the plastic container. She felt a twinge of guilt at not leaving even one piece for Jake, but the cakes were so scrumptious that before she knew it, she was wolfing down the last piece. He was working so hard, too. His brow was knotted in concentration as he polished her presentation and helped her come up with the perfect conclusion. His pink tongue peeked out every so often, driving her crazy. She had to occupy her mouth with food to keep from leaning over and capturing that luscious appendage with her lips.

She forced her gaze away from his face before she could disgrace herself. Her eyes lit on his hand, which held the pen in a light grip as he wrote. His fingers were long and supple, and his fingernails were kept clean and short.

She imagined those hands cupping her naked breasts, brown against white, his thumbs tweaking her nipples into prominence, brushing across the dark brown areolas, rousing her desire ...

“There!” Jake put down the pen.

She jumped, focusing on his face and ignoring the sudden wetness in her panties.

He glanced over at her and smiled. “Are you okay?”

She found it hard not to smile back; his smile was *that* contagious. “Yes.”

“It’s done! You can go over it tomorrow morning; the meeting’s still in the afternoon.” He yawned and then stretched.

Adrienne couldn’t look away. She responded with a “Thanks,” but it was said in an absent manner. She still couldn’t believe her eyes. The boss that she knew wouldn’t have let her see him in such a display. The very act broke down some of the barriers of the boss-subordinate relationship between them, making them seem almost ... equal, like friends.

She found herself unable to maintain her usual distance from him. The threatening call earlier had eroded the cool distance she usually maintained, allowing her truer nature to come out. It felt so good to be with someone she knew, someone safe.

Anyway, she was feeling reckless. Lucien's earlier comment came to mind. She wanted to see where this relationship would lead, outside of the office environment.

"How come I get to do the work," Jake asked, arching a brow, "when it's supposed to be *your* presentation?"

"That's why I have a great feeling you're going to prove to be such a wonderful boss." She winked at him.

He laughed and then bounded up from the chair. "I feel the need for some exercise." He made his way around the table and walked across the room to her component system. He scanned through the titles on her CD racks. "You've got some cool music here."

She was distracted from the moment he presented his enchanting backside to her. She practically drooled. She couldn't wait to get her hands on his --

Buns.

Jake took one of the CDs from its case and placed it into the slot, ready to play. He was amused. "Are you still hungry, Adrienne? After all those *puto* you ate, I can't believe you still have room --"

"Hungry?" Her voice sounded preoccupied. "No, no ... Not hungry ... Well, maybe ..."

Hmmm ... His butt looks good ... good enough to eat ...

Jake almost choked. He finally realized what he was hearing, but ... *his butt?*

A thought-wave of desire drifted over him, washing him in the initial stirrings of feminine awareness. It had a tinge of Adrienne to it. She was sending him mental pictures of her hands on the fly of his trousers, brushing over his hardness as she pushed his pants down,

of her hands roaming over his butt, stroking ... squeezing ... her long fingers splayed wide on his flesh ...

He whirled around.

Adrienne was looking at him through half-lidded eyes, straight at his groin, which was where his butt was before he turned. His cock stirred in answer to her heated gaze.

The mournful tones of the theme song from an old love story filled the room.

Of their own accord, his feet took him to Adrienne.

She glanced up, startled. Her eyes had turned dark brown. With need? Her unique fragrance wafted by him, heightening his sensual awareness of her.

As if in a dream, Jake held out his hand. He bowed. "May I have this dance?" His voice was low. The love song weaved a web of intimacy in the atmosphere.

"Yes." She placed her hand in his.

They danced, wrapped in each other's arms. They moved around the small room in minute movements, swaying to their own internal music and rhythm.

Adrienne rested her head against his chest and closed her eyes.

A long, lonely time ...

This was what she had dreamed of for so long. She didn't care if this was real or only her fantasy; she wanted this moment to last forever.

His male scent surrounded her, drugging her body and her mind. His chest beneath her cheek was warm and firm, moving with his every intake of air. And his arms -- oooh, they were holding her so tightly she couldn't break free even if she wanted to. He felt just as she had imagined.

The hard bulge beneath his pants brushed against her stomach. Almost unconsciously, she rubbed against it, exaggerating her movements.

He groaned. "You're going to kill me, baby."

I hungered for your touch ...

Desire unfurled in her veins. She snuggled closer to him. He was no longer her boss; he was just Jake, the man who could burn her up with lust just by looking at her. Her hands caressed his back and her voice was husky as she said, "We can't have that now, can we?"

Silent laughter tore through him. Pressed this close to him, she felt the vibrations going through his body.

"And what do you plan to do about it?"

Her hands inched downward until she was cupping his buttocks. "This." His butt was tight, packed with muscles. She couldn't wait to see, to touch, to ... eat him up.

He inhaled sharply. The slight bulge hardened even more, if that were possible.

She squeezed and massaged lightly. "And this." She turned her head and looked up at him, gratified to see the wild lust in his eyes. "And if you allow, I'll do even more." Her voice thrummed with need. "I will kiss every inch of you, from your lips, down your luscious body to your throbbing cock, and -- oh heavens, I want to taste your sweet, sweet butt. And then -
_"

He choked. "Sweet butt?"

Adrienne grinned. He looked so adorable with that hint of red sweeping across his face. "Obviously, you've never seen your backside." She made a face. "Believe me, many women in the office can be seen with mesmerized looks on their faces when you pass by."

Despite his embarrassed protests, her statement turned him on. She felt his unmistakable arousal against her belly. She wondered how long he was, if he could reach to her womb --

"Even if I were able to see *my own butt*, I doubt I would have the same reaction as you do." He ground against her in retaliation and insinuated a thigh between her legs.

She purred. She was so tempted to stroke her hungry core against his muscled thigh. She controlled herself, denying herself to heighten the anticipation. “As long as I’m allowed that reaction, I’m okay.” She didn’t know what she was saying anymore.

“Do you still want to dance?” His voice was thick.

“Yes --”

“Okay.”

She felt his reluctance as he tried to give in to her wishes. “But another kind of dance.” She allowed herself a small smile. “The one that doesn’t involve clothes.”

He paused for an infinitesimal second.

“You should have said so earlier,” was the last thing she heard from him before his lips captured hers, kissing her with passionate strokes. His tongue pushed inside her mouth, striking up a duel with her tongue.

He tore at her clothes, ripping them in his haste. Buttons clattered to the floor, but Adrienne barely noticed; she was too busy with his shirt, taking away the only barrier between her hands and his warm, satin-smooth skin. Muscles bunched where she touched, but he wasn’t overly muscular, just enough to give him a firm shape beneath any kind of clothing he wore.

He opened the snap of her skirt. She felt the material flutter to the floor. His fingers hooked around the band of her panties. He nudged them down to her thighs and sank a finger into the cleft of her pussy.

Desire steeped her, filling her with harsh, urgent need. She moaned and opened her legs as far as her trapped panties would allow ... which wasn’t far enough. She whimpered. He ignored her. Instead, he inserted two fingers deeper, massaging her folds with furious strokes. His neck corded with the effort he was expending to keep up the fast, insistent rhythm.

She keened. Her release was near ... she could feel it ...

“I want to taste you,” he said, nuzzling her neck.

He lifted her in his arms, and then slowly lowered her to the carpeted floor. Without breaking stride, he replaced his fingers with his mouth, lapping and slurping with fierce desperation, his tongue creating havoc wherever it touched. He opened her legs wider to reach her opening; the panties snapped. His tongue pointed, thrusting in and out with bold strokes. His urgency, his passion, ignited her erotic side.

Her hands tangled in his hair. She pulled him closer, pressing him against her pussy.

His tongue circled around her clitoris.

Her breath quickened.

His mouth sucked.

She cried out, the intense sensations threatening to overwhelm her, swamp her until her world dwindled to nothing but Jake ... his mouth ... his tongue ...

Oh God.

There was no order, no logic, *nothing* whatsoever to commend Jake’s actions, but she was falling apart, shattering ...

His hard cock shoved into her as she started to convulse. His action threw her over the edge. She erupted into screams and vicious movements, her pussy gripping around him tightly. Each time she crested and started to come down, a slight movement from him would send her off again. Her pleasure went on and on.

Finally, she came back to herself. She was half-lying on the sofa, panting heavily. Her brow was covered with sweat, but her lips were slowly forming a wide smile. It was the best damn ride she’d ever had.

She opened her eyes. Jake’s head was thrown back and he had a look of intense concentration on his face. He was trying to push into her, but her pussy was still holding him so tightly his movements were almost stagnant.

She purred.

His eyes popped open. He glared at her. “You witch!”

She laughed from sheer joy. Her muscles relaxed and he slid in. “You are the best lover I ever had.”

“I’d better be.” His face softened, but he still sounded disgruntled.

“Prove it again, Jake.” She challenged him with a sultry laugh. “Bring me to greater heights.”

Chapter Six

He covered her lips in a voracious kiss. She yielded to him, but her tongue dueled fiercely with his, sometimes gaining ground into his mouth and sometimes retreating so he could taste her honeyed depths.

Her pleasure washed over him, increasing his building tension. *No one had kissed her quite like this, making her feel cherished and wanted, wanted for herself and not her money.*

Jake was startled. Money?

He started to pull back, but her soft body and being snugly encased in her sweet warmth were siren songs that sang to him, making him lose the fleeting thought that had flashed through his mind. His body ached from a long-delayed release and called to him with urgency.

He thrust into her with measured, sensual strokes. He slid easily, her generous wetness easing the passage for him.

Her pussy gloved him, tightening about him in minute increments. She lifted her legs and hooked them around his neck, enabling him to push deeper. She whimpered and writhed beneath him, her movements inciting his excitement. Her eyes were closed, her brow furrowed.

He was nearing his release. He broke their kiss, whispering roughly, "Open your eyes, Adrienne. Look at me."

Her gaze reflected all the wild lust and naked desire in the world. Suddenly, the full force of the sensations she was feeling slammed into him, breaking over him in massive shock waves: the building pressure, the anticipation of release, the way she savored each thrust and plunge. It propelled him into shattering, his own tension exploding in conjunction with hers, and only the pleasure was left as it engulfed them both.

* * * * *

"What was *that*?"

They were too lazy to move to the bedroom, so they made do with her carpeted floor. Adrienne sprawled on top of him, her slight weight no burden.

He rubbed lazy circles on her back. "What was what?"

"Toward the end ..." She hesitated. "It was like -- don't laugh, okay? And don't think I'm crazy either," she warned.

Jake tried hard not to laugh. She was so funny. Good thing her head was turned away from his face. Although ... He squinted suspiciously down at her. He could almost swear she was deliberately blowing air at his nipple.

"Toward the end ... I *felt* your pleasure." She faltered. "In ... in my mind."

"You did?" Shock electrified him.

"Yes. At least, I think so. I, uh, I felt you ejaculate and the release it gave you." There was wonder in her voice as she continued, "I certainly haven't been able to do that before, I mean, feel the pleasure, the ecstasy of *my partner*."

"That's amazing." Awe colored his voice. He was sure if she were to look up, she'd see his amazement on his face as well. "I mean, I've heard of it happening, but never have I experienced it before --"

“What?!”

“I’m an empath, Adrienne -- Ow!” She’d dug her elbows into his ribs to support her head as she looked at him.

She moved her elbows to meatier portions of his chest. “Sorry. Really?”

Her curiosity swept over him, but it was immediately followed by dismay, although nothing showed on her face. *Oh no, he can’t find out about --*

Her mental shields slammed up.

He wondered what she meant by that, what she didn’t want him to know. A secret lover? The strong surge of jealousy clawed at him, surprising him with its intensity. Had Adrienne gotten under his skin more than he knew? Or was it because he was naturally possessive, wouldn’t tolerate his woman with another man?

Her elbow jabbed deliberately hard on his chest. “You were saying?”

He quickly collected his thoughts. “Yes, as an empath, I can sense feelings, thoughts,” he smiled ruefully. “It has brought me quite a few problems in the past --”

“Problems?”

“Once, I was interviewing this candidate for the post of Marketing Executive. She was obviously under-qualified and didn’t have the necessary experience, but I sensed her desperation for a job. I kept seeing mental images of little children in a small run-down apartment. Apparently, their parents had died in an accident, and she was the sole breadwinner of the family. So, I gave her the job, with the condition that she had to learn all that was required of her within six months or be terminated.”

Adrienne smiled. Her eyes softened. “You’re a very sensitive man, Jake.”

“Yeah, Mr. Sensitivity, that’s me,” he said self-deprecatingly.

“So, uh, you can sense my thoughts?”

“I know you’ve had the hots for me since, oh, the first day we met.” He leered.

She grinned, unashamed. “How embarrassing.”

“Embarrassingly erotic and arousing. There were many times I almost came in my pants, especially when the images were accompanied by particularly strong emotions.” He lifted his head and licked her nose.

Moving a few inches upward, she reached out with her tongue and dueled with his in the open air. Their tongues still making love play, he reached between their bodies to fondle her pussy, testing her wetness. She was dripping.

His cock stirred and rose, thumping against her thigh, seeking her molten heat.

Her eyes darkened as she saw his intent. Her breath quickened.

He sensed her increasing degree of excitement and caught a fleeting picture of what she was expecting from him. Positioning his engorged cock at the entrance, he surged into her in one sharp move, taking her breast into his mouth at the same time and biting down hard.

She threw back her head and arched. “Argh!”

She was so primed that her pussy immediately constricted around him, tightening as her muscles drew him in. Her legs bent around his waist and pulled him closer. The action heightened his urgency. He thrust and plunged, allowing her pussy to milk him until he spewed his load. Through the mind-link, he felt her pleasure spiral, peak and swell, overwhelming him with its force and might.

They collapsed in each other’s arms, still joined together.

* * * * *

He rocked, his half-erect cock pushing slowly into her, massaging her still constricting vagina walls. Though the act was carnal, his gentle rubbing gave her an underlying feeling of being cherished.

“Since you knew what I was feeling, why didn’t you jump me? Why did you wait so long? Just think of all the time we’ve wasted.”

“Oh, you mean since I was aware of your lust for me?” He surged into her, whamming her clitoris with his groin. She sucked in her breath. Her heels dug into the soft flesh of his buttocks. “I wanted you to be sure of your feelings before I acted.”

“But two months?” she asked sharply.

“Minus nine days, fifteen hours and I don’t know how many minutes and seconds.” He moved to nibble on her neck.

Her heart soared. “You counted.”

“Every slow second of it.”

She hoped that meant something.

“Oh, it meant something, all right.”

She jumped. “Don’t do that.”

He laughed. “You’ll get used to it.”

“So what did it mean?”

“It means I was so in lust with you I couldn’t think straight. I had to do something to retain my sanity.”

She was sure her grin stretched embarrassingly from ear to ear, but anyway, Jake couldn’t see her, with her head resting on his shoulder. “Flatterer.” She changed the subject. “So you’re an empath; does that mean you can hear all my thoughts and feelings?”

He palmed her breast, using his thumb to soothe the place where he had bitten her earlier. “Not all. You put up a mighty damn good shield.” She felt his cock stirring, becoming harder in the warm cocoon.

“Shield?”

“It’s what empaths do to protect themselves from the cacophony of the emotions around them. If they don’t do it, they’d go mad. Imagine going into a shopping mall with thousands of shoppers, and all their emotions running loose.”

“So you mean I was able to put up a shield to keep you from reading my thoughts sometimes?”

“Yes.” As an afterthought, he added, “Though I don’t know how you do it. Unless you’re psychic, too?”

She snorted. “Not that I know of.” But it was quirky, this talent of hers. How did she know if her shield was up at the right time or not? “Okay, tell me. What am I thinking of now?”

“Umm ...” He surged suggestively into her. “Another round of sex?”

She laughed. “No. But it was a very good guess.” She lifted herself a bit and ground down on him. His breath caught, and she smiled. “Does anyone in the office know of your amazing gift?”

“Only you. Sweetheart, do you mind if we stop talking?”

“Not at all.”

* * * * *

Adrienne turned over in bed. Sunlight hit her closed eyelids. She yawned and smiled.

Last night was marvelous. They couldn’t get enough of each other, and made love all the way till dawn. Would he come again tonight? Her pulse quickened. They hadn’t said anything on the matter. She’d wait and see, take her cue from him.

Her eyes opened blearily and focused on the bedside clock. On no, she was late!

She moved to jump out of bed. Her hand encountered a crumpled piece of paper. She smoothed it against her thigh and read:

I've gone to the office. Sleep in if you wish. I told the boss you'd be late.

-- Jake

Adrienne smirked. Shaking her head over his sense of humor, she got out of the bed to prepare for work.

By the time she reached the office, it was already lunchtime. However, her co-workers were still ensconced in their cubicles and hard at work when she passed by. As she neared her office, she paused and her heart began to pound. Her office door stood half-open, and a light shone from inside.

Filled with dread, she hung back, remembering yesterday's unpleasant little surprise. Cautiously, she walked toward the door, expecting the worst. She looked in, then stepped fully inside, her brows raised in surprise. "Marcy, what are you doing at my desk?"

Marcy looked up, startled. A guilty look came over her face, and her movements became hurried and nervous. She started closing whatever files she had opened on Adrienne's computer screen, just as Adrienne rounded the desk. "I was, uh, researching something. I promise, I didn't touch any of your files."

"That's beside the point. What if you had unintentionally downloaded some virus? My files would all have been infected."

Marcy stood up, biting her lip. "I'm sorry." Her librarian-style spectacles sat askew on her pert nose.

"Why can't you research at your desk? You have Internet access, don't you?"

"Yes, but when I tried to access the URL awhile ago, it wouldn't respond. It kept throwing up an error page."

"But what's so urgent that you couldn't wait for me to come in before using my computer?"

Marcy stiffened. "I already said I was sorry. It won't happen again."

“Damn right it won’t.” Adrienne said, and then sighed. This was her friend; not just her secretary. Her tone changed. “I’m sorry, Marcy. I’m a bit uptight today; worried about the deal later this afternoon.” She touched Marcy’s arm in a gesture of regret.

Marcy smiled and patted Adrienne’s hand. “I understand. I was wrong to use your computer without your permission.”

Adrienne was curious. “What were you researching, anyway?”

“It’s embarrassing.” Marcy blushed and turned around.

Adrienne’s curiosity peaked. She crossed her arms over her chest. “We’re friends, remember?”

Marcy glanced back over her shoulder. Indecision crossed her face. “All right. Logan and Kaelyn are getting married.”

“Oh. That’s too bad, Marcy.”

“Their engagement party is in two weeks.” Her voice breaking in the middle, Marcy said in a hot rush, “You’re invited too, by the way.”

“But I don’t even know them!”

“I’m taking you as my date; I’ll need you for moral support.”

Poor Marcy. Adrienne attempted to cheer her up. “So, you were looking online for the perfect gown to wear to their wedding, right? One that’ll make Logan regret his decision, dump Kaelyn, and elope with you. Excellent plan; I’ll help you look.”

Marcy grimaced. “Who says I’m looking for a gown? I’m looking for the perfect poison to send them to oblivion!”

Adrienne’s mind went blank. “Poison?” Then she cracked up.

Marcy would be just fine.

* * * * *

“What do you think, Jake? Will they buy it?” Adrienne asked.

They were on their way back to the office after meeting with the representatives of Draycott Technologies. It had been the toughest two hours of her entire career. Draycott's top management team had been impassive and business-like. Immediately after she'd finished her presentation, the men had bombarded her with grueling questions. She'd thanked her lucky stars Jake had attended the meeting with her; with his charm and diplomatic skills, not to mention his long experience and knowledge of the industry, he had given clear explanations and satisfactory responses, covering for Adrienne's occasional stumble.

Jake glanced at her, taking his eyes off the road for a moment. "I don't know. But we can rest assured we did our best."

She drummed her fingers restlessly on her file folder. "They're tough, aren't they?"

"They have to be. The amount they're investing in the advertising is not exactly chicken feed." The car slid to a stop in the busy traffic jam. He glanced at her again. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, basically." Adrienne smiled ruefully. "I'm still running on pure adrenaline, but that's probably because we didn't get a quick yes or no. I hate to wait. If they'd given us an instant answer, I'd have a release for all this tension."

Jake's eyes darkened. He placed his warm hand on her thigh and caressed her through her skirt. "You'll have all the release you need tonight."

Her breath caught. Her tension level went even higher, but it was good tension. "I'm looking forward to it."

Impatient toots sounded from behind. Noticing the car in front of them had already moved a good distance away, Adrienne laughed. Jake squeezed her thigh one last time and returned his attention to driving.

Adrienne licked her lips, excitedly anticipating the coming evening. But their rendezvous was too far away -- at least three more hours, maybe five if Jake worked

overtime. She sighed and shifted, restless and uptight. Surely, all the nervous energy skimming her veins was bad news for her heart. If she could only expend it in some way ... Just thinking about it made her wet.

“Don’t even try it, Adri.”

Adrienne jumped. “Jake, would you stop doing that? I haven’t even told you what I was going to do yet.”

He never took his eyes off the road. “Sure you did. Your thoughts were quite clear.”

“Which reminds me. Why was I able to feel your pleasure when I don’t have psychic powers?”

“Hmmm ... Mom said that such a thing happens --”

Adrienne unbuttoned his shirt and slipped her hand inside, tangling her fingers against the rough strands of his chest hair. She purred.

“-- only when two people’s emotions for each other are so strong that they overflow into the other.” His words ended on a sharp gasp.

Adrienne moved her hand south. “Was that what happened last night?”

He groaned. “I can’t think of any other explanation.”

“Is your entire family psychic, Jake?”

“Everyone, except Dad. We got the gift from Mom.”

She pulled his shirttails out of his trousers for better access to his flesh. Leaning close, she placed a kiss on his chin. The seatbelt ate into her skin, but she hardly noticed. She deliberately lowered her voice, so that it came out husky. “Who is everyone?”

He quivered like a leaf exposed to the gentle zephyr wind. “Mom, Jared,” he gasped out, “Tracy, Jason, me --”

She caressed him, quietly listening as he recited the names of his family members.

He took a deep breath and continued, “What about you? Your file said you weren’t married, but I saw a picture of you hugging a kid on your DVD component system.”

Her hand stilled.

Chapter Seven

“Who is he? Is he your --” He broke off, groaning as she brushed her knuckles against his nipple. “God, Adri. Hmmm ... Do that again.”

She thumbed his nipple back and forth, further sensitizing the already tight bud, hoping he would lose his train of thought.

“Is he your son? What’s his name?” he asked, dashing her hopes. “Where was he last night? All these nights?”

Her tension grew. She hoped her shields were all up. “He -- he doesn’t stay with me,” she said as casually as she could, answering his last question first. “He’s actually my brother.”

“Your brother? There must be quite an age gap between you two --”

She cupped his cock. His heat seared through her hand, causing a burning fire to sweep a lustful path within her.

“Damn it, Adrienne. If you keep this up, we might meet with an accident.”

Men are so easily distracted, Adrienne thought, smiling inwardly. Despite his protests, he didn’t slap her hand away. Of course, if he did so, he might also inadvertently slap the family jewels. “I have faith in you, Jake.” She unbuckled his belt. She licked her lips, making a loud smacking sound.

“People will see, Adri.” There was desperation in his voice, but an underlying hint of longing, as well.

“Oh no, they won’t.” Excitement riding her veins, she unsnapped his pants and slid down the zipper. “They’re too busy battling traffic.”

“We’ll be hauled in for indecent -- Damn!”

He whispered the last word in a soft exclamation as her hand brushed over the hard bulge beneath his briefs. She slipped her fingers in between his dark blue underwear and brought out his cock. It stood at attention, bobbing. He released a tortured groan.

Heat engulfed her. Wetness pooled between her legs. He was so yummy.

“Adri ...” He tried to dissuade her one more time. “Thank God traffic’s slow, otherwise --”

“Look at you.” She reached out a tentative hand, brushing daintily against his cock. It jerked. “No wonder you gave me so much pleasure -- so thick and long.” She hiked up her skirt, reached inside her panties and smeared her hand generously with her moisture. “I bet you’re at least seven inches.”

The car jerked to a stop. The seatbelt saved her from being thrown against the windshield.

His cock bobbed violently in her direction. Looking up, she saw him watching avidly. His mouth formed a soundless “eight.”

She reached, hooking an arm around his neck and pulling him down to meet her lips. She engaged him in a passionate kiss. His mouth opened underneath hers, kissing, sucking in an urgent, desperate way. She wrapped her moist hand around his iron-hard cock, rubbing briskly.

Loud toots pierced her ear, despite the closed windows. Angry voices reached them. Someone rapped on her window pane. Adrienne broke off the kiss and turned toward the sound. The obese man was saying something and gesturing violently toward the empty

stretch of road in front of them. His eyes traveled from her hiked-up skirt, to Jack's lap, where he had an unobstructed view of her hand, still wrapped tightly around Jake's cock. The irate man's eyes widened.

Jake cursed, and in a flurry of movement, he drove the car away from the surprised man.

Adrienne laughed softly. "I bet he's wishing he was in your shoes."

His cock throbbed in her hand. Veins decorated its length, topped by a pearly mushroom head. A drop of pre-cum glistened from the slit, making her cream gush out even more. She was thoroughly wet. "Hmmm ... I'm hungry for you, Jake."

Her head dipped, bumping against the steering wheel. Above her, she heard Jake's feverish mutterings, "Damn ... gotta find some place to park." Her mouth closed over his cock, tasting his cum, tasting herself on his dick.

The car jerked, swerving a few inches from side to side. Alarmed horns blared.

She moaned. "Mmmmm." She was *very* hungry; she wanted her orgasm. Her head bobbed up and down on his cock. She stroked him with one hand, following the movement of her mouth. She pushed aside her panties with her other hand and dipped two fingers into her pussy, thrusting and plunging.

"Mmmmm mmmmm."

The car screeched to a halt.

She gave barely a thought to where Jack had parked them; her world was narrowed to his cock and her pussy, and the eventual satisfaction to be derived.

He shifted. His cock thrust into her mouth, almost gagging her.

She adjusted her position, and heard him sigh. Tightening her lips, she gripped him tighter, sucking him harder, deeper. He rewarded her efforts with a low, excited moan.

His fingers plowed into her hair, holding her head steady as he coordinated her movements. He reached his other hand between her legs and sought out her clitoris. Using

light, feathery strokes, he circled the tight bud, heightening her excitement and sending her blood boiling.

She sucked harder. She slid her hand lower, cupping his balls.

His fingers plucked her clitoris, pulling it.

She bucked.

His palm pressed down.

She arched, grinding her crotch against the heel of his hand. Her teeth lightly grazed his cock.

He shouted and thrust in a frenzied rhythm into her mouth. A jet load of cum hit her throat. She swallowed as much as she could, but some dribbled down to land on his lap.

His fingers delved into her folds and rubbed against her clitoris with fast, insistent strokes. The tension built, tightened and climaxed. She shook and writhed against his frenziedly massaging finger. She felt her pussy close around her fingers and savored the sweet release.

* * * * *

Jake locked the car door and turned, swinging an arm around Adrienne's shoulders. He yawned. "Whew! What a day; I'm so tired. Let's get to your place, snuggle a bit and then sleep."

His voice came out hushed in the dark, quiet night. Few cars passed by on the street and most people were already indoors and asleep. Jake had parked his car a few blocks down from her apartment building, since the parking lot there was always full.

"That's the best suggestion I've heard all day." Adrienne slung her handbag more securely on her right shoulder and then leaned against Jake's wonderful strength as they walked. She couldn't stop the yawn from breaking out. "I can't believe the board would keep us in the office so late." She checked her watch. "It's nearing midnight."

“Well, it’s understandable that they would want to know how the meeting went.”

“Yeah, but for them to analyze each snippet of response or question is a bit too much.”

“If we didn’t manage to win this deal, they’d probably want to be able to pinpoint what went wrong and see how to improve --”

The loud, insistent, beeping alarm from Jake’s car sliced through the deepening night. Adrienne felt him stiffen.

“Stay here,” he said, and he was gone.

She blinked. How could he move so fast? One second, he was right there beside her, and the next, he was nowhere in sight. She stood on tiptoes and craned her neck, hoping to be able to see Jake checking out the car. But they’d walked some distance, and he was now too far away for her to see him. The alarm was suddenly cut off, and the silence was deafening. She hoped there was nothing wrong with the car. Normally, her residential area was a good neighborhood, but with the increased criminal activities lately, even the previously “safe” areas were not so safe anymore --

Someone gave a vicious tug at her handbag. Her shoulder was almost wrenched from its socket.

She whirled around, screaming.

“Give it to me, lady,” The beefy, towering male spoke in a guttural voice. Something sharp poked her in the ribs. “Don’t fight, and you won’t get hurt.”

“No!” She couldn’t stop screaming, and instinct made her cling stubbornly to her purse.

The thug cursed, and a tug of war ensued between them. His arm swung in an upward arc.

She flinched, certain he meant to strike her.

The knife flashed in the street lamp and severed the strap of her handbag from the bag itself, which was in the hands of the hooligan. She lost her balance and stumbled backward,

the detached strap in her hands. She watched, helpless, as the thug made a threatening gesture at her with the knife, no doubt warning her not to follow.

He turned to flee, but had only taken a few steps when someone -- or *something* -- flew past Adrienne.

The blur of motion knocked into the thug, bringing him to the ground with a hard thump. Her handbag fell beside him.

Adrienne's mouth opened in a wide "O" when she realized what she was seeing.

Jake.

He was straddled on top of the thug, one hand around the thief's neck in a vicious grip. Low, angry growls issued from Jake's throat as he stared down at the thug, who was blubbering with terror, his arms and legs flailing as he tried to scuttle away from Jake with an unmistakable expression of alarm. However, he was doomed to failure for Jake was sitting squarely on top of him.

Adrienne breathed out a sigh of relief, thankful that Jake was with her. In hindsight, she felt incredibly stupid for hanging onto her handbag, which contained nothing but a few coins, some cosmetics and her mobile phone. She stepped forward and scooped the bag from the ground. "Jake --"

He turned to face her.

Startled, she couldn't control the gasp that escaped from her lips. She saw the reason for the look of terror in the thug's eyes.

Under the street lamp, she saw that his gray-brown eyes were inundated with flecks of yellow amber that glowed with an eerie light, and his incisors had grown about an inch long. His expression was feral and fierce, like that of a dog protecting its master. No, something more terrifying than a dog -- a wolf. Yet, there was human intelligence shining from his eyes.

She'd seen such a being before. Her ex-love ... "You're a werewolf." Even to her ears, her voice sounded flat.

She didn't understand the look of resignation that crossed Jake's face. "Call the police. We'll talk later."

* * * * *

Eventually, the police came and hauled off the thug. By then, Jake had willed his features to assume human form. He cursed himself inwardly for allowing the beast to take over his physical appearance, but when he'd heard Adrienne's scream from several blocks away with his canine ears, his one thought had been to reach her before she was harmed.

Fortunately, Jake was acting on the right side of the law, i.e., rescuing his friend's possession. Anyway, the thug wasn't injured, so nobody would be able to press charges against Jake. Nor would The Council come after him. To aid the police in their investigation, Jake added the information that the thug might have an accomplice who'd provided the decoy by causing the car's alarm to go off so that Adrienne would be alone. The police promised to look into things and to inform them should they have any leads. Before the police left, they dispersed the neighborhood residents who'd come out to watch the fun long after the excitement was over.

Jake and Adrienne walked back to her flat in silence. The crunch of their shoes on the sidewalk was unnaturally loud to his ears. Her face was averted from him so he couldn't see her expression; he also didn't know what she was thinking. He could have lowered his shields to let her emotions flow through to him, but he didn't want to. He wanted to hear it from her lips. In such an important situation as this, it was better that she tell him her thoughts herself.

Adrienne could be like Lila, and reject him for the aberration, the monster that he was. He didn't know many women who could accept being with someone who was half-human. Still, he drew comfort from the fact that she had *recognized* him for what he was -- a

werewolf. Which meant that she might have seen or heard or encountered one of his kind before, and just *might* be one of those humans with the big heart that Jared had mentioned. Despite himself, hope burned like a tiny wavering flame in the wind.

Jake hadn't said anything to Jared when they'd met the other day, but the moment Jake had seen Adrienne, he knew. She was the one -- his mate. There was a sense of rightness with her, something that he didn't feel with Lila ... with any of his past girlfriends. He didn't know what he'd do if Adrienne couldn't accept him for what he was. His fear of her reaction to the truth was the main reason he had forced himself to keep his distance from her all this time.

The moment they entered the flat and shut the door behind them, Adrienne rounded on him. "When were you going to tell me that you're a werewolf?" Her eyes narrowed. "Did you ever plan to tell me?"

"Adrienne --"

"Or didn't you think this is something I needed to know? Would I just wake up one day to see you biting me? Or to see you changing to a wolf while making love to me?"

He flinched at the unjust accusations. How could he explain he'd been so consumed with his fear that Adrienne couldn't accept his werewolf heritage that he hadn't thought so far ahead?

"So, tell me, Jake! Speak up! I'm not an empath like you; I can't read your mind!"

"Adrienne, I realize you're in shock --"

"Damn right I'm in shock! I never expected my boss and lover to be a werewolf!"

"But you recognized me." Anger at Adrienne's illogical behavior filled him. His voice was cold as ice, in direct contrast to the heat of wrath that was fueled by uncertainty burning within him. "You saw me and knew that I am a werewolf."

"Yes." Her voice was flat and her face devoid of all expression. "I had a lover once, and he was a werewolf, too. I knew he was one from the very beginning, before our relationship

started. I was given the choice to accept him or not, based on the truth of what he was. What about you, Jake? I didn't know you were an empath, until *after* we'd made love. When was I supposed to know that you're a werewolf, *after* we'd parted?"

How ironic that he'd withheld the truth from her for fear that she couldn't accept his genetics and would leave him, and instead the withholding would backfire on him and bring about their parting. If he'd told her from the very beginning about himself, then perhaps she might have decided to stay with him? He was dismayed to find that he was trembling; it conveyed too much of his inner turmoil and anguish. He was going to lose her, lose everything, and it was all his fault.

"I won't allow you to leave me!" He growled, catching her by the shoulders and pulling her close against him. Her handbag, which she'd clutched in her hands all this while, dropped to the floor due to his hard shaking. "So now you know I'm an empath and a werewolf. All my secrets are bared to you; I'm not hiding anything anymore. Do you accept me as I am? Would you stay with me?"

"No!" Adrienne struggled in his arms.

That one word functioned like a knife and cut him up.

She continued to struggle. "You presume too much! What if tonight hadn't happened? Would you have told me? When would you have told me?"

"So you can't accept that I'm a werewolf? But you had a werewolf lover once, surely --"

"That's beside the point! When were you going to tell me that you're a werewolf, Jake? Answer me!" Her eyes blazed with anger. "Did you even plan to tell me?"

Cold fear washed over him, extinguishing the hot burning fire of anger and uncertainty. "I was afraid that if I'd told you, you'd leave me," he whispered.

As quickly as that, her anger cooled down. She wrapped her hands around his waist and laid her head on his chest. "Oh Jake."

“I had a woman friend once; her name was Lila.” He closed his eyes, letting the memories flow into his mind. “We got along very well; she was open-minded, carefree and gay. I’d told her I was a werewolf early on in our relationship and she seemed to have accepted it and even delighted in it. She went with me to the hunting grounds during the full moon and kept my mother company while the rest of us hunted. One day, I went home and found her gone. She left a note, saying that she couldn’t live with a werewolf. I --” He swallowed.

“I’m sorry.” Adrienne moved her hand over his chest in a caress. “Sorry that you were hurt, but not sorry that she left you. She didn’t deserve you!”

“And you?” He waited with bated breath. The hope that wavered like a tiny candle flame flared up a little. “Are you going to ask me to leave?” He let a little humor creep into his voice. “Since we’re in your flat?”

Adrienne gave a soft laugh. “I’m sorry, Jake, sorry for being angry awhile ago. I thought you never intended to tell me about your being a werewolf; that’s what made me so angry. I didn’t know the strong grip your past has on you. That, combined with the shock of finding out about your heritage, well, I just blew up. Nobody at Creative Minds knows you’re a werewolf.”

It wasn’t a question. Still, Jake answered. “No.”

“You were afraid they’d have the same reaction as Lila.”

“Yes.” Though he had nothing to do with it, pride surged through him that Adrienne was quick and perceptive. “Though the treaty that recognized weres and vamps, to name a few, was signed more than ten years ago, a lot of people still cannot accept the fact that we are to be accorded the same status as everyone else, that we don’t need to go into hiding anymore, that we can come out into the open and expect to be rendered the same rights and privileges as everyone else, that we are protected by the law like every human on this planet! But like everyone else, I need money to survive in this world, Adrienne, hence, I need to

work. I can't let a little prejudice hinder my career, or at the very least, my ability to survive. If I must keep my heritage a secret from everyone else, so be it." He hesitated. "So, you accept me? Willing to stay with me and see if we can make a go of this relationship?"

"Wasn't I clear enough?" Adrienne presented him with a tremulous smile that he ached to kiss from her lips. "Then let me make it plain to you, Jake, that I'm not sorry Lila left you, for if she didn't, I wouldn't have the chance to be with you. But now that she did -- more fool she -- I'm not about to commit the same mistake. You are someone special, Jake, and not just because of your unique abilities, but because you are *you* -- my boss, my empath, my werewolf, my lover." She frowned up at him in a considering manner. "Though I think it's unfair that not only are you an empath, but you're also a werewolf, when there are poor souls like me who don't have a shred of talent."

"You do have talent." He nodded in a very solemn manner, which belied the joy that was splintering through his very soul. "Very formidable talent."

If anything, she only frowned deeper. "I do?"

He nodded emphatically. "Not everyone has the talent to make me so crazy with lust as you do, with those infernally sexy long legs in high stiletto heels."

A sensuous expression crossed her face. "Really?" She asked in a breathy voice.

"Really." He was having difficulty breathing as well. She unbuttoned his shirt then slipped her hands inside, caressing his naked chest, tugging on his nipples. She bent her head and licked his right nipple, rolling her tongue around the hardened tip. He groaned and arched his chest. Shocking tingles shot all the way to his groin. His cock stirred, hardening. "I came close to throwing you on top of my desk and making desperate love to you every time you came into my office."

She straightened, her tongue sliding in sensuous play over her lips. "Hmmm. What a lovely thought." Her gaze roved over his face, lingering on his mouth. "So, do you change into a werewolf sometimes?"

“Only during the full moon,” he replied thickly. “Other times, we can control it.” His sense of fairness demanded that she get the same treatment. His fingers flew down the buttons at the front of her blouse, soon revealing her lush creamy cleavage. Her white lacy bra couldn’t conceal the jugged prominence of dark brown nipples. He swallowed. Hard.

“Wow. I wish I could see it happen.”

“You really do?”

Her answer was straightforward. “Yes.”

Shock rendered him speechless and without thought. As in, his mind went blank. He reached out ... and felt nothing from Adrienne but a sincere wish to witness his transformation and unfeigned acceptance of his werewolf heritage. Stunned, he could only look at her as an overwhelming joy crashed through him. His voice unsteady, he said, “You will. At the next full moon, which is in three weeks.” He leaned down and touched his lips to hers in a tentative, emotion-filled kiss. Her lips were eager, willing and ready.

After a few minutes, he nuzzled his nose against hers, and voiced the thoughts that had been puzzling him. “Most pure humans still can’t accept my kind; I assume you have such an open mind because of your werewolf ex-lover. It would seem that I have a lot to thank him for.”

She stole a kiss from his lips that was so sweet it took his breath away. “I know, it’s sad, isn’t it, considering that weres have been recognized by polite society for some time now? But I suppose, as you said, people generally have a hard time accepting those who are different from themselves, for a variety of reasons. In your case, they may be afraid that you’ll harm them; after all, you’re part wolf. What if you suddenly shift and gobble them up?” she teased.

“Ah.” He nodded sagely. His fingers remained busy, taking off her bra and unsnapping her skirt and allowing both garments to fall to the ground in silken whispers. The urgent beat in his burgeoning erection demanded that he undress her as soon as possible. He hooked

his fingers inside the band of her panties, and tore the lacy material away. “Shades of Little Red Riding Hood.”

“What?” She mocked him, even as she rubbed herself against him. “A wolf reading fairy tales?”

“The wolf’s mom,” he said, getting into the spirit of the game for a moment, but then he turned serious. “So is there any other reason why you are different, why you aren’t afraid of me?”

“I believe that no matter how different people are, they are still special.” Her eyes were dark with some expression he couldn’t define. “They have a heart, they have feelings, and they can get hurt.”

“I have a hunch you didn’t get your profound understanding from textbooks.”

She hesitated, and then it seemed as if she’d come to a decision. “My brother, David, is a very special person. He’s only ten years old, but he’s very talented with his paints. He isn’t *normal*, based on how society dictates normalcy.” A trace of bitterness crept into her voice. “He is very normal though, in his world, which I think is a far better and more beautiful world than ours. He’s autistic, but that doesn’t mean he’s not brilliant. That doesn’t mean he’s less human, or that he doesn’t have very deep emotions.”

“I see.” He hugged her tight. He understood a lot about her now.

She shook her head. “Enough about me. What about you? How come you’re an empathic werewolf?” She made a tiny movement with her head. He could easily imagine her grimacing. “Did that sound right?”

Laughter shook his entire body, a laughter that was cut short when her tongue licked his left nipple this time. Desire came back in ripples, then in waves. He dug his fingers through the thickness of her hair. “Mom’s family,” he said, “has paranormal ability, while Dad has the werewolf genes.” Her tongue pointed and played with his nipple, teasing it to

hardness, and causing his rock-hard shaft to demand satisfaction with great urgency. He ground his hips against hers, seeking her softness.

She moaned. "Hmm ... perfect combination."

Her mouth enveloped his nipple and sucked. His hand tightened on her hair. Sensations of delight whispered through him, pooling at his groin. His cock ached. God, he wished she'd hurry. She unbuckled his belt and opened the snap of his trousers. She pushed both his trousers and briefs down, freeing his cock, which bobbed and sought her heat. She cradled it in the juncture of her thighs. God, she was so wet he almost came.

"Yes ... perfect indeed," he rasped, referring to the way they fit together, even though he knew that wasn't what she meant.

She moaned. Her hands roamed wildly up and down his back, finally settling on his buttocks, alternately palming and pulling him nearer.

Loved your butt ...

The thought made her actions incredibly sexy, arousing him to no end. He rubbed his cock in a rhythmic motion between her folds, the thick cream of her desire easing the way for him, his movements increasing in pace.

She gave a little muffled scream. Her teeth rasped on his nipple.

A burning path seared through his blood to every nerve ending. He was so tempted to throw her down onto the floor and push into her. Instead, he held on to the tiny bit of control he had left, taking it slow, wanting to draw each moment out for her maximum pleasure. Cupping her heavy breasts, he kneaded and pressed. She arched into his palms and he pinched her nipples.

"Yes! Harder."

He plucked at them, pulling them until they peaked into tight little buds. He squeezed and nipped at her nipples, feeling her need for a little pain to heighten the pleasure.

She transferred her attentions to his other nipple, and sucked like a newborn babe on her first bottle. She rode his cock, frenzied, slamming her crotch against his body.

Tension built in him, winding him tighter with each passing second. His whole body went taut, rigid with the desire to let go.

She fell apart. Her teeth bit down on his nipple. She bucked, gyrating wildly, keening. Throwing back her head, she screamed.

His breath caught, and he ignored the pain her teeth had wrought.

She was magnificent. Wild and uninhibited, like a wolf on the range, running free.

She collapsed against him, panting. They fell onto the sofa, their lips fused in a passionate kiss.

His cream-covered cock slipped into her tight warmth, and it was his turn to moan. He pushed his hips up ... and felt Adrienne pull away from him. His eyes snapped open.

She was standing beside the sofa, mischief glinting in her eyes. She sent him an impish smile and sped toward the bedroom.

“Fuck! Adrienne!” He roared and went after her.

God, this was no time for games. Didn't she know how badly he ached, how she was killing him by offering a tantalizing glimpse of heaven and then denying him --

He stood in the doorway of the bedroom. His jaw dropped. Blood roared in his ears and into his groin. His cock throbbed.

Adrienne was on her knees on the bed, her white buttocks enticingly exposed to his sight. Her head rested on the dark blue satin bedspread, face turned back to him with a sensuous expression. Her hand moved. “Come, lover. I want you to fuck me ... in the ass.”

Chapter Eight

Her husky voice rang in his ears. He stared at the tiny puckering hole, and in one part of his brain he speculated as to how she could take him in. But even as he wondered, excitement spread throughout his body. God, she would be *so* tight!

The tension in his cock built and grew until he ached. He went to the bed and fell to his knees in front of her mesmerizing ass, his cock bobbing painfully. There was something about those pale globes that seemed connected directly to the nerve endings in his groin.

Sweet sweet butt ...

He palmed her ass and squeezed, marveling at the smoothness of her skin. He bent his head and kissed each cheek, incredibly aroused by the enticing musky scent of her recent orgasm. His sensitive nose twitched at the smell of her pussy, which dripped with her cream. He swiped his tongue against her folds, tasting her. He captured her ass cheeks, stretching her wide. His tongue poked into the little opening, tracing the lines and bumps.

Her hips swayed. He could just imagine being surrounded by her heat. The sexy little moans issuing from her throat inflamed him.

A cold metal grazed his arm, distracting his attention. It was a tube of lubricant.

“Jake ... please ...” Adrienne nudged it against him.

He picked it up and squirted some onto his trembling hand, spreading it generously over his stiff cock. He rubbed his cock briskly a few times, enjoying the building tension. Eagerness made him fumble, and the grease caused him to drop the tube once. Gripping it tightly, he stuck the mouth inside Adrienne's anus and squirted a generous amount into her.

She yelped from the cold liquid and then sighed as he spread the lubricant around the opening. Her eyes were languorous as she looked up at him, urging him to hurry. Her breath caught as he dipped his forefinger into the tight little hole, massaging the area to prepare it for his much bigger cock. Her hips began a slow, gentle motion, thrusting in his direction.

"God, Adrienne ... you're a tempting witch," Jake said. He stood and grasped her by the hips. Positioning his cock at the entrance, he pushed himself in slowly, letting her adjust to his size.

Her anal walls alternately squeezed and relaxed. It was killing him! God, she was so tight. Her muscles were massaging each ridge, each bump of his cock. He longed to plunge and bury himself in her snug ass.

Her breath quickened. "Deeper." She demanded, a guttural sound. Her eyes were glazing over. Obviously, she'd done this before, from the way she deliberately relaxed her muscles to take him in.

He drove forward, his hard thrust burying his cock to the hilt. She surrounded him, gloving him with her intense heat.

She sobbed. "Yes!"

He felt like sobbing himself. She felt *very* good, *excellent* good, tight and constricted. He slapped her ass, and felt the vibrations run through his cock. He shook. She cried out. Holding each white cheek, he rode her hard, his balls slapping against her rump, the lubricant easing his way into her channel. The sound of their harsh breathing filled the air. Her anal walls clamped down on his cock, contracting around him, tighter than he had ever been held before. The tension built fast, increasing in tempo and intensity.

He plunged his fingers into her hot pussy, alternating his finger-thrusts with his cock. He felt the elusive touch of his fingers against his cock, separated only by a thin membrane of cells. It increased his desire, deepened his hunger and heightened the anticipation.

In the instant before orgasm, their minds linked together. He felt her double pleasure at the sensation of his fingers in her pussy; he sensed her straining for that mind-shattering release, her heart occupied with nothing but to give and receive satisfaction. The pressure increased fourfold in a rush. With one last hard thrust, they both erupted into sheer blinding pleasure.

* * * * *

The next day, Adrienne woke up late again. Really, if this kept up, the Creative Minds Board of Directors might personally boot her out of the company! Although ... She shivered, delicious tremors going through her body. She might not regret losing her job if Jake would continue to bring her to such pleasurable heights every night of her life.

She shivered. What a scary thought, tying herself down to one man. The funny thing was, she *could* see herself waking up to Jake every morning, but with one catch: There was someone else beside them in bed. Somehow, she didn't think Jake was the type of man to share his woman.

She pushed the thought away, preferring to concentrate on getting her things together for the office. Anyway, the point was moot, because at this particular moment, she wasn't attracted enough to any other man to consider asking him to be the third person in her and Jake's ongoing relationship. Then again, who knew when and how life might change?

One thing she knew for sure: She did miss having two cocks in her.

Thirty minutes later, she was about to leave when the phone rang. She hesitated at the doorway, wondering if she should pick it up. The phone continued to ring, the sound taking on an insistent quality.

Adrienne backtracked to her bedroom, cursing all the way. If that were Jake telling her to get her ass in gear and hurry to the office, she'd ...

She picked up the phone. "Jake, don't tell me --"

"I'm not lover-boy, Adrienne." Evil laughter rolled into her ear. "That was a very good show you put on yesterday afternoon."

Goose bumps crawled up her arms. Bile rose in her throat, burning her mouth like hot acid. "You were watching us?!"

"You're very good, Adrienne. I came in my pants, just from watching you suck lover-boy. Seeing your pussy was the final straw, of course. Yes, I believe I shall have you one of these days."

"Not on your life!"

"Life is so full of uncertainties, Adrienne. You never know when it might ... bite you in the arse." He cackled. "How'd you like last night's display? Were you scared?"

"That was your doing?" Anger stirred within her, anger that someone would stalk her like this, anger that her life would be so disrupted, her hard-earned peace disappearing like smoke in the wind with each threat. "What do you want? Why are you disturbing me like this?"

"Are you scared enough, I wonder, to tell me what I want to know?" His voice turned menacing. "Where is David, Adrienne?"

Shock assailed her. The odious villain finally gave voice to David's name. Her hand gripped the phone. "What do you want with him?"

He ignored her question. "Where is he?"

"He -- he's not in this country."

"Don't lie to me, Adrienne. You don't want to find out what I do to bad girls who lie. Where is he?" The last three words were said with heavy emphasis.

"I don't know!"

“That’s my girl.” There was an almost bizarre admiration in his voice. “Last warning. I’m giving you until tonight to give me an honest answer. Meantime, keep these two pictures in mind: a vibrant rose and a dead puppy.”

Click. Adrienne listened with disbelief to the dial tone. As if in a dream, she put down the phone with shaking hands. No, not a dream. A nightmare. Her apartment, which had given her so much comfort in the past year or so, had taken on a sinister atmosphere, tainted by the evil voice she could still hear in her head. She sank down onto the bed, forehead cradled in her hands.

The moment she had been dreading had arrived. Only, she hadn’t expected it to come so soon. After so many months, how could her stepfather still be intent on putting away his son? How had he tracked them down so quickly? She thought she had covered her tracks pretty well, leaving all those clues and false trails that led to Canada.

Unless he had spies among her circle of friends.

But she hadn’t revealed her real background to anyone, had never talked about her family, her education, her country of origin, heck, she hadn’t even gossiped about her ex-boyfriends. Most importantly, she hadn’t told anyone about David, her well-guarded secret, who was all alone in the nursing home. She had told no one about him, from the time she landed in this country --

Jake.

She stared unseeing at the wall. The awful realization washed over her. The sick feeling of betrayal pervaded her heart.

She had told him about David yesterday. Though she hadn’t revealed much, she had confirmed his existence.

Had Jake passed on the information? He had had plenty of time to do it. Was the man on the phone his co-conspirator? Jake had certainly been deceptive when it suited his purposes, the cad! He’d kept his being a werewolf to himself. If last night’s incident hadn’t

happened, she might never have known of Jake's unusual genetics. Would Jake have eventually told her? Could someone who had been so intimate with her betray her?

Something else flashed in her memory.

Marcy. She'd been fooling around on Adrienne's computer that morning. Could Marcy have been looking for clues to Adrienne's history? Could Marcy have seen the scanned photo of Adrienne and David together that Adrienne had, in a moment of foolish sentimentality, stored in a folder in her hard disk?

The knife of betrayal twisted deeper.

Who could she trust?

Her logical mind asserted itself. She was jumping to conclusions based on scant clues and pure speculation. She shivered, suddenly realizing that the villain had succeeded in dividing her against the people she trusted, people she considered her friends, her allies, just by sowing a few seeds of doubt in her mind.

What was she going to do? *Get a grip, Adrienne.* She didn't have any solid reason to point a finger at anyone. What she *could* do is to be more careful about what she said to people, especially when it concerned David. She could also be more observant and take note of anything suspicious.

Feeling calmer and steadier, she let herself out of her apartment and drove to the office. She turned onto the highway. At this time of day, there were few cars around, as most people were already at work. Hmm ... maybe she should ask the boss for a flex-time work schedule; that way, she could save time by not being caught in traffic during rush hour, and more importantly, she could enjoy being with Jake --

Something bumped into her car from the right side. She swerved, tires squealing. She screamed.

Adrienne fought to get the car back under control. Her heart pounded heavily. Her hands tightened on the steering wheel. She glanced to the right, to see a muddied Toyota with heavily tinted windows deliberately closing the gap between them.

Her small car jarred from the impact.

“Hey you crazy man! Stop that!”

The Toyota veered away slightly. From this angle, she saw a man behind the wheel. Good grief! He was coming at her again!

This time, she braced herself, but the impact was no less harsh. Panic reared its head. Fear thudded in tempo with rising hysteria.

“Oh, God, oh, God, oh, God ...”

He kept his car close to hers. From time to time, their fenders grated against each other, metal scraping, paint peeling. Sparks of fire flew where the friction heated up the metal.

She slowed.

He slowed as well.

She sped up.

He kept pace.

She looked around wildly for a way out. She'd moved to the far left lane. A long stretch of island separated the two sides of the highway. Up ahead, a bridge loomed into sight.

The Toyota continued pressing her from the right, such that the left underside of her car scratched against the island. In reaction, she threw her wheel to the right, deliberately bumping hard against the Toyota. Its tires screeched and skidded on the black asphalt, driving away from her.

Where are the cops when you need them?

She stepped on the gas, trying to outrun the Toyota. The speedometer inched up: sixty ... eighty ... one-twenty ...

She dared a glance in the rearview mirror.

Her heart lurched.

The Toyota was racing up behind her with a vengeance, gaining ground with each second. It crashed into her rear bumper. Her car lurched forward. The Toyota turned slightly to the right and made a wide “U”, smashing into her right passenger door. Metal buckled with a sickening crunch. She lost her grip on the steering wheel. Traveling at great speed and pushed by the Toyota, her car jumped over the island onto the other side of the highway.

Her eyes widened. Her mouth opened in a silent scream.

She was on track for a head-on collision with another car.

The impact was explosive.

Chapter Nine

The air bag and her seatbelt saved her.

After the horrifying, thundering roar of the crash, the sound of the hospital's everyday bustle was comforting.

The doctor aimed a smile at her. "You're a very lucky young woman. To be in a car crash of such magnitude and to walk away virtually unscathed ..." She shook her head, her silky dark hair flowing over her shoulders. "It's almost unheard of." She consulted the chart in her hand. "Your vital signs are normal. Aside from a few bruises and scratches, you're fine."

Adrienne lay on the gurney, shaking with relief. She didn't know what would happen to David should anything terrible befall her. She touched the bandaged wound on her cheek and winced. "What about the other car, the one I collided with? The driver --?"

"He'll be fine; don't worry. Although he suffered more wounds than you, he'll live. My colleague is attending to him now."

Adrienne remembered the dirty Toyota. "Was there ... another car?"

The doctor gave her a strange look. "Not that I know of. Only two cars, two accident victims."

Suddenly, the whole incident came rushing back. Someone had deliberately tried to run her off the road. *Someone wanted to kill her.* Cold chills ran down her spine. She wanted to tell someone, anyone. Jake. “So, can I leave now? I still have to get to work.”

The doctor frowned. “Yes, you can leave, after the police talk to you. They wanted to take your statement. But work? I wouldn’t advise it. You should go home and rest.” She gestured for Adrienne to follow. “Come, I’ll take you to see the officers.”

Adrienne picked up her handbag and trailed after the doctor on shaky legs. “There’s just someone I need to ... to talk with.”

The doctor laughed, her teeth flashing under the cold light of the corridor. “You don’t need to explain to me. Where are you working, by the way?”

Adrienne skirted around someone pushing a wheelchair in front of her. “Creative Minds Advertising.” She was looking back at the man in the wheelchair and came abruptly to a stop as she bumped into someone.

It was the doctor. She was staring at Adrienne with wide eyes. “You work at Creative Minds?”

Adrienne wondered what was so unusual about that. “Yes.” She glanced at the gold nameplate pinned slightly above the doctor’s left breast. *Dr. Tara Woolf.* No wonder she looked familiar. Was she a werewolf as well? How can a wolf be a doctor? “You’re related to Jake?”

Tara’s face closed. “His sister.” She turned and walked briskly away.

Adrienne alternately walked and hopped to keep up with her. “He never mentioned your name.”

“He wouldn’t. I’ve been estranged from most of my family for almost five years now.”

Adrienne gasped. “Why?” Perhaps, she shouldn’t wonder. After all, she’d run away from her own father. Well, stepfather.

“Why? I can’t tell you.”

All right, it was none of her business, but she was still confused. “He’s only been at the company for two months. So, how did you --?”

“My mother and I keep in touch, without their knowledge.”

“Please, can you walk slower?” Adrienne gasped, her chest heaving. “I’m still not feeling so well.”

“Of course.” Tara immediately slowed and laid a compassionate hand on Adrienne’s arm. “I’m sorry; it’s just that I ...” She was silent for several long moments. They walked companionably, side by side. “How is Jake?”

Without being an empath, Adrienne knew that this lovely young woman missed her family and wanted to know how they were. “He’s the greatest boss, but don’t tell him I told you so. He may be one of the top management, but he doesn’t have any airs, and he doesn’t mind getting his hands ‘dirty.’ Do you know that he created the presentation slides for our latest project for me? That’s the kind of boss he is -- helpful and very hands-on.” Adrienne gave an inward chuckle. *Tara just didn’t know exactly how hands-on her brother was being.*

* * * * *

Adrienne took a cab to the office. Her car was mangled beyond repair, and she’d have to buy a new one. Or not. She remembered the horrifying incident and shuddered. She’d probably never get behind the wheel again.

She’d wanted to talk to Jake immediately, but his office was empty. Even Marcy wasn’t around. Then she remembered; it was time for the monthly meeting of the different division heads, of which Jake was one, with the directors of Creative Minds.

She reached her office and sank gratefully behind her desk. She sagged against the chair and closed her eyes. Her body felt as though it had been battered and beaten many times over. In a way, it had. A massage would be good tonight ...

Someone was trying to kill her, but who? Her threatening caller? She shuddered. But why? He wanted to know where David was, right? How could he get the information if she died?

She didn't know how long she'd been sitting there with those thoughts going round and round her head when the phone rang. Maybe she had drifted off for a few minutes as well. She picked up the receiver and answered briskly. "Hello?"

The dark voice she had come to associate with her worst nightmares came over the line. "You aren't too shaken from the accident, are you?"

"Why are you doing this? Other people could have been hurt!"

Evil laughter reached her ears. "I don't care about other people. Tell me what I want to know; where's David?!"

"I told you, he's not here! Why won't you believe me?"

"I'm tired of your lies!" He snarled. "You can bear to be without your beloved brother? Don't play that game with me, girl. That's not what I was told."

Told. Someone told him all about me and David.

The menacing voice continued. "This is your last chance! Where's David?"

Adrienne was shaking. How should she counter this? What should she say? However she answered him, she was doomed.

"No answer?" The threatening voice asked.

Adrienne hadn't realized that some time had passed.

"Don't say I didn't warn you," he said, "and be prepared for the consequences."

Click. Adrienne was dismayed to discover she was still shaking terribly. Jake. She wanted to tell Jake. She wanted Jake to hug her close and make her feel safe. She wanted Jake to think for her and tell her what to do, what she should do to keep David safe.

She hurried out of her office and went to Jake's. Marcy was still nowhere in sight, but oh thank goodness, Jake was in the office. Through the slightly open door, she could see him on the phone. She was about to announce herself when she heard him saying, "Yes, she has a brother. She told me so yesterday. I don't know where he is right now; I didn't get a chance to ask. I don't think she would've told me now, anyway." He paused. She continued to listen in mounting horror. "Don't worry, I'm working on it. I'm sure that once I've gained her trust, she'll tell me everything. I'll bring both of them to you then. Yes, I've got everything under --"

Adrienne backed away, one hand fisted to her mouth. She blinked, suddenly blinded by tears.

Jake. It was really Jake.

She shook her head. And to think she would have gone to him --

The knife of betrayal sliced deep, piercing to her bone. *Foolish, foolish Adrienne.*

But how could it be Jake?

The cry came from her broken, shattered heart. A strong cry of denial and disbelief.

Had their sweet lovemaking all been a ruse, to get her to open up to him, to tell him her most intimate secrets? She remembered him questioning her about David, in the car, before she had deliberately distracted him.

What about the evil-voiced man who'd been calling her? Is that who Jake was speaking to now? Were the two of them in cahoots? One to make her so scared she'd break down and run to the one person whom she'd learned to trust?

She shook with silent, hysterical laughter.

Only, they wouldn't have counted on her overhearing their incriminating conversation. Coincidence was a marvelous thing.

She shook again, while chills penetrated her entire body. Could Jake have been behind the wheel of the Toyota? Could he make love to her and then ... kill her? He didn't seem like

a cold-blooded man, and yet ... he was a werewolf, wasn't he? Didn't wolves kill without conscience or remorse?

She shuddered.

Jake's voice caught her ear. "Now Marcy, tell me all that you know about Adrienne."

Adrienne was doubly shattered. So, her earlier suspicions were right. Her heart cried out. *Marcy ... how could you do this to me! You're supposed to be my friend!* As Marcy's voice filtered through the gap in the door, only one question reverberated through her brain. *Why are they doing this to me?*

Adrienne stumbled back to her office in a daze. A band of pain, like steel, constricted around her heart, squeezing tighter with every second.

Someone brushed past her, almost knocking her against the wall. "Oh, I'm sorry."

Adrienne's sharp ears caught a sob. She looked closely at the girl who was about to dash away. "Tielan? What's wrong?" She caught hold of the girl's arm. Adrienne chased away her own anguish and drew the other woman into her office. She made Tielan sit on one of the chairs in front of the desk, while Adrienne took the other, choosing to sit beside the young woman, rather than put a desk between them.

Tielan was sobbing uncontrollably, her head buried in her hands. Heart filled with pity, Adrienne reached out a hand and awkwardly smoothed the girl's hair. She was reminded of the times when she did the same thing with David. "What's up, Tielan? Can I help?"

Tielan shook her head. Her sobs became louder.

Adrienne pulled out a few pieces of tissue from the Kleenex box on her desk. She pressed them into Tielan's hands. "Here, wipe your face and blow your nose. You'll feel better."

Tielan did as directed. Soon, her sobs subsided into hiccups. She wiped away tears that still rolled down her cheeks. "I'm sorry, boss. It's just that my mom's in a coma for several

weeks now, and dad's out of job and -- and --" She wrung her hands helplessly, her eyes downcast.

Adrienne could guess the problem. She asked gently, "Are you having financial difficulties?"

Tielan glanced up and nodded. "The hospital is asking for the next installment payment. We kept praying that Mom would wake by now, but she hasn't --" The word ended in a sob.

Adrienne gave her an impulsive hug. "There, there, Tielan. Things can only get better. In the meantime ..." She stood to get her bag and wrote a check. She tore it off from the checkbook and handed it to Tielan. "Here, is this enough? Take it. That way, you can concentrate on taking care of your mom."

Tielan reached out, and then snatched her hand back and shook her head. "I -- I can't."

Adrienne pried one of Tielan's fisted hands open and placed the check in her open palm. "Sure you can. It's a loan; I'm not giving it to you. You can pay for it slowly, in installments."

Tears ran down Tielan's cheeks again. Her fingers closed over the check. "Thank you, boss, thank you."

"Don't mention it. The important thing now is for your mom to get well." Adrienne fully expected Tielan to dash off, but she sat there, worrying a length of her pale blue skirt. Adrienne ventured a guess. "If you need to take the rest of the day off, you have my permission."

Tielan glanced up with startled brown eyes. "No, it's not that, boss. It's just that ... I'm so ashamed of myself." The last words came out in a rush. "I was the one who put the beautiful box in your office the other day, the beautiful box that turned out to contain something so ugly." She hung her head and whispered. "I'm sorry."

Adrienne was taken aback. Tielan had never come across as cruel and sadistic. “You did that? You killed ...”

Tielan reared back in alarm. “No, no.” She shook her head vehemently. “I only delivered the box. A man called and told me that if I were to deliver a box to your office, I would be handsomely paid. I needed the money, and I saw no harm in doing it.”

“You saw this man?”

“No. He would call me and tell me where to get the things. Like, for the black rose, he told me to go to this eatery and the package would be on the seventh table to the right from the entrance.”

Adrienne swayed. It was him, that evil, disembodied voice. He’d gotten to her subordinates. Would it be a surprise if he got to Jake, too? The sharp pain of betrayal returned full force.

Tielan touched her arm. “Are you okay, boss?”

Adrienne pasted a smile on her lips. “Come to think of it, no. I think I’ll call it a day. See you tomorrow.” She slung her bag over her arm and hurried out of the room.

“Wait!” Muffled footsteps came after her. “Ms. Lee, can you get home okay? What happened to you?”

Adrienne stifled a sigh of impatience. She didn’t really want to talk now. She wanted to go somewhere quiet so she could think. She turned. “What do you mean?”

Tielan’s reached out to touch Adrienne’s cheek.

Adrienne winced. She’d forgotten the bandage. “I was in a slight accident.” Tielan’s eyes grew round and worried. She kept glancing at the bandage. Adrienne hastened to reassure her. “Nothing major. I wouldn’t be standing here if it were, right?” She waited for Tielan to nod before continuing. “But I’m still shaken from the experience. I think I’ll go home and rest.”

* * * * *

Jake gripped the phone tightly, though he wanted to throw it across the room. “And I still say you’ve got your information wrong, Jared. The person you’re looking for isn’t Adrienne. It’s not possible!” He rushed on, not giving Jared the opportunity to talk. “Just because Adrienne’s also from Edinburgh doesn’t mean she’s the person your client is looking for! What?! You want to come and talk to her? Absolutely not!” He slammed down the phone and muttered, “Crazy!”

He looked up to find Marcy gazing at him with a quizzical expression on her face. “What?!”

“Do you always talk to your brother like that?”

“Only when he’s being obnoxious and stupid.”

She laughed. “Or when the topic’s Adrienne, who is so absolutely pure and innocent that no wrongdoing can be attributed to her.”

I wouldn’t exactly call her innocent, he thought wryly, as images of the previous night flashed through his mind.

Marcy sobered. “What’s this all about, Jake? Why did you ask me to tell you all that I know about Adrienne? Why is your brother looking for her anyway?”

“We’re not sure he’s looking for Adrienne. He’s looking for someone who came from Edinburgh.” Jake rubbed a hand across his face. A headache was starting to split his head. “I didn’t even know Adrienne *was* from Edinburgh.” He was sure his bewilderment and confusion were reflected in his face and tone.

Marcy glanced away. “She didn’t want anyone to know. It slipped out once, when we went drinking.”

“Really?” Jake stared at his secretary. A feeling of dread bloomed in his chest.

How well did he know Adrienne? What if she was the one Jared sought? Was she some petty thief after a pretty bauble, or had she stolen something of more value? Like the man’s son, perhaps, and was holding him for hostage? A son named ... David?

He shook his head, appalled at himself. He was jumping to conclusions. He stood and strode abruptly out of the room, calling out over his shoulder, "I'm going to Adrienne's." He had a burning need to see her, to find out the truth, once and for all. He could use his psychic ability to sense if she was lying or not.

Her office was eerily silent, although the lights were on. He couldn't see her black handbag, which usually rested on the table beside her computer. He stood perplexed in the middle of the room.

"Mr. Woolf."

He turned around and saw one of Adrienne's subordinates in the doorway, the one who'd been in the office with her during the black rose incident. "Yes?"

"Ms. Lee's gone home for the day." She twisted her fingers together. "I'm worried about her. She's been in an accident."

The blood drained from his face. "Accident? How badly was she hurt?"

"She seemed okay, except for the bandage on her cheek. But she didn't look too good. I don't know if there are internal injuries or what --"

Jake didn't stick around to hear more. He ran out of the room, stopping by his office momentarily to get his keys. He flipped open his mobile phone and dialed her house. Holding it to his ear, he took the lift down to the parking lot. The phone kept on ringing. Damn! She wasn't home yet. He flipped through his address book. Shit! He didn't have her mobile number. He shut his phone and jumped into his car. He'd take the route she usually did on her way home. God, he hoped she didn't meet with another accident.

He made it to her apartment building in ten minutes, faster than he'd ever traveled the same distance before. He pushed on the lift button once, twice, three times, willing the lift to get to the ground faster. The numbers on the panel lit up: twenty-five ... twenty-four ... twenty-three ... twenty-two ...

Jake hit the button one more time. With an exclamation of exasperation, he sped toward the stairs, and took them two at a time. He was winded and breathing hard by the time he reached the seventh floor. He veered toward the right and staggered to Adrienne's unit.

Funny. Why was the door ajar?

A chilling thought came to him. Could a burglar have been in the apartment and Adrienne, coming home so early, had interrupted the thief's nefarious activities? She could be lying inside, tied up and afraid! Worse, maybe raped, murdered --

Stop! All those morbid thoughts wouldn't help her.

Jake pushed the images out of his mind and took a deep breath, calming his racing heart. He quietly pushed the door wider and walked in on swift, silent feet. Times like these, his werewolf nature came in handy. Maybe he would be able to surprise her attacker, get the upper hand and rescue Adrienne.

He heard a moan coming from the direction of her bedroom. God, had he hurt her? Knocked her out maybe? Or was he raping her?

He quickened his pace, skirted around the dining table and tiptoed down the hall.

The bedroom door was open. He peeked in.

And the bottom fell out from under him.

Chapter Ten

Lucien's oiled hands moved sensuously over her body, kneading and dissolving the knots of tension. He was very good at finding the tight spots. His fingers hit a particularly nasty knot in her right shoulder.

Adrienne felt it unravel. It should have relaxed her, made her lethargic and languorous. Instead, her shoulders wound up even tighter. Tears threatened to seep out from under her closed lids.

How could Jake do this? While he made love to her, had he been plotting her death? The trauma of her morning accident paled in comparison to the pain of his betrayal. His treacherous, honeyed tongue ...

She couldn't believe he would deceive her. Not like this. She'd read him differently, and she was a pretty damn good judge of character.

The absolute worst was that she still liked him, all right, *loved* him, even. Which made the pain of his betrayal run that much deeper.

Lucien and Paul were waiting for her when she had arrived home. For a moment, she'd frowned upon seeing them. She couldn't remember if she had called them or not. But since

they were there on her doorsteps, she decided to have a quick massage. Maybe it would help make her feel better.

It didn't.

"What's wrong, Adrienne?" Lucien asked from above her. "You're too tight." His stiff cock brushed against her backside. "Maybe some sex would relax you."

"Yes," Paul chimed in, his hands soothing as he massaged her scalp.

Adrienne felt something brush over her lips, repeatedly, insistently. She knew it was Paul's cock. Her heart cried and shed tears of blood. She didn't want Paul's cock. She wanted Jake. She wanted Jake to hold her and tell her that she was wrong about him, that he had never deceived her, that his feelings for her were true and genuine.

"C'mon baby, open your mouth," Paul cajoled.

"N--"

A fat cock shoved into her mouth. She choked.

"What the hell's going on here?!"

Jake. Her heart clenched with pain. She couldn't let Jake see that she knew about his treachery. She couldn't let him win the game. She had to keep David and herself safe from him.

She sucked on Paul's cock, although she felt like gagging. She took her time, giving it a final kiss when she took it out of her mouth before she faced Jake. She almost lost her resolve when she saw the devastated expression on his face. God, what a good actor he was!

She turned on the bed and propped her head up on her upraised palm. She threaded her fingers through Lucien's hair as he leaned over her breast. He enveloped her nipple with his mouth and sucked. She gasped. She hoped it was realistic enough. She raised an eyebrow at the man standing at the doorway. "Jake, what a surprise! Wanna join us?"

He swayed, clutching the doorsill for support. "Join you?" An expression of disbelief crossed his face. Then, he shook his head, and his expression changed in the next second to a

feral look that blazed from his eyes, turning them golden yellow and glowing. A low growl rumbled in his throat. His hands knotted into fists, cracking as they did so. "I'll teach you to mess with my woman --"

In a flash, he reached them, grabbed hold of Paul's arms, pinning them close to his body. Jake drew Paul up to face level and snarled, "Your cock does not belong in her face, asshole!" So saying, Jake threw Paul across the room. Paul crashed against the wall, groaning.

Adrienne scrambled up on her knees. Jake seemed blinded by rage, and she feared for him. She didn't want him ending up in jail because of her, no matter that his betrayal ran so deep.

Jake turned toward the bed, howling his fury. He stalked forward, reached out a hand toward Lucien, who had turned rigid above her, his eyes wide with fear as he stared at Jake in morbid fascination.

Heart thudding with desperate urgency, Adrienne placed herself in between the two men. "Jake, stop! Stop it!"

His throat rumbled with some menacing sound. He picked her up and placed her gently to the side before whirling around with threatening intent toward Lucien.

Adrienne rushed to the bed, grabbing Jake's arm as his fingers closed around Lucien's throat. Lucien's eyes bulged and pitiful noises scratched out of his throat. His hands clawed with desperation at Jake's fingers.

"Jake, Jake! Let go of him!" She scraped at his fingers, trying to get them to loosen from around Lucien's throat. "This has nothing to do with them. It's all my idea! Jake!"

He looked at her, shock registering on his face. His fingers slackened.

Lucien fell onto the bed, gasping for breath.

"Adri! What is the meaning of this?"

She laughed, a light, trifling sound. "What does it look like?" She threw him a sensual look. "I had an itch that needed scratching and since you weren't around ..." She drew a

caressing hand down his cheek and fiddled with the buttons on his shirt. "But you're welcome to join us. I could always use another man."

"But -- but --" he sputtered. "I thought they were raping you!"

"Rape? Good heavens, no! I enjoy sex more with two men --" She deliberately licked her lips. "-- or three."

"But you and I --" He shook his head and straightened. Adrienne's heart shattered at the cold look in his eyes. His face stretched taut with tension. He continued bitterly, "I guess there was never 'you and I.' My mistake."

"That's okay, Jake," she said gaily. "It's so easy to misunderstand. But now, you know that one man is not enough to satisfy me. If you can't deal with that, then ..." She shrugged. She stretched out on the bed, her head propped on one hand. She drew Lucien down beside her and nudged his head toward her nipple. Lucien resisted, glancing at Jake with fear in his eyes. She caressed Lucien's cheek, looped her arm around his neck, and tried to draw his neck down, but Lucien slipped his head out from within the circle of her arm to back away from the bed, stumbling as he went. His eyes and his trembling form betrayed his fear. Mouth thinning, Adrienne glanced across at Paul, but Paul stayed where he was against the wall, groaning as he clutched his aching body. She looked up at Jake and shrugged again. "It looks like you've terrified my lovers out of their libido. Would you like to take their place --"

"What a fool I was!" Jake towered over her, his rage ice-cold in its intensity, his fingers clenched into tight fists. "And *when* were you planning to tell me, Adrienne? Or did you even *plan* to tell me?"

He threw her earlier words back at her, which stabbed straight into her deepest part. Her soul was stripped naked, for she'd never even *thought* of telling him, preferring to maintain the status quo until, if ever, the third in their trio came along. She opened her mouth to give a scathing reply, but was halted midway by the strangest thing. She seemed to

be seeing double images, a large gray werewolf superimposed over Jake's figure. She blinked. Only Jake was standing in front of her.

Contempt flashed from his eyes. "And to think, I had rushed over here, worrying you were badly hurt from the accident. I can see that it didn't interfere with your orgy."

Her eyes saw his proud bearing. Her heart recognized that she had hurt him by hitting him at his weakest: his ego. *You can never be enough for me.*

Her heart wept.

Her werewolf, her lover, her man.

She drove the stake deeper. "As I said, you can always join us." She stretched out, brushing her foot over the bulge in his trousers.

He jerked back as though burned. The double images came back, the wolf form intensifying in strength, its face contorting with pain into a most fearsome visage.

Her heart was shattering, breaking into a million tiny pieces with no hope for redemption.

He wrestled for control; it was there in the hard gritting of his teeth, the resolute determination of his jaw, the way the image of the wolf faded in and out as he sought to get the upper hand over his animal instincts. In the end, he regained his human face, threw her a disgusted look and left, slamming the door behind him.

No! The crashing door brought home the finality of his actions, and in that split second while the sound of the bang was still reverberating in the room, she knew a moment's panic.

"Wait!" Adrienne jumped up. Ignoring Lucien and Paul, she ran into the living room and threw open the door. "Jake!"

He was nowhere in sight. From the staircase, she heard the swift thud of leather shoes against the marble stairs.

"Jake." She wanted to cry and rage and rail against fate for the terrible joke it had played on her.

Lucien's hand tugged on her arm. "Come back in, baby. We haven't finished playing yet."

She wiped away the tears with the back of her hand. "Go away. Both of you, pack up and leave." When Paul touched her other arm, she screamed at them, "I don't want to have sex!"

A heavy object knocked into her from behind.

She fell, boneless, to the floor.

Darkness.

* * * * *

Adrienne slowly regained consciousness. Her mouth was dry, and her tongue felt thick. She tried to move, but ... she couldn't. As her senses came back to her, she realized she was lying on the hard floor on her left side and she was tied up like a trussed pig from her shoulders to her legs, with her hands behind her.

Something had awakened her, some sound that had joggled her from her unconscious state. She opened her eyes slowly. It was semi-dark. By the fading sunlight filtering in through the boarded-up windows, she could make out a cramped bed to one side and a table with two chairs. A small chest of drawers stood next to the bed. There was a door on the far side of the room that led to freedom. If she could get up.

She tried, but her legs wouldn't obey her. They seemed to be numb. And she couldn't get purchase to move her body upright, tightly bound as she was.

The most recent events flooded into her mind. She recalled with mounting horror the incident that had led to her captivity. Lucien and Paul had kidnapped her!

Were all the people around her out to get her?

She glanced down, noting with relief that they had at least put some clothes on her, even if it was her oldest shirt and a mismatched skirt.

There it was again, that rhythmic sound that must have awakened her from her unconscious state. Adrienne held her breath, trying to identify the noise and pinpoint its location. She frowned. It sounded like someone sobbing, with slight hitching breaths, and it seemed to be coming from the direction of the door, toward the far corner where the gloom was deeper than in the rest of the room. She wasn't alone.

Should she speak up? Maybe it was a fellow victim, and they could devise an escape plan together. But what if it was a ruse to catch her off guard?

She decided to risk it. "He-hello? Is anyone there?"

There was a slight catching of breath, then silence. Even the sobs died away.

The door thrust open and the overhead light flared.

She flinched from the sudden brightness.

"Ah, our captive is awake!"

Adrienne shivered. She recognized that voice. The same voice that had haunted her days and nights. She opened her eyes.

She didn't recognize him, and his kindly features were incongruent with the evil voice on the phone. Then she saw the maniacal glint in his eyes.

He smiled.

It shouldn't have scared her, but it did.

He strode across the room toward her, his gait excited and sure. His fingers caught hold of her chin. He turned her face to the right and then to the left, as if examining a pig bought for slaughter. She resisted, but he was too strong for her. "You're even prettier up close. I think I would enjoy having you. I did say so the last time, didn't I?"

She spat in his face.

His smile slid away. His face turned cold and hard. He took a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped her spit away. "You'll pay for that later." He stood up and went to the darkened corner, hauling up a small body like a sack of rice. He hurled it toward the two

men standing at the doorway, who stooped down as one to catch it. A high-pitched scream emitted from the body the men had caught. "You did a good job, boys. Take her and go."

They had been hiding in the shadows, but Adrienne saw them when they moved. "Lucien, you bastard!" she shouted as much as her hoarse voice would allow. "Why did you do this to me?"

Lucien's handsome face showed his anguish. "I'm sorry, Adrienne, but he took Lissa --"

"Enough!" The evil man thrust a gun in the men's direction. "Shut her up! You've done your job. Now go!"

Lucien clutched the small, wriggling girl to his chest, muffling her screams against his chest. "Yes, sir, we're going. We're going. Thank you, thank you, sir!"

Adrienne felt sick.

Lucien and Paul turned to leave.

Her eyes widened in horror as the trio hit the floor and lay still. She turned her disbelieving gaze on her captor, looking at the gun in his hand. "How could you kill them after they've done your dirty work for you? And how could you kill that little girl? She was innocent in all this!" Adrienne wanted to throw up at the thought of all the lives that had been lost because of her.

The evil man chuckled as he blew at his smoking gun. "Very easily." He patted the gun and placed it on the table. "Very useful things, these silencers." He turned to her. "Now, as for you --"

There was one burning answer she needed, though it hurt her to even voice the question. "Is Jake in your pay as well?"

He laughed, loud and hysterical. "Jake? Is that your lover's name? I'm afraid not. It was so funny to see you drive him out earlier. It cleared the way for the boys to take you."

A wild joy bloomed. *Jake didn't betray her; Jake didn't betray her.* The chant went on and on in her head as a few tears of remorse slid down her cheeks. Adrienne regretted being

suspicious of Jake, for not trusting in her instincts. She felt a pang of shame at her hurtful words.

Jake, Jake, Jake ... I'm sorry, sorry for doubting you ...

She stuck her chin out, defiant. "What do you want?"

He went down on his haunches before her. He trailed one finger over her chin. She shook her head, dislodging his finger. He grabbed her chin. "Such a fierce slut. You've fucked with everyone, haven't you?" His lips ground down on hers, biting and drawing blood. "Your lover, your masseurs ... Well, my cock will be the last to fill you before you meet your end."

"I'll die first!"

"We'll see." His cold eyes looked at her contemplatively. He stood up and rummaged in the drawers.

Adrienne closed her eyes. *Jake, Jake, if you can hear me, please, I'm sorry.*

"Now tell me: Where is David?"

Adrienne opened her eyes. Her captor once again stood over her, and he had a wicked-looking pair of scissors in his hand. "What are you going to do with those?"

A cruel smile came to his lips. "I'm going to cut you up, piece by piece, until you spill out the answer."

Her lips firmed stubbornly, although her heart pounded in fear. Cold sweat broke out along her body. "I won't tell you anything!"

He didn't speak. He just started cutting up her shirt.

She twisted and turned, trying to evade him. *Jake, Jake*, she sobbed in her mind. All she got for her efforts were bloody nicks on her upper body where the scissors got to her skin. In the end, her torn-up shirt lay on the floor beside him.

The ropes binding her bit into her skin. *Jake ...*

He palmed one of her breasts that peeked out from between the ropes.

She squirmed away. *Jake ... Do this for Jake ...*

He slapped her wherever his hand could land.

She whimpered. Her breasts ached from the blows. *Jake ... Stay alive ... for Jake ...*

He held her still with one hand, and with the other, he squeezed one breast. A rapturous expression came over his face. He closed his eyes, as if savoring the sensations as he kneaded her breast.

Careful not to disturb his trance-like state, she asked in a timid voice, “Who asked you to find out about David?”

“I was just out of prison, after 12 years. An Englishman approached me, obviously rich by his clothing and the stack of bills he waved under my nose. He told me what to do, and where to find you. He said I could have as much money as I want. I could also have you, if I want. And yes, I want,” he said, breathing hard.

“What’s his name?”

“I don’t know,” he answered, his voice distracted. “He always ... called me.”

Adrienne felt ... nothing. She didn’t really need the answer; she knew who it was. A confirmation would be good though. She might not be his real daughter, but she never thought ... How could her stepfather do this to her?

She was sure that he was the mastermind behind the plot to get David back. After all, she stole David right from underneath his nose. Her stepfather, who was one of the richest men in the United Kingdom. Her stepfather, who had loved her like a daughter, but was now ... now ...

The villain’s trademark evil laughter filled the air. “Yes, I think I’ll have you before we continue the interrogation. Maybe you’ll be more compliant afterward.” His mouth replaced his hand. He sucked and bit her breast, her nipple.

It hurt. It hurt everywhere. Tears pricked her eyes.

Jake ...

Yes, she would think of Jake as she died.

Chapter Eleven

Jake drove like a maniac through town, dodging honking cars and running red lights. Fortunately, there was nary a policeman in sight. But even if there had been, he wouldn't have cared. He'd gladly spend the time behind bars and drive all the inmates nuts.

He squealed to a stop in front of his apartment. He sat there, the car's motor running, and slumped over the steering wheel. He didn't want to move. He didn't care if he solidified into a stone right where he was.

He dropped his hand onto the passenger seat and groped for the half-full bottle of whiskey. He'd bought the bottle after he'd stumbled out of Adrienne's flat, needing to find solace in the one thing that had a chance of causing him to forget, even if only for a little while. He'd been drinking as soon as he'd fled her apartment, trying to drink himself into oblivion the whole afternoon, to erase the words that still blazed across his mind. Unfortunately, it took a lot of booze to make him drunk.

He gripped the bottle around the neck and brought it to his lips, guzzling the fiery liquid like water. It burned as it slid down his throat, but it couldn't burn out the memory of the terrible words that she had thrown at him.

One man is not enough for me.

He wasn't enough for her. He could never be enough. He didn't measure up. Even with Lila, he hadn't felt his inadequacy so keenly, so helplessly.

He dumped the rest of the whiskey over his face, threw back his head and howled out his unhappiness.

A rap on the window stopped him in mid-howl.

Jared. He was gesturing for Jake to open the passenger door and allow Jared to get into the car.

Jake shook his head. He stared stubbornly ahead. He wanted to be alone. He didn't want any of his family to witness another one of his failures. The last time was bad enough. He tried to ignore the small voice telling him to open the door, tried to resist its enticing pull, but in the end, Jared's will was still stronger. He released the door locks.

"I hate it when you pull rank on me." Jake said as the door opened.

"Perks of being the head of the pack." Jared slipped into the passenger seat, which had escaped Jake's impromptu whiskey dunk. He wrinkled his nose. "Whew! What have you been doing? Your car stinks."

Jake remained silent, his head leaning back against the seat rest, his eyes closed as the fire water dripped down from his face.

"What's up? Your secretary said you rushed out of the office in pursuit of a demon."

"You can say that."

"So, what's up?" Jared scrutinized his younger brother. "What happened to you? You look terrible."

Jake's lips twisted. What the hell. Jared would find out, sooner or later. He might as well know now. "You are looking at Lila II." At Jared's blank look, he elaborated, "You know, World War I, World War II. Well, this is Lila II."

"Adrienne?"

Jake nodded.

Jared clasped Jake's shoulder. "Sorry, bro."

Jake shook his head.

"C'mon, let's head to the nearest bar; I'm in the mood for a drink."

Jake really didn't want to; he preferred to be alone, but he knew his brother's good intentions. "Your treat?"

"Sure, any --"

Jake ...

He straightened abruptly.

Jared turned alert. "What is it?"

Jake faced Jared with wonder and bewilderment befuddling his thinking. "Adrienne. I heard her ... calling me."

Jared looked at him sharply. "Calling you? You were never able to 'hear' anyone before."

"I know." Jake nodded. "It's coming again." Fear clutched his heart. "She's in trouble."

"How do you know?"

"I can hear it in her voice." Jake fumbled with the key in the ignition and tried to start the car. His fingers slipped, once, twice. He realized with a start that his heart was beating too fast and that his skin was clammy with perspiration. He laid his head on the steering wheel and took in several deep breaths. Feeling calmer and his heartbeat slowing, he finally got a grip on the key and turned the ignition. "I've got to go -- No, wait. She's not at her flat. Jared, we have to find her."

"Why should we?" Jared was assessing him with steady eyes. "She left you high and dry. I say we go ahead to the bar and leave her to fend for her --"

Jake gunned the engine, anger and fear snaking their vicious way into his heart. "Get out of the car!"

Jared placed a steady hand on Jake's arm. "Cool down, bro, I was just joking. How can we find her if you can't think clearly? Now, take a deep breath. There. Another. Okay, did Adrienne say where she is?"

Jake closed his eyes to concentrate better. He took another deep breath, forcing out the panic and fear. He couldn't afford to miss Adrienne's voice. He needed to find her, like he needed air and water to survive.

Jake ... I'm so sorry ...

Adri, there's nothing to be sorry about, he whispered from his heart. *Tell me where you are, honey. Tell me, so I can find you.*

Incredibly, he could sense her. As long as her voice kept coming, he could pinpoint her general direction.

He opened his eyes. "She's to the west of us. Jared, we better change places. You drive, and I'll navigate." His voice was grim as he added, "I hope we get there in time."

* * * * *

Jake ...

The villain mauled her other breast. He pulled up her skirt and insinuated one blunt finger into her cunt, rubbing roughly.

She was dry. She couldn't become wet for him, even if it meant her life.

He made an angry exclamation and snatched up the scissors again. He cut away her skirt in a frenzy, sometimes nicking her flesh. One particularly careless cut stabbed deeply into her thigh, spurting blood.

The pain awakened her from her stupor. Why was she taking this lying down, literally? Why was she waiting for death when she had so much to live for? Nobody knew she was here. It was up to her to save herself!

All right, Adrienne, think! What should you do first?

She forced herself to smile at her captor. "Hey, handsome, since we're going to be so intimate, it's a bit unseemly that I don't even know your name."

He grunted. "Charlie."

She batted her eyelashes up at him. "Well, Charlie, I think it would be more pleasurable for you if you untie me, you know. Just think, I can hold you close in my arms. Also --" Her lashes lowered. "-- how can you -- how can we have sex with my legs tied like this?"

He sat back on his haunches. Sweat dotted his forehead. An obvious struggle was going on inside his mind.

To tip the scales in her favor, she stretched and planted a kiss on his chin, licking his flesh in the process. She kept her expression sensuous, though she wanted to gag at his taste. "I want to be able to grip you with my legs ..."

He sneered at her. "You're hot for me, aren't you? Slut, slut, slut!" With each word, he snipped at the ropes securing her. Several minutes passed as he sawed at the thick ropes, struggling to break through them with the scissors.

Adrienne suffered every insulting word, every grope and squeeze of his fumbling hands. She felt separated from her person, as if her spirit had detached itself from her body and was floating above, watching. Physically, she bided her time, waiting for the last length of rope to fall away from her, waiting ... waiting ...

He gathered the rope into one untidy ball and threw it to one side.

She raised her knees and opened her legs, forcing a smile. Blood from her numerous scissor wounds trickled down her calf and dripped onto the floor.

He moved eagerly between her thighs.

She held up a hand. "Wait!"

"What?" He roared. "Are you playing with me?"

"You haven't taken off your pants," she said, lower lip protruding in a fake pout.

He leered. "Oh yeah, I forgot." He stood up and took off his pants and underwear. His cock sprang out, short and stumpy.

"Oooh," she cooed, "well, come on, big guy, what are you waiting for?"

He knelt down between her legs, not appearing to mind the blood red rivulets on various parts of her legs.

Her foot shot out, aiming for his groin.

"Ow!" The impact sent him sideways to the left, clutching that side of his crotch. "You bitch!"

Drat! She missed! Blast her wounds; they hurt too much! She sprang up and hobbled as fast as she could toward the door.

"Get back here!"

Her hand closed over the doorknob. Two meaty hands closed around her waist and dragged her forcefully away from the door. She struggled and twisted and writhed. She flailed and thrashed, swinging her hands and kicking her feet with desperate strength, determined to hit him, resolved to bring him down. Her leg wounds stung and ached, but she ignored them. Her elbows poked into his chest. By some lucky stroke, she stabbed his thigh with the heel of her foot. Hard.

His hands tightened until she fought to draw a breath.

"You bitch!" He threw her on top of the bed and towered over her, breathing heavily from his exertions.

Winded, she stared up at him, heart thudding in fear. In a quick, surprise move, she rolled off the bed, and her feet hit the floor running.

A roar of rage sounded from behind her, and then she was tackled to the floor. The breath was knocked out of her. Her face smacked hard on the concrete. Her nose bled.

He flipped her onto her back, fury etched on his face. His eyes burned with an unholy anger. His lips twisted into a snarl. "You played me for a fool!" He caught her hands and pinned them above her head. With some maneuvering, he subdued her legs with his thighs.

He was so heavy. She was losing the feeling in her legs, felt crushed beneath his weight. She tried to fight him, but she couldn't even move her limbs. She had no strength left. He slobbered against her neck. She shook her head, trying to escape his touch. His cock nudged against her pussy. Tears of frustration and helplessness pricked her eyes. "No ... no ... no ..."

The door banged open. Loud growls filled the small room, like that of predator cats or wolves.

Adrienne's head snapped in that direction, and she opened her eyes. Tears threatened to spill again, but never was there a more welcomed sight. Her breath caught on a sob. *Jake's here, Jake's here*, her mind chanted.

Jake's massive body filled the doorway. The voice that issued from his throat was deep and harsh. "Take. Your. Hands. Off. Her." In a fast blur, he ate up the distance separating them. He hooked one hand around Charlie's neck. His fingers tightened.

Charlie turned purple. His eyes bulged with terror. His hands slackened.

Jake growled. "Since you can't act fast enough to suit me, I'll do it for you." He lifted Charlie by the neck and threw him across the room.

Adrienne heard Charlie crash into the wall with a loud thud, but she only had eyes for Jake.

He sat down beside her, a tender expression on his face. He laid a gentle hand on her cheek. "Look at you."

Her tears spilled. Extreme joy and utter remorse mingled within her. She struggled to sit up. "Jake ..."

He made her lie back down. "Let's get you to a hospital first. We'll talk later."

* * * * *

Adrienne opened her eyes, aware of the parched feeling in her throat. She looked around. The ceiling was white, the wall was white, and the bed was unfamiliar. Weak sunlight streamed in through the curtained windows. There was an antiseptic smell to the room that she remembered from another time. The hospital. She croaked, “Water.”

She didn’t think that anyone was in the room with her, but a feminine voice spoke up from somewhere near her feet. “You’re awake. Hold on, girl, while I get you that water.”

A moment later, the strange woman approached the bed from the right side and supported Adrienne’s head while she sipped the water from a straw. “Slowly now, girl, that’s it. There.”

Adrienne lay back down, exhausted. She closed her eyes. She heard the woman dragging over a stool to sit beside her bed.

“How are you feeling?”

Adrienne opened her eyes.

The woman was really a sight for sore eyes. Although there were tiny lines on her face and a sprinkling of white among her short black strands, beauty was still etched on her face, with her high cheekbones and clearly defined features.

“Better.” Adrienne smiled a little. “Who are you? You couldn’t be a nurse. You’re too elegant.”

“Oh, won’t James be amused when he hears that!” The woman trilled. She leaned in confidently. “He always says I’m old; now I know he’s just jealous.” She smiled cheekily. “I’m Teresa, by the way. Jake’s mother.”

“Oh, Mrs. Wo-Woolf,” Adrienne stammered.

“Call me Teresa,” the woman said, her hands pressing firmly on Adrienne’s. She added with a twinkle in her eye, “Or Mom, if it’s not too early.”

Adrienne had never thought herself capable of blushing, but she found herself heating up. She met Teresa's eyes shyly. "I'm afraid it's a bit too early for that."

"I was afraid you'd say that." Teresa gave a mock sigh. "I'm in despair of my children ever marrying. I have five, you know, and not one of them shows any sign of settling down."

"But you're still young. Surely, you don't want to have grandchildren yet." Adrienne found herself teasing her, trying to appeal to the woman's vain side.

"I'm a mother at heart, Adrienne." Teresa patted Adrienne's hand. "I love the sounds of childish laughter and running feet. That's why I was so excited when Jake told me that you have a 10-year old brother; maybe you can let him visit me sometime. I would so *love* to meet him."

Adrienne's eyes filled with tears. Teresa reminded her of her own mother, who had passed away many years ago. Impulsively, she took Teresa's hand. "David would love you."

"There, there. All that crying can't be good for you." Teresa used a tissue and dried Adrienne's tears with a gentle hand. "You're just starting to recover, you know."

"How long have I been here?"

"You've been asleep for two whole days." Teresa frowned. "We were getting worried, but Tara said you were healing, that your body needed time, and that sleep was the best for now."

"Tara. She --" Adrienne hesitated, wondering if it was her place to say anything. "She misses you all, you know."

"Yes, I know." Teresa's voice was sad.

Adrienne decided not to pursue the topic. Anyway, she wasn't part of the family yet. She couldn't deny, though, the great yearning that rose in her at the thought of belonging to Jake. Now, more than ever, she was determined to work things out with him. Nothing like a near-death experience to bring things into the right perspective.

A deep, familiar voice came from the left side of the bed. "Adrienne."

Adrienne turned. Tears filled her eyes at the sight of his beloved face. She opened her mouth, but no sound came. She tried again. "Jake." Her gaze touched lovingly on his clean-shaven face, noting his haunted eyes and slightly gaunt face. "What happened to you?"

He moved and took over his mom's place at her side. "You." He captured her hand in his fist and brought it to his mouth. His eyes looked intensely into hers.

"I'm sorry." She was so absorbed in looking at him that she barely noticed what she was saying. She wasn't even aware of Teresa leaving the room, until the door clicked shut after her.

He shook his head. "Not your fault. If I hadn't gone out that door so fast, those guys wouldn't have --"

"We couldn't have known they were out to get me. If you had stayed, maybe they would have captured you as well --"

"Capture a wolf?" An amused look crossed his face. "I'd like to see anyone try."

Adrienne thought about it and laughed. "You're right." She turned serious. She searched the gray-brown depths of his eyes intently. "Jake, I swear I wasn't having sex with Lucien and Paul when you barged in on us. I was angry with you, and I wanted to hurt you as much as you've hurt me. That's why I made it sound like you interrupted us in the middle of --"

"But you -- the three of you -- were lovers." His voice was quiet and devoid of emotion.

Chapter Twelve

“That was before the two of us.” Adrienne’s voice was equally quiet. “I never intended to take up with them again. The sex was purely physical, Jake, without the gut-wrenching emotions that tore me up inside when I thought you had betrayed me.”

She waited for some declaration on his part, some avowal of love, of affection, but she waited in vain.

“Betray you? Hurt you?” He looked confused. “When did I do that? What did I do to make you so angry?”

Adrienne bit her lip and looked away. Telling him about it was so shameful that she thought of lying. She’d failed to trust him, and brought about a nearly catastrophic event. Yet if they were to build a relationship, she had to be honest with him. She had to trust him now, to understand and forgive her. She gathered her courage and turned back to him, meeting his eyes. Her voice trembled. “I thought you were worming your way into my affections, spying for my stepfather about where I hid David, and when you had the information, you were going to betray me.”

A flash of pain crossed his face. His hand tightened on hers. “Ah. I suppose I couldn’t blame you. After all, we don’t really know each other very well.”

“I should have listened to my instincts; they were telling me that I was totally wrong about you,” she confessed. “But logical person that I am, I couldn’t disbelieve the evidence that I had before me.”

He threw her a sharp look. “Evidence?”

“I heard you talking to someone about the fact you’d found out about David and how you’d have all the information once I was putty in your hands and that you’d bring us both to him once you knew where --”

“Oh, that.” Jake laughed. “I was talking to my mother. I made the mistake of telling her I was dating this girl who had a young brother. She wouldn’t stop nagging until I promised to bring both of you to see her.”

“Oh.” So that’s how Teresa had known about David. An urgent beat tugged at her heart, reminding her of one more thing she had to clear up. “Jake ...” She hesitated.

He seemed to have read her thoughts, because his face went taut. “I’m only sorry that I’m not enough --”

“No.” She placed a finger swiftly over his lips. Her voice held all the remorse within her. “Those were words of anger.”

His eyes looked searchingly into hers.

“You are more than enough for me. It’s just that -- the lack is mine.” She needed to explain to Jake, to try and make him understand as much as she was able to. “My past sexual encounters have made me the way I am, Jake. I enjoy variety in bed, I enjoy having more than one man in my bed, but as I’ve discovered, it is a variety that I can do without, if you cannot accept it. You are enough for me, Jake. You fill all my needs.”

“Adrienne ...” Jake rested his forehead against their joined hands for a few moments. Finally, he looked up, his expression somber. “Life stopped for me when I sensed that you were in danger. I realized then that I need you in my life; I need you as much as I need air to live. I’m willing to try and compromise on -- on --” He swallowed.

She looked at him with tears blurring her sight. She knew what it cost Jake to even say it and love for him rose up from deep within her. She choked, "That's enough for me, Jake. Your willingness to meet me halfway -- it's enough."

"I almost lost it when I knew you were in trouble," he continued in a low voice. "If a wolf can't even protect his mate --"

"Am I?" Her breath caught.

"In my heart, you are." He nodded. "I knew it a long time ago. But you have the choice, too."

"Yes." The moment she said the word, Adrienne felt peace spread throughout her entire being. "You are my wolf-mate, and I am yours." Her voice broke on the last few words. *Jake*. She didn't have to *think* it twice.

Jake's warm lips touched hers and he kissed her with slow, cherishing passion. His lips were trembling, and she knew that he was as affected as she was. There was something about this moment that was sacred, this pledging of their hearts, their whole lifetime to the other.

Jake lifted his head and smiled. "You do know that wolves mate for life, don't you?"

"Then that means I'm stuck with you?" The idea pleased her very much.

He nodded.

She smiled, delighted. "What a great way to spend the next fifty years."

He started to smile back, but then his jaw tightened and the beginnings of the smile faded. "That guy -- did he hurt you?"

Adrienne knew who he was talking about. She still felt sore in certain places, but they would heal, in time. "A little, but nothing that can't be mended. You arrived just when I needed you most." A thought struck her. "How -- How did you know where I was?"

"Can you believe it?" A certain bemusement filled his face. "Up till now, I couldn't. Your voice-thought acted as a beacon for me to find you."

"Wow. That's incredible."

“Thank God you kept on calling me. If not, I don’t know how --” His face twisted.

“I couldn’t stop.” She reached up to caress his cheek. “Calling you was my only comfort.”

His hand tightened on hers.

A commotion at the door interrupted their conversation. Adrienne couldn’t see who opened the door into her room, as it was blocked by a wall of the washroom.

A strident female voice rang out. “And I told you time and time again that it wasn’t Adrienne, but would you believe me? No! You had to go and disturb our Human Resources people and now they’re wondering if Adrienne is above board and --”

An equally harsh male voice interrupted, “Will you stop?! You’ve been at it since I saw you standing along the road, waiting for a cab. If it were not for the goodness of my heart, I wouldn’t even have offered you a lift --”

“Offered me a lift?!” The two of them were still out of the line of her sight, but Adrienne recognized Marcy’s sarcastic voice. She didn’t know who Marcy’s male companion was, though. Could it be Logan? Marcy scoffed, “Ha! More like, you thought you were picking up somebody for a lay. If I weren’t in such a hurry and with no sign of public transport around, I wouldn’t even have considered hitchhiking --”

Adrienne glanced at Jake and caught him rolling his eyes. He smiled at her slightly and spoke, lifting his voice so that he could be heard over Marcy’s companion, who was speaking just then. “Guys, guys. This is a hospital, you know, where sick people come to get well in *peace and quiet?*”

God, she loved this man’s sense of humor.

“I don’t see why that should be so. When they’re dead, they will have all the peace and quiet they want.” Marcy shot back, coming into sight. She squealed when she saw that Adrienne was awake and came over to hug her tight.

The hug went straight to Adrienne's heart, healing the rift caused by Marcy's suspected betrayal. As in Jake's case, she should have known that the friend who had stuck with her through all the turmoil she'd suffered at work would never have betrayed their friendship.

Marcy stepped back. "You okay?"

Adrienne nodded, warmed by the worry in Marcy's eyes. "Better now." Adrienne gestured toward the man who had appeared behind Marcy and was now standing at the foot of the bed. "Who's your boyfriend?"

Marcy snorted. "Hardly. That's Jake's elder brother, Jared."

"I wasn't aware you knew each other." Jake looked from one to the other.

"We don't." Jared shared similar features with Jake, but he was taller and more muscularly built. Adrienne thought Jake possessed an overpowering presence, but it was nothing compared to Jared's. The man oozed authority with his every gesture and stance.

"I was on my way home when I saw her by the roadside. She seemed vaguely familiar, and that's when I realized she worked for you. So, being a good Samaritan --" He ignored the snort from Marcy. "-- I stopped and offered her a lift."

Jake still looked confused. "But that still doesn't explain how you know Marcy. When did you go to my office?"

"The last two days while you were busy taking care of Adrienne, he came over once, ostensibly looking for you." Marcy shot a dirty look at Jared. "What he was really after was some information about Adrienne. He stirred up a hornet's nest over at HR."

"What? I don't understand." The more Adrienne listened, the more things got muddled. "Why were you asking about me?"

"I can't go into the details of the case I'm working on." Jared sent her a brief, apologetic look from the foot of the bed. "But the gist is that my client wanted me to find a girl who came from the United Kingdom. The trail led to your company, and when I heard that you

were from Edinburgh, I thought you might be the one. That's why I was snooping around in your HR department."

Adrienne panicked. What did that mean? Was her stepfather Jared's client as well? Why wouldn't her stepfather just let go and let them live in peace? In the midst of her alarm, she felt Jake's reassuring squeeze on her hand. She met Jake's eyes. Her heart filled, overflowed. She wasn't alone. Not anymore. From now on, he would be there beside her. She squeezed back.

It was Jake who asked, "Did you come to any conclusion?"

Jared nodded briefly. "I received additional information that the one I was hired to look for has a twin sister, which Adrienne doesn't have."

Adrienne released the breath she wasn't aware she'd been holding.

"See? I told you so!" Marcy crowed from her place on Adrienne's left. "You shouldn't have wasted so much time and effort trying to ruin Adrienne's name at the company!"

A low growl issued from Jake's throat.

Adrienne's head whipped around. Jake was staring intensely at Jared, his features rearranged into the beginnings of a ferocious frown. She felt the vibrations of his anger along her skin.

"It's not ruined, I assure you!" Jared said hastily. He shot a furious glance at Marcy. "Will you stop saying things you know aren't true!" Turning back to Jake and Adrienne, he continued, "Have faith in my many years of being a PI, for heaven's sake. I know what I'm doing. Your HR Manager thought I was interested in Adrienne and merely wanted to know more about her. She thought it was so romantic that I wanted to surprise her with her favorites on her birthday, which is two months down the road, by the way." This information Jared directed toward Jake. He boasted, "She was so helpful, bringing out the whole file for me to see and browse at my leisure."

“Miss Prissy Ice Queen?” Marcy’s eyes were wide with shock. “The one whom our director couldn’t talk into letting him see *his own* file? You must have cast a spell on her.”

Jake was frowning. There was a soft warning to his voice as he said, “Jared?”

“Stop acting like Dad. It was just a nudge!”

“A nudge?” Adrienne felt more and more adrift. “You mean you nudged Prissy? As in a body nudge?”

“More like a mental nudge,” Jake corrected wryly.

Adrienne caught on. “That’s his gift?”

“Gift?” Marcy looked bewildered. She looked from one face to the other.

“He’s psychic,” Adrienne explained briefly. “Show me.”

Jared just looked at her. The silence was deafening in the room. He continued to look at her. Why wasn’t he doing anything? He’s taking so long. God, all this waiting was making her thirsty. Oh, didn’t Teresa leave a glass of water on the bedside table? Adrienne reached out for the glass ...

... and looked at the glass in her hand perplexedly. She wasn’t even thirsty. What was she doing with the glass? Wasn’t Jared going to demo something?

She looked up at Jared irritably. “Well, what are you waiting for?”

He pointed at the glass. “I just did.”

That threw her for a spin. “Huh?”

Jake spoke up. “You weren’t thirsty, were you, Adrienne?”

She shook her head.

“He made you believe you were thirsty, so you picked up the glass, intending to take a drink. Before you could do that, he released you from the thrall.”

Marcy’s wide-eyed stare hadn’t diminished one bit. “Man, you’re a dangerous person to be around, Jared. I think I’ll keep far away from you.”

Jared looked like he was about to say something, but then his mouth snapped shut.

“That is one powerful talent, Jared.” Adrienne smiled. “I hope you don’t use it indiscriminately.”

“Jake’s been my conscience all these years.” Jared’s mouth twisted. “If you add to his voice, I think I’ll be kept well in hand.”

Coming from the pack leader, that was an ironic statement indeed. Adrienne delighted in Jared’s sense of humor. God, what a great family to belong to!

“By the way, what happened to Charlie?” Adrienne shivered, remembering her ordeal. “I hope they lock him away for the rest of his life; he shot three people in cold blood, you know.”

Jared and Jake shared a look, but it was Jared who answered. “Yes, you needn’t worry about him anymore. He’s been taken care of.” He lifted an eyebrow. “But three people?”

“There were only those two guys that I saw at your flat, Adri,” Jake chimed in.

“There should have been a girl.” Adrienne was confused. “Her name was Lissa. I don’t exactly know who she is, but she must be related to Lucien, from the way he acted to protect her. From what he told me, I inferred that Charlie had taken Lissa hostage so that Lucien and Paul would do his bidding and kidnap me.”

“The bastard!”

Jared’s eyes flared with anger as well, though his voice was sober and grim as he said, “We’ll do our best to find her. I’ll get my men to check the roads for a girl wandering about. Do you know how old she is, any description of her features?”

“I’m sorry.” Adrienne shook her head. “I’m not much help, as I didn’t get to see her at all. I only know she’s small, so she could be anything from, maybe age ten to twelve?”

Jared nodded and turned away to speak into his mobile phone.

Adrienne shuddered, her eyes on Jake. “Charlie’s pure evil. He was the one who sent me all those awful gifts --” Adrienne paused as Marcy gasped. “-- and he made a few

threatening calls.” Now that she had started, the words poured out. It was a cleansing that she needed badly, having confided in no one. “He shadowed me from work almost everyday, and he was also the one who caused the car accident on the day I was kidnapped.”

“Why did you never tell me any of this?” Jake grasped her by the shoulders. “I could have asked Jared to investigate who it was, and I would have made sure we were together all the time.”

Adrienne closed her eyes in remorse. When she opened them a moment later, she smiled at Jake sadly. “Why? There are so many reasons, but the bottom line is, I didn’t know who to trust. I dare not trust anyone lightly. Not only was my life at stake, but my brother’s life was in danger as well.”

“Your brother?” Marcy echoed. “I didn’t know you had a brother.”

“It wasn’t in your file either,” Jared put in as he snapped his mobile phone shut.

“I couldn’t take the chance of anyone knowing about him.” Adrienne looked straight at Marcy. “I never told anyone, until Jake started asking about a kid’s drawing that he saw at my house. His name is David, and he’s my brother. Half-brother, actually. We share the same mother; my mother died giving birth to him.” She continued with a catch in her voice, “I miss him. I used to visit him every day after office hours, but since the phone threats started, I dared not go to see him.”

Marcy’s gaze softened. “You don’t have to tell us if you don’t want to, Adrienne.”

Adrienne had come to a decision. “No, I want to tell you, but I must ask that you keep it secret.” She waited until they all nodded before she continued. “Charlie didn’t exactly tell me who hired him to kill us, but I know of only one person who might be responsible: my stepfather.”

There were shocked gasps and questions of “Why?” from the other three in the room.

“David is ten years old, and he is ...” Adrienne took a deep breath. “... autistic. His mental development is slower than other kids, although outwardly, he looks very normal. He

lives in his own world of magic and fantasy creatures; sometimes, he doesn't even hear us calling him. Needless to say, he didn't do very well in class, although his art teacher was very impressed with his drawings.

"My stepfather couldn't bear to have an imperfect child. You have to understand, he's the chairman and CEO of the UK's largest hotel chain. His image was tarnished by whispers of his 'retarded' son. Many times, he tried to put David away, to lock him up in an institution somewhere, maybe an asylum." Adrienne gave a bitter laugh. "I wouldn't allow him; I believed that David should be given as normal an upbringing as possible, among family. I tried to protect him as best as I could, but in the end, I failed." She sighed. Her shoulders slumped in defeat. "I put David into an institution myself, here on Tolidet Island, as I couldn't care for him and earn a living at the same time."

"What happened?" A trace of anger underlined Jake's voice. "Your stepfather forced you out of the house?"

"No." Her lips twisted. "His third wife gave birth to a perfect baby boy. Afraid that she'd be given less in the inheritance, she wanted my stepfather to put David away for good. I came to overhear their conversation. I was afraid of what my stepfather would do, as he was so enamored of her. So, I took David and ran. I made a false trail, leading to Canada. We were safe for awhile, for fourteen months. How short it seems now."

"So, what you're saying, Adrienne," Jared said thoughtfully, "is that you aren't sure that it was your stepfather who sent Charlie."

Adrienne breathed out. "Yes." She could remember her conversation with Charlie clearly, and not once did Charlie mention a name, only a description: a rich Englishman. With her affirmation, she gave voice to the fear that had been nagging at her.

"You mean it could be someone else?" Marcy exclaimed.

"But who?" Uncertainty and foreboding plagued Adrienne. Her hands twisted together in her lap. "I don't really have any idea."

Jake and Jared exchanged a glance.

Jared spoke up. "Why don't I investigate the matter for you, Adrienne? I have some contacts in the UK. I'll be very discreet, I promise."

"Um ... I just thought of something." Marcy bit her lip when they all looked at her. "I mean, if the mastermind is really your stepfather, Adrienne, and if he is really as determined to do away with David as you say, don't you think he will send another man to replace Charlie when he realizes that Charlie has been incapacitated?"

Fear gripped Adrienne in its thrall.

Jake squeezed her hand. "Don't worry. I'll be with you at all times from now on. Nothing and no one will get through me."

"Right." Marcy's hand found its way onto Adrienne's other hand. "You're among friends now."

"And family," Jared added, his voice brooking no argument.

"And when you're ready to talk to your stepfather, I'll be there beside you. For now, you're safe." Jake assured Adrienne, his hands tightening painfully on hers. "You're both safe."

"Safe," Adrienne echoed, her eyes misting with tears.

Epilogue

Edinburgh, United Kingdom

He punched in the familiar numbers and held the phone to his ear.

Ring ring. Ring ring.

He tapped his foot impatiently on the linoleum floor.

The phone continued ringing incessantly. Endlessly.

Incensed, he heaved the phone across the room. Its cord jerked out of the socket. The phone crashed against the opposite wall.

He ignored the broken apparatus and paced the room. His robe swirled about his legs in angry patterns.

It was the nth time he'd tried calling Charlie in the past five days. Each time, the phone just kept on ringing or was picked up by strangers. He couldn't understand how Charlie could have failed to be at the particular phone booth they had agreed upon to take his call. He'd given Charlie a list of the days and times he would be calling, and pending a major catastrophe, he had strongly emphasized to Charlie that he expected him to be there.

He stopped short.

Unless ...

His eyes narrowed.

Could it be that his henchman had been caught?

He cursed softly.

Yes, that must be it. It would explain why Charlie never picked up that blasted phone.

But how had that happened? One defenseless girl ...

He couldn't afford to lose any more time. There seemed to be no recourse left but to send the one he trusted most. He'd have to change his strategy as well.

An evil, delighted smile crossed his face.

That one would get the job done. Adrienne Lee would have no hope of rescue from him.

* * * * *

One week later ...

"Woo hoo!" Jake whirled Adrienne around the room.

Adrienne laughed. He had taken the precaution of moving the low glass coffee table in the middle of her living room before whirling her around. "You still haven't gotten over it?"

"You mean you have?" His voice mocked her.

She shook her head. "No. I still can't believe we got the contract. Will we have a fat bonus at the end of the year?"

"You bet. Aside from which, the company is rewarding us with a three-day, two-night stay at an island resort of our choice!"

"Great! Let's choose the most expensive, plushiest resort."

“How mercenary you are, my love.” He caressed her nose with his. “You may invite Marcy along to occupy the other room, since we’ll be using only one.”

“I’m sure she’ll love it.” She opened her mouth to say something, and then closed it. Of course, Jake took the bait.

“What is it?”

“I was wondering if we should invite Jared along.”

His eyes twinkled with evil intent. “Are you matchmaking your friend with my brother?”

Adrienne aimed a light punch at his chest. Desire began to raise its delicious head within her. “Didn’t you see the sparks between them? I’m sure they’re perfect for each other.”

“Not if they kill each other first.”

They laughed.

Adrienne unbuttoned his shirt. “Let’s stop talking and get into bed.”

“We can still talk in bed.” His eyes were hot with naked lust. He caressed her buttocks with urgent hands.

“I’d much prefer to do something else in bed,” she responded with a deliberately husky tone. She tore away from his arms, stopped at the doorway to her bedroom, lowered her eyes to half-lids and aimed him a sensuous look. She crooked a finger at him.

He started toward her, shook his head, and went to the door instead.

She watched, shocked. Was he leaving?

At the door, he bent to get something from the floor. Plastic bag in hand, he walked in her direction.

Her sultry smile returned of its own accord. “What have you got there, lover?”

His smile sent goose bumps across her body. It made her want to tear off his clothes and attack him.

“Something that will please you very much.” He reached inside the bag and drew out something elongated.

It was a long dildo, a dildo made in the fashion of a realistic-looking cock, with all the veins and bumps.

Her eyes widened.

“I’ve been thinking seriously about this need of yours.” He reached out and caressed her cheek. She closed her eyes and rubbed against his hand, letting his voice wash over her. “I love you, Adrienne. I don’t want to change any part of you; it is what made me love you in the first place. I want to try to accept it, so I thought we’d go with a toy for the second cock initially.”

Love for him overflowed her heart. She couldn’t ask for anyone better. She opened her eyes and looked at him. “You don’t have to do this, Jake. I can live with just you in my life --”

“Yes, I know I don’t have to; but I *want to*.” His eyes were earnest and dead serious. “There is a difference, you see.”

“You really want to?” She asked slowly.

“Yes.”

A wide grin split her face. “Well, what are we waiting for?” She stood on tiptoe and planted a kiss on his lips. “I love you, big guy.”

He said teasingly, “And that’s why you love me: my big cock --”

“Big heart,” she said, tracing a heart-shaped figure over his chest. She continued impishly, “Although the big cock doesn’t hurt.”

Jake laughed. “I knew it!”

Hands flew, tearing off clothes amidst laughter. Lips meshed, twisting together in a hungry torrid kiss. Her hands caressed his back, lowering to palm his buttocks, kneading and pulling him closer. His hand insinuated itself between their bodies, dipping into her folds to test her wetness and encountered the gushing cream of her desire.

They fell onto the bed in an ungainly heap. Their kiss broke off, allowing them to catch their breath.

Adrienne tingled from the intense look in Jake's eyes as he gazed down at her. His fingers were still in her pussy, playing with her clit and inciting her to more wetness.

He handed her the dildo. "Play with it for me."

Her blood boiled. Taking the dildo from him, she placed the tip of the dildo in her mouth. Without taking her eyes from him, she licked the protruding head and sucked it the way she did his cock. Thicker and rounder, the dildo filled her mouth. She missed the way a real cock throbbed in her mouth though, and the feel of satin sheathing steel.

She was gratified by the way his nostrils flared and the increased intensity of heat in his eyes.

She pursed her lips in a kiss as she drew the dildo away from her mouth. She ran it down her body, circling her breasts and then down her abdomen to her pussy. His eyes followed its teasing movements. She nudged his hand away and pushed the dildo slowly into her dripping cunt.

His breathing quickened. One hand played with her breast, but his eyes never strayed from where the dildo was slowly fucking her pussy.

God, the dildo was stretching her. It seemed to be a bit thicker than Jake and massaged every inch of her vaginal walls. It felt *terribly* delicious. Her eyes fluttered closed. She was soon lost in the building sensations, the increasing pressure ...

Jake grasped her feet and put them on his shoulders.

Her eyes opened.

Jake hovered over her.

Raw desire was stamped on his face. His cock was a bulging stiff length of lust. "I'm joining you. Wait for me," he said, his voice guttural and hoarse.

Hunger gripped her in its basic state. Even with the dildo in her pussy, she wanted Jake's cock in her as well.

He dripped lubricant into her opening and onto his cock. His hands stretched her ass cheeks apart. He drove into her tiny opening.

She gasped. Two cocks stretched her, filled her. Jake thrust in a rapid blur, his cock rubbing against the dildo through the thin membrane separating the two passageways. It created a friction that burned her. She arched. Her fingers worked the dildo, brushing over her clitoris as she slammed the heel of her hand down on it. Hard.

Incredibly, she felt his wonder at the newness of the experience, of having another cock rubbing against his, of the increased tension it engendered. His surprise mingled with a satisfying enjoyment and slammed into her hard, mixing with her own.

It was too much. She started to buck. She screamed his name and convulsed, her muscles constricting around the two cocks, milking them of their essence. Jake shot his load into her, shouting as he came.

Seconds later, they lay on the bed side by the side, panting. Jake removed the dildo from her pussy, which dripped with her cum.

Adrienne's gaze roved over his face, searching for any sign of discontent or disgust. Though he had felt pleasure during their lovemaking, there might be some negative feelings *after* the fact. Though she looked closely, she didn't observe anything other than male satiation. "What do you think?"

"It's incredible." He captured her lips in a passionate kiss. "*You're* incredible. I never thought it would be that way. I think I want to try it again." His eyes twinkled. "Or do you have more tricks up your sleeve?"

To say that she was delighted with his response was an understatement. “Don’t worry, love, there are lots *more* things I want to experience with you.” She leaned close and murmured against his ear, as if sharing a dirty secret. “How about let’s try this position next? ...”

 THE END 

Kai Andersen

Kai has always loved books. For as long as she can remember, she has been fascinated by stories. The humdrum of her life forced her to seek the excitement that could be found in books. As Belle said in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, far off places, daring swordfights, magic spells, a prince in disguise... What can top that?

Her real life was pretty boring until... until... that day in June 2004 (of course I remember, it's a momentous day in my life!), when one of Loose Id's editors contacted her for her full manuscript. It wasn't even an acceptance, but already her heart was bursting with joy.

So these days, she still tries to trick the world into thinking that she's a tough, no-nonsense career woman, her boss however is not fooled. He sees through the conservative clothes to the passionate woman beneath and decides to make her his.

At least, that's her latest favorite fantasy. ;) It's so much more fulfilling than real life, don't you think?

You can find Kai Andersen on the Web at www.kai-andersen.com , or email her at author@kai-andersen.com.