

BEASTLY INTENTIONS



WENDY STONE

Beastly Intentions

a novella of erotic romance by

Wendy Stone

Phaze
6470A Glenway Avenue, #109
Cincinnati, OH 45211-5222

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Also by Wendy Stone

A Gamble Worth Taking

Chapter One

"Hurry up!" His growl reverberated throughout the bed chamber.

She hurried up to him, book in hand, her small satin slippers feet scurrying up the steps that led to the huge, ancient bed in the center of the dark, stuffy bedroom. Sitting on the edge, she lifted the book, showing him the front of it, waiting quietly.

"Go on!" he growled, his temper foul.

"Once upon a time," she began, reading from the old book, for that is how all good fairytales begin here and everywhere in the world. "There was a girl born on the edge of a small village to poor people..."

* * * *

Melissa was a beautiful girl, full of love and laughter, and always a kind word to say to any who needed it. She lived with her parents, her father was a slightly bewildered farmer whose crops never amounted to much more than what the family needed. Her mother, once a carefree woman, took in mending and made clothing for the family's more affluent neighbors to help make ends meet.

When it became known that the big manor house outside of the village was being cleaned out, that an owner had been found and would be moving to the country for health reasons, her mother sent her to inquire about work, Melissa was old enough to be a maid.

She dressed in her nicest dress, a muted green that made her hazel eyes shine with gray green flecks and brought out the gold in her blonde hair. She pulled her long tresses back from her face, catching it up in a tail at her nape that fell to the small of her back. She'd blossomed into a beauty in the last days of her eighteenth year, her figure filling out the bodice of the dress nicely, leaving small mounds of flesh to draw the eye. Her hips were slender but ripe, her buttocks pleasing to watch as she walked to the manor house and rang the bell.

"Yes, miss?" said the older gentleman who opened the door. He was thin to the point of leanness, his head bare of hair except for the tiniest bit at his ears. His arms seemed almost too long for his body and his nose

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filled his face overly much, making him one of the homeliest men she'd ever seen.

"My name is Melissa, sir. Melissa Turner. I come from the village seeking employment." Her voice was breathless from nerves, her cheeks were burning and she knew they must be bright red.

The gentleman opened the door wider, ushering her into the foyer of the huge manor which was still full of cobwebs and dust. "My name is Jeffrey, Miss Turner. I will let the master know that you be wishing to work here." He turned, hesitated a moment, and turned back toward her.

"The master is a sick man, Miss Turner. His illness has taken a toll not only upon his body but upon his manners as well. He isn't...an easy man to be around. But he is a good man and a fair master most of the time." His ears turned red and he stammered out the order to stay put, as if he were embarrassed by what he'd just said.

He was back before she could get even more nervous, waving her ahead of him, guiding her to a room at the back of the manor house. "He will see you, miss, but I must warn you. Today is not one of his better days. Do not be offended by anything he says. He's not himself."

Melissa nodded. "Thank you, Jeffrey," she said, bobbing him a small curtsy and taking a deep breath as he opened the door and waved her in.

She entered the room. It had once been a grand library, with shelves over all the walls that were now empty of books and covered with dust. A fire roared in the fireplace, sending a wisp of smoke back into the room and causing her to cough lightly as she looked around.

"Well," a voice roared from the shadows. "What are you waiting for?"

"Sir?" she asked, her hand rising to her throat as nerves tried to overtake her.

"You want something...spit it out, girl."

"A...A job sir, that is all that I want," she said, speaking up loud enough for him to hear. "I will work hard for you if you will but hire me."

"Undress," he growled from his hidden corner.

"But..."

"Do you want the job or not, girl? Undress or be gone."

Melissa stood, indecisive. Her mother had told her to not return home without the maid's job. But to undress in front of a strange man,

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could she do such a thing? Her hand rose to the buttons on the front of her gown, her face and chest burning with embarrassment.

She heard the rustle of material shifting as she slowly pushed the small disk through its hole, staring everywhere but the corner where she could just make out the darker shape of a man. The second small button was undone before she could think, then the third, showing a goodly amount of dark cleavage between her lush and bountiful breasts.

She was on the fourth when her fingers faltered and her hand fisted, holding the two sides of material together. Her chin dropped and she stared at the floor, unable to glance at the figure in the corner.

She heard his growl, low and menacing, a beast that was denied its feast, and a small cry sprang from her lips before she could stop it.

"You wish for a job, you come in here, looking for money from me. Yet you are unwilling to disrobe for me to decide whether you are worth the price of a fuck?" His voice started low, growing louder and crueler with every syllable.

A single tear slipped down her cheek. "Sir, I came for the maid's position. I do not even know what a f-fuck is," she said, stammering over the unfamiliar term.

"Come, come! A girl with a face like yours in a village in the middle of nowhere and you have no knowledge of sex? That is unthinkable." He snarled, though it sounded almost as if he were laughing. "Come closer, girl."

Melissa closed her eyes tightly, forcing herself to step closer though she still refused to look at the form of the master as he stepped into the light.

"Don't you wish to see the monster?" he sneered, his hands coming out to grasp hers and pull them away from the front of her gown. "Don't you wish to look at my face, then run and tell them all in the village just what I am?"

She felt his hands on her skin, his fingertips brushing against the inner curve of her breast and causing her to inhale sharply. The movement caused her curves to swell, as if she wished for him to touch her more.

His low growl sounded unnaturally loud in the now silent room and she peeked through her lashes, staring down at the hands that held the sides of her bodice open. She'd outgrown her only chemise, her mother deciding to wait to make her a new one until she'd finished growing so

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that she was bare to the waist under her gown. She could feel his eyes upon their supple and lush curves.

Then, to her surprise, he slowly buttoned the gown, though she swore his hands shook as he did.

"Tell Jeffrey to hire you," he growled. "You can start in here and unpack the crates when they come." He turned from her, making his way slowly back to his seat in the shadows.

Melissa glanced up, seeing only his back. He was coatless, his shirt almost startling white in the light. His shoulders were wide, tapering down to lean hips and long legs that seemed well muscled in the leather breeches that he wore. His hair was black as sin, as her mother would have said, adding under her breath that it probably mimicked his soul. It was pulled back, the tail curling down to between his shoulder blades.

She couldn't see his face now, and curiosity ate at her.

"I said go, or have you changed your mind about undressing?" he snarled, though his tone wasn't as cruel as it had been before.

"N-no, no sir, I will let Jeffrey know." She bobbed a quick but graceful curtsy and hurried from the room.

That night, her mother was pleased enough to smile at dinner, though the fare on their table was lean. She came close to rubbing her hands together in glee when told the amount Jeffrey had told Melissa she would make every week. She would work from sun up to sundown, and be granted two meals a day. The work would be difficult, but Melissa was not afraid of work, she'd been doing it her entire life.

In the morning, she hurried down the small, rutted road, rushing past the old cemetery that always seemed spooky no matter what time of day it was, and through the huge gates that heralded the manor.

Jeffrey met her at the door of the servant's entrance, holding out a small gray gown with a white apron.

"This will have to do until I can get the village seamstress to make up others," he said with a small smile.

"My mother is the seamstress. If you wish, I can take her your order when I leave tonight. She will be happy for the job." Melissa beamed, for that would make her mother even happier.

Jeffrey left her alone in a small room off the kitchen with an order to hurry along with her changing.

She slid off her own gown, a serviceable blue one that she wore when she worked with her father. Pulling on the gray uniform, she gasped at how tight it was across the bodice, the buttons gaping when she

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moved her arms. The apron, which pinned at the neckline of the bodice, helped to conceal the glimpses of her skin between the buttons and she breathed a sigh of relief. It wouldn't do for the dress to come undone and show off skin, especially after what the master had done the day before.

Putting on her own small slippers, she couldn't help but note that the gown was too short, showing off her shapely ankles and part of her calves, but it couldn't be helped. She would just do the best she could.

Jeffrey glanced at her as she came out of the room, his eyes widening at the sight of her legs. Melissa heard him clear his throat and saw him avert his gaze. She was glad that only a few members of the staff had been hired as of yet. She was the first that would be on the floor. She watched as Jeffrey made a note to have her uniform made first.

"The master wishes you to work on cleaning out the library, miss. He has books that should be here today that he will want uncrated after the shelves are clean. I hope you can handle heights, for the ladders in there are quite tall."

Melissa nodded, going to take the pail of water and rags from him. She followed him into the library, nodding as he closed the doors behind him and left her to her work.

She hummed as she cleaned, wiping off the accumulated layers of dust and cobwebs, using the beeswax that Jeffrey had left with her to give a beautiful shine to the hard wood shelving. She did the lower shelves first, working methodically and getting a lot accomplished in the early morning. Jeffrey returned before the noon hour, drawing her away and into the chef's pantry where he'd set up a meal. He shared it with her and they talked during their lunch.

After lunch, Melissa felt Jeffrey's eyes upon her. "I hope my work so far has been satisfactory," she said quietly.

"Oh, yes. You've been a wonder so far, miss. You bring a breath of fresh air into this dismal place." Melissa saw the smile that came upon his face and felt a heated blush infuse her cheeks.

"Thank you," she answered, smiling brightly and dropping a quick curtsy. She could feel his eyes upon her as she turned, heading back to work, humming a catchy melody.

Nathaniel James Belmont, Earl of Jaspershem, sat in the partially cleaned library, staring at the empty shelves. His books would be brought in today, ridding him of the tediousness of his days of imprisonment. He

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couldn't leave during the week of his affliction, for he would scare any who saw his face.

It became worse every month, beginning with itching so deeply ingrained in his skin that he wondered if he could rip the flesh off his face with the scratching. Then the hair would grow, long, thick, fur like hair, sliding from beneath his skin, covering his body everywhere. His teeth seemed to grow sharper and his nose longer, the pain of his bones growing was so intense that he howled through the night. He found no relief, not even with the strongest of barbiturates.

His eyes grew sensitive to the sun's harsh rays, leaving him with little choice but to hide himself in darkness. His nails grew sharper and he had to take care with how he touched things, for even the heaviest of materials ripped with ease under their lethal edges.

His longing for meat grew until he felt as if he must go and stalk his own, digging his teeth into the freshness of rich, red meat—blood still flowing, pumping thickly throughout. This disgusted him the most, the longing for raw meat, for blood. He worried that if the sickness grew worse, he would have to be locked away, like his father had been before him, or else go insane and kill heedlessly throughout the countryside.

If it weren't for Jeffrey and his loyalty, he'd have gone berserk long ago.

His ears seemed to pick up and his nose lifted, scenting the air only seconds before the door to the library opened and *she* came through it. His eyes roamed over her, noting everything from the stressed buttons to the too short skirt. His heart picked up speed, his nose actually felt as if it twitched.

She was so beautiful, young and naïve, as he'd discovered when he'd told her to undress the day before. He'd never forget the sight of her tender breasts, so full for someone so slender, the tips a perfect pale pink, and soft.

The sight of them made him long to nuzzle against her rounded curves, to lap at those sweet buds until they blossomed for him. He wished to suckle her, devour her every scent and taste, reveling in each one. He wanted to see if the scent of her arousal was as sweet as the acrid aroma of her fear was sour. The scent still lingered, teasing him with the wonder of its freshness and its salty sweetness.

He heard her humming, something soothing and soft. Closing his eyes, he let the tenor of her voice flow over him, feeling it deep inside. It seemed to sink into him, calming the furor of just seconds before.

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Melissa climbed the first ladder, letting the bucket of water rest on one of the shelves just below her. She was glad that she was alone, for the view she would be giving anyone below her would have her mother seeing red. A small laugh escaped her, for her mother had pushed her hard into getting this position. Would she force her to leave if she knew of how she was dressed this day?

Nathaniel heard her laugh and opened his eyes, seeing her standing on the ladder. She rose up on the tips of her toes to reach the top shelf. He saw the ladder jiggle and heard her sharp intake of breath. He realized what was happening and with the swiftness that was part of his monthly illness, he was at the ladder before it could tip, steadying her before she could fall.

"Are you all right?" he growled, his hand holding on to her thigh. He made the mistake of looking up; his eyes took in the long length of her leg, the shadowy depths of her skirt no obstacle to his sharp vision.

It brought the hunger back, the ravenous desire to taste her, to feed off her arousal, to lick the sweetness of her juices off of his fingers. The feeling was so strong, so imperative that he touch her, he had to force himself not to pull her from the ladder right then.

"I...I'm fine, sir. I'm sorry, I didn't know you were in here." Melissa flushed from the knowledge that he could see up the bottom of her skirt and the feel of his hand on her thigh, even if the touch was through the fabric. She could only be grateful that she hadn't yet gotten to wiping out the smoke covered globes of the lamps and the room was dimly lit.

"Come down from there," he growled. "Jeffrey will hire a boy to clean those top shelves. You shouldn't be on the ladders."

"B-but it is part of my job, sir. I cannot afford to lose this position because I am afraid to climb a ladder. Please, sir. Give me one more chance. I can clean these shelves and not fall from the ladder." She cringed. "My mother would be angry if I were to lose this job."

He yanked on her skirt, averting his face from her as she fell. He stepped back, Melissa landing in his arms. Before she could blink, he set her to her feet and stepped behind her so that she couldn't see his face. He held her steady as she gained her balance, never releasing her.

"I said that Jeffrey would hire someone else to do the top shelves, girl. You will do something else. Do not argue with me." His voice grew deeper and he felt an urge to howl that was almost irresistible.

"No, sir," she said quickly, only to stutter, "I...I mean, y-yes, sir, I won't argue."

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"Good." His hands dropped reluctantly from her shoulders, only to return them quickly when she tried to turn. "No!" he shouted, holding her still. "You can't see me!"

"What?" she asked him, her head turning in her confusion. "Why shouldn't I see you?"

"I'm ill. It is not a pretty sight, Melissa. Not one for your eyes to have to see."

"I am made of strong stuff, sir." The sympathy in her voice made him feel as if he could trust her.

"You would have to be made of more than strong stuff, Melissa." He closed his eyes with a sigh, inhaling and drawing her scent inside of him. It triggered a reaction—his cock hardened, his body grew tense. She smelled like spring flowers and sunshine, a hint of the roast beef that Jeffrey had served for lunch and something else, something feminine and sweet with just a hint of spice that tangled his senses into a knot. He was pressed close to her back, a scant inch separating him from the rounded curves of her buttocks. He had but to pull on her shoulders and she would be touching him.

He could see it in his mind's eye. Her back to his front, her head against his chest, for she wasn't a very big thing and he was a large man. She would be pressed against him, able to feel the bulge of his cock as it pressed against her curves, desperate to get out and bury itself inside of her.

His hands could slide under that concealing white apron to those gaping buttons, one small pull and they would come apart, leaving her bountiful breasts as open prey to his hands. He could even imagine how they would feel, warm and soft, the flesh under her skin firm and resilient as he kneaded and played with those full curves.

He could almost feel them under his hands. He flexed those hands now and heard her gasp.

"Sir?"

"I don't mean to frighten you, Melissa," he whispered, moving just a touch closer, drawn to the feel of her warmth, the scent of her body. "I don't wish for you to be disgusted or afraid of me."

"I could never feel disgust at an illness, sir," Melissa said. He could tell her mind wasn't as much on her words as it was on the heat of his body behind hers. He had but to take a tiny step forward and he would be pressed against her. What would it feel like?

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His laugh was rueful and full of self-loathing. "This would," he said. "I'm going to release you and return to my seat, Melissa. Please promise that you won't turn or look until I tell you to?"

"I...I won't," she whispered, and he heard the disappointment in her voice that he was willing to just release her. His hands slid down her arms and she shivered at the strange sensation of fur against the skin of her wrists before he dropped them. For just an instant, his body brushed against hers, her gasp of surprise turning into a low moan.

He heard her gasp then moan, and stopped dead in his tracks, his feet no longer listening to his mind. Instead they moved forward, coming to rest on either side of hers, his body pressing intimately against hers, his hands coming up to rest upon her stomach, pulling her back further.

"I have to do this," he said. "Close your eyes and don't open them."

"Sir?" she whispered.

"Do it, Melissa. Now!"

She did as he instructed her, his hair brushing against her neck. His hands rose from her stomach, but didn't release her, climbing over the small bones of her ribs, his fingers brushing against the buttons that had come undone in her fall.

His moan tickled her throat as his hands slid inside the rough material of the gray uniform. She gasped as the heat of his palms slipped across the tips of her breasts, cupping their round fullness, his fingers squeezing gently.

"Just as I thought," he whispered harshly. "Soft and sweet. Has any man touched you here before, Melissa?"

"N-no, sir." Her hands fisted in the material by her thighs, showing him that she was enjoying what he was doing to her.

He snarled at the exquisite pleasure brought on by the knowledge that he was the first to touch her. Licking his lips, he could feel the growth of his teeth, the canines turning into fangs sharp enough to knick the flesh of his tongue, leaving the taste of blood in his mouth to mix with the innocence of her scent.

Wrapping one arm around her waist, he lifted her easily, taking her to the back of the ancient sofa. "Put your hands on the back," he ordered, closing his eyes. She did what he told her without question. His fingers trailed over the tip of her breast, pulling upon it, feeling the tip turn turgid under his twisting fingers.

His other hand unbuttoned more of the too small gown, sliding under the band of the petticoat she wore, feeling the thin material of the

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too often washed bloomers. One nail rent the fabric with ease, leaving her bare and open to his fingers.

Her gasp was lost as his mouth found her throat, his tongue licking at the tempting beat of her pulse. It thudded so delicately against his tongue, the blood rushing under that small bit of skin and flesh, so close to the surface, so tempting to him. He let his fangs graze her flesh, not breaking the skin, but using subtle pressure and the softness of his lips to cause her heart to beat even faster.

His hand slid down her soft, flat stomach, his fingers tripping over the scant hollow of her navel, tickling across the soft skin of her stomach, enjoying the way she tensed her muscles just an instant before he found the short, crinkly hair that covered her woman's mound. Her body jerked backwards, pressing her bottom against his loins even as her thighs parted, making way for his hand to touch her.

"Sir?" she gasped, unable to stay still.

His lips explored the side of her throat, paying special attention to the soft skin over her pulse. Her body felt so wonderful against his, lithe and slim in his arms. She was soft, mewling her pleasure as he caressed her.

"No one has taught you about love between a man and woman?" he asked her harshly, his fingers stopping just at the top of her slit. He could smell her arousal in the air mixed with the heady scent of fear and her own special aroma that had him panting in need. He wanted to taste her, to turn her in his arms and find her lips, let her tongue play across his fangs, use his nails to rip the small gown from her lush figure. He wanted her bare for his eyes and his lips.

He wanted to drink of her juices, he wanted to taste her virgin's blood.

"N-no, sir. Is...is that what this is?" she gasped, her hips wiggling against him.

"Love is an insipid emotion not worthy of mentioning," he growled, his hand trembling from the effort it took to hold back from touching her wet woman's flesh. "What matters is this, Melissa. The heat of your body against mine, the taste of your skin, the scent of your need, that is what is important."

His hand slid lower. He could feel the heat of her sex against the sensitive pad of his finger. It called to him, making him long to slip further, to part those swollen, soft lips and dip into the wet wonder of her. He sounded like an animal in pain.

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"Please," she whimpered, tipping her head to bare her throat to him more. He could see her tempting pulse even as he heard the sound of her blood rushing through her veins. His hips moved against the soft caress of her bottom, pushing his erect cock against her.

"Please what?" he teased, the pad of his finger tracing the lightly furred lips, denying them both the pleasure of thrusting between. "Please stop? Please let you go? Please fuck you?" The last two words were nothing but a husky growl at the thought of her soft voice pleading with him, using those words an instant before he drove himself into her. "Pull up your skirt," he ordered, not waiting for her answer.

Her hands fisted the material, doing as she was ordered, sliding the material up ever so slowly. Her underskirt rose, too, leaving her legs bare to his gaze. The lace on the bottom of her petticoat brushed the back of her thighs as he stepped back just a little, his hands never leaving her body.

Her bottom was tight and lush, outlined by the tight curve of the back of her pantalets that hadn't been ripped. He could see the sweet crevice that split the wonderful curves in two. Glancing down, he could see just a hint of her curly fur in the tear he'd made. It was as golden as her head, a scant barrier to his lusts.

"Do not move," he whispered huskily, forcing his hands from under her gown. He heard her moan and smiled, a horrible sight if anyone had been there to witness, fangs flashing in a face covered in long black fur, his eyes glowing with unholy pale amber lights. "Keep your eyes closed, Melissa," he ordered sternly as her eyelids trembled. "I do not wish you to see me this way."

He dropped to his knees behind her, his hands sliding up from her ankles, pushing against the insides of her legs to force her to open them. She didn't fight him, seeming to wait breathlessly to see what he would do next. With the tip of one fingernail, he slit the side seams of her only covering, watching as the fragile fabric slipped down, sticking slightly to her legs, only to be hurried along by the palm of his hand.

Then those sweet globes of flesh were bare to his eyes, his to caress, to kiss, and to nip. "Hold still, Melissa," he said softly, moving closer until he could brush his face against her hip. His lips brushed against her skin even as the fur on his face touched her, causing her to shiver.

* * * *

Melissa was confused. It felt as if an animal was touching her, fur, not whiskers against her skin. But how could that be? She had to be

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wrong, for the master wasn't an animal; his touch was gentle and sweet, his breath hot against her creating the most amazing sensations to rush over her skin. Her nipples felt swollen and hard, her breasts tender and yearning for more of him.

She felt daring and wicked, standing this way with him kneeling behind her, rubbing his face against her bottom, almost as if he were marking her with his scent. She was open to him—exposed, naked and wanting, her body screaming for things that in her innocence, she didn't understand.

Then his mouth touched her skin, his tongue coming out to lap at the silkiness of her flesh, sliding over the deep valley of her bottom and into the cleft between her thighs, tasting her. It felt huge, his tongue, stroking over the soft folds of her virgin sex, investigating each wet fold of flesh with a fascination that had her panting and squirming, her legs shaking.

"M-master..." she cried out to him, shuddering when his tongue rubbed against some part of her that sent shattering pleasure through her.

* * * *

"Nathaniel," he growled, never moving his mouth from the sweetness of her. He could feel her virgin barrier, wanting nothing more than to rip through it and feel it tear, taste her virgin's blood upon his tongue even as she screamed her ecstasy to the room.

"W-What?" she moaned, her hands dropping her skirt to hold onto the back of the sofa once more as he made it harder for her to stand.

"My name is Nathaniel, Melissa. I wish for you to use it when we are together like this." Holding her open with his huge hands, he lapped at her clit with the flat of his tongue, hearing her moan and feeling the shaking of her legs as she fought to continue to stand. "Keep your eyes closed, Melissa," he groaned.

Forcing himself from the sweetness of her cunt and its temptations, he rose to his feet, his hands at his breeches, unlacing them swiftly. He groaned his relief as his cock, freed from its leather prison, sprang free, the tip wet with his own intense excitement. He held her waist, pulling her skirt up, baring those sweet globes one more time to his eyes. He could see traces of her juices shining on the inside of her pale thighs, juices caused by him. Her scent was all over his face, his fur wet from her, smelling of her arousal, driving him mad with the desire to take her as his own.

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He stepped forward, letting the tip of his cock slide over the wet flesh, feeling her body jump when he brushed over her clit. His hands went to her breasts, gathering their softness into his palms, feeling the hard tips rub against his skin. His mouth was at her ear, his breathing labored as he fought to not rip and plunge, to plunder her depths as the beast inside him was screaming at him to do.

"I'm going to show you what fucking is now, Melissa," he growled, his tongue tracing around the whorl of her ear, his breath making her shiver. "If you don't want me to, if you want me to stop, you'd better speak now."

He drew her earlobe into his mouth, suckling gently upon the silky flesh, waiting for her answer. He found her nipples with his fingers, twirling and rubbing the hard buds and hearing her moan even as she arched her back to press her breasts into his hands.

"Hold on to the sofa," he snarled, bending his knees and putting his hand on the flat of her back. He grabbed his cock with his other hand, carefully finding the tiny opening that betrayed her virgin sheath. With a grunt and one single push, he felt himself stretching her, the head of his cock breaching her barrier.

Melissa cried out and he gentled his grip, not wanting to hurt her unduly, though the feel of her around him made it difficult to be still. She shifted, digging her fingers into the sofa. He bared his teeth, desperately trying to give her a chance to grow used to his fullness inside of her.

"Are you all right?" he asked, his body leaning over hers, his hands still playing with her nipples, rolling and tweaking the stiff tips.

"It hurt," she said, her voice accusing. She shivered as his lips brushed against the tender nape of her neck.

"I know, little one. But it shan't hurt you again, I promise." His hips moved and he heard her gasp, saw her fingers tighten their hold, felt her arch against him, pushing her hips back and into his as if she didn't want to lose the feel of him so deep inside of her.

She moaned as he slipped his hand down inside her skirts, his fingers delving between her parted thighs. His finger circled her throbbing clit, touching it with a gentleness that made her shake. He moved against her, his hard male flesh inside of her surging and ebbing, his finger making her moan and cry out.

"You feel so wonderful, Melissa, so tight," he panted. His mouth found her throat, his fangs brushing against her skin. What would it feel like to let the beast go, to ravage her as it demanded he do, to sink his

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teeth into her throat and feel her blood in his mouth. Just the thought had him plunging harder into her, his cock battering at her tender flesh, her cunt contracting with delightful spasms that told of her pleasure.

He forced his mouth away even as his climax approached. He did not want to bite her, unable to stop himself as lust flowed from his body to hers. "I'm going to come, Melissa," he growled, hearing her cries of pleasure, drinking in the sounds and scents of her own sweet orgasm as if they were nectar and he one of the gods to consume it.

He ground his body into hers and felt his hardness swell inside of her. He could feel her shivering under him, her cunt fluttering around his cock. He snarled, his hands closing around her waist, his body slamming into hers and she soared once more, her hips pushing back into his. He roared, his head tipped back, and his body arched as he jerked, spurting his seed inside of her in thick, hot ropes of pearly come.

His body leaned against hers, his weight pushing on her arms until she lost her balance, her legs giving out. He caught her before she could fall, lifting her once more with his arm around her waist, holding her to him and taking her around to the other side of the sofa. Maneuvering carefully, he managed to lie down, pulling her back to his front. Her gown was still mussed, her breasts showing beneath the thin fabric of the apron she still wore.

Her hair was no longer in its neat tail, the ribbon she'd worn to hold it back lay on the floor behind them. He buried his face in her hair, feeling it catch in his fur, breathing in the clean scent of sunshine and spring flowers. Closing his eyes, he let his breathing relax, his hand softly caressing her thigh where it was still bare, resting upon his own.

* * * *

When his hand stilled, Melissa shifted carefully, her eyes wide as she pulled out of his arms. He hadn't let her turn around, not once during all the time he'd been with her this afternoon, had he let her see him, not even his hands. Curiosity drove her; she had to see his face.

Taking a deep breath, she slowly shifted again until she was facing him. His pants were still untied; his cock, now limp and tinged with her blood, rested against the black leather. She stared at it for a moment, fascinated by how something that had felt so huge could seem so defenseless now. But then her gaze shifted, slipping up the white shirt he wore, over the plains of his chest that so wide, up to his shoulders, their girth taking up the back of the couch. His head was buried in the pillow, his hair covering his face and hiding it from her sight.

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She reached out with a trembling hand, pulling it back when he grumbled and muttered, waiting until he stilled once more. His hair was silky soft under her fingers. It felt incredibly thick, drawing her closer. She wished she had the nerve to dig her fingers into the mass, to stroke and play with it to her heart's content. She couldn't, not yet, for now she had a mystery to resolve. What was so wrong with his face that he would hide it from her?

She gently pushed the hair from his forehead, her brow furrowing when it seemed so thick. Moving closer, her eyes squinted to see in the dim light, she realized the truth, and at that same moment his eyes shot open. His hand reached out, grabbing her.

She screamed. His eyes were feral, wild, with their eerie amber lights.

"You couldn't resist," he growled at her, his voice hoarse with shock and mortification. He hadn't wanted her to see him like this. Not with her perfect skin and winsome beauty, he didn't want to see the pity in her eyes or feel her scorn. "You had to look. Well, now you must pay the price."

Standing, he tied his breeches quickly, scooping her into his arms and throwing her over his shoulder. She landed with a painful thud, the hard muscle and bone driving into her stomach and knocking the breath from her. She hung there, her legs and thighs bare, her breasts pressing between the edges of the too small gown, visible under the small white apron. Her slippered feet kicked for a moment before he slapped his hand down on the soft globes of her bottom.

He carried her from the room, shielding his eyes against the bright rays of the sun coming in through the front windows. He growled at Jeffrey, who stood on the stairs.

"Master?" Jeffrey blinked in shock at the sight of his master coming from the library, the new maid half naked upon his broad shoulder.

"Not now," Nathaniel snapped. He took the stairs two at a time, going from the slightly clean area at the top of the stairs and down a long hallway. It got darker the further he walked until only dim light came from under the doors they passed. He opened the one at the end, closing it behind him.

Melissa heard the sound of the key turning in the lock and her heart dropped. She was trapped.

Chapter Two

She heard the sound of her Master's low moans, saw movement beneath the soft duvet that covered his large body. It made her smile, knowing that Master approved of her story, and that the sound of her voice speaking such words could make him aroused. She only wished that he would allow them to make love to each other, just as Nathaniel and Melissa had.

"Do you wish more, Master?" she asked him softly, squirming slightly on the side of the bed where she perched, feeling the familiar and frustrating wetness between her own slender thighs.

"Yes," he growled, his breath coming in harsh pants.

"Master, I could..." she began, reaching out to touch him through the duvet, only to be stopped by his snarling roar.

"NO! Finish the story," he snapped.

She jerked back for a moment, then smiled knowing he wouldn't harm her. Despite his growls and snaps, inside he was a gentle and loving man. She knew he cared for her, for he'd taken her from the street when she was a child living in an alley in London and given her food, clothing, shelter. He had taught her how to read and write, things that not even some of the most elegant debutantes being squired about to the most exquisite affairs could do.

"Well," he said. "Don't sit there smiling at me, read!"

She leaned forward and kissed his dark nose, laughing as he grumbled before taking a deep breath.

"Chapter Two: Sweet Captivity...."

** * * **

Melissa felt her breath driven from her once more as Nathaniel moved toward the large, ornate bed, then walked up the two steps and dumped her from his shoulder onto her back. She lay there, stunned, her body limp and in shock from all that had happened to her in such a short amount of time.

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She had known a man's body, if that was what the Master was. She wasn't sure anymore. Whatever he was, he'd brought her the most exquisite pleasure, unlike anything any she'd felt before. But now he stalked in front of her, like a hungry tiger in a cage, his gait long-limbed and loose, his gaze never leaving her. His eerie eyes with their amber light seemed to see into her soul.

She tried to straighten her gown, but he snarled as she reached down for the hem of her skirt.

"Leave it!"

"B-but..."

"You heard me," he growled. He turned, prowling back the other way. "Why did you look at me? I cannot let you leave now." He moved toward the bed, and she cowered back.

"B-but yesterday, in the library, you ordered me to look at you." Her eyes grew wide as he leapt onto the bed, coming down over her, straddling her body and pushing her backwards into the pillows.

"Yesterday I wanted you to leave. I didn't want a frightened woman running through the house. Yesterday I hadn't tasted your flesh or felt your passion," he groaned, his face rubbing against her neck.

"N-now you don't want me to leave?" She didn't move but to speak, not knowing what he would do if he thought she were trying to fight him.

He took one of his claws and played with each of her buttons on the front of her dress, popping the fragile disks off the fabric with an ease that startled her. "Now I want you here. If you leave me and go back to your home, you might not return," he muttered, his tongue coming out to lick at the soft sensitive skin under her ear.

He finished with her buttons, feeling her squirm as shivers of heated goose flesh quivered over her skin. Flexing his hands, he lightly traced the seam lines of the too small gown with his nails, smiling when the fabric gave and a gentle tug left her dressed in nothing but the underskirt which was pushed up around her waist.

Her eyes were huge when he looked down into them. "You want me here?" she asked him.

"Yes," he murmured, finding her mouth with his own.

* * * *

It was her first kiss, and unlike anything she'd thought it would be. His lips were soft, tender, barely touching hers. His breath was warm, clean smelling against her cheek. His fur tickled her skin, and she had the

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almost irresistible urge to reach up and thread her fingers through it, tracing the darkness of it with her hand, smoothing it with her palm.

"Stay with me," he ordered, his tone gentle, his voice sounding almost human.

"What will I tell my parents?" she asked him. Her heart, that soft and tender organ, urged her to give in, as her brain told her to run, to flee this dark place and this dangerous man before he could hurt her.

"I need you. I will pay you more," he said, lifting his head, his body now lying on top of hers.

"But my mother will want to..."

"I will talk to your mother." He closed his eyes, "I will send Jeffrey with a note."

"I...I can't," she said helplessly. "I can't deceive my parents."

"No!" he shouted, leaping off of her to stand next to the bed. "It has nothing to do with them. It's me." His rage built and he knew he mustn't stay much longer for he had very little control when the fury was great. "I disgust you! But you are staying, Melissa. Until I let you go. I will have Jeffrey talk to your parents." He turned, loping out of the room, slamming and locking the door.

He stood outside the heavy portal, his sensitive hearing picking up the sound of her sobs on the other side. For a moment, Nathaniel felt the side of himself the illness had not touched, the side of himself that was kind and giving, and wanted to reach out to her, to let her go and hope that she would return to his side the next day.

But the illness drowned that part of him, fearing that her sobs were for herself, for the fate of being fucked by a man who looked like he did. He caught a glimpse of himself in the small mirror that was hanging in its decorative frame on the peeling wallpaper. Furious, he slammed it against the wall, shattering the glass, wanting to ignore forever what was reflected there.

His face was a mass of long, soft, silky fur, without any roughness or wiriness. It grew down from his face, over his neck, and onto his chest. Thick, it covered even a hint of skin tone. His nose was black and unlike any human nose. It wasn't as big as a wolf's, but it was close to the same shape, though he had no muzzle.

His lips were black on the outside, lost in his fur. On the inside, they were bright pink, and his teeth were glistening white and incredibly sharp. They were made to sink into flesh, living, breathing flesh, to be used to feed though he'd never done such yet. It was as if he kept his

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humanity alive by not allowing himself to take that last step that would take him to the animal that seemed to be growing inside of him. If he fed, he would lose himself.

He hurried down the stairs, avoiding the bright light of the sun which hurt his eyes, to find Jeffrey.

* * * *

"You will tell them that," Nathaniel roared, pacing in front of Jeffrey and trying to control the rage. "She is staying here and that is final."

"Is Miss Melissa happy with that?" Jeffrey asked, nonplussed at the rage his Master showed. He'd taken care of Nathaniel's father, Jonathan, through the same hereditary disease. He'd stayed with him until the end, even when they'd finally taken him and locked him up. He'd taken care of his employer the way he should be taken care of, and Jonathan hadn't touched him, had never so much as nicked him with a claw.

Yes, he would roar and snarl and scare the living daylights out of everyone. But Jeffrey knew that, inside, he was the same gentle man he'd been before the curse of the family had caught up to him. So there was no way he would let Master Nathaniel frighten him now.

"Melissa is happy with whatever I decide," Nathaniel growled, coming up and pushing his face into Jeffrey's. "Now, before I decide to bite that skinny ass of yours, go and tell her parents that she will be living here as part of her duties."

"Yes, my Lord," Jeffrey said, his voice stiff and not full of its usual warmth. He gave Nathaniel a look that only a servant very familiar with his master could get away with, and even then it was a close thing. He turned toward the door, stopping only long enough to look back at his master. "Is Miss Melissa well?"

"I haven't bitten her, if that's what you want to know. But I have made her mine, Jeffrey. She won't be leaving here."

Jeffrey shook his head, his heart breaking for the young girl he'd brought into the house. Unless she grew to love Nathaniel, her life here would be one of pain and heartbreak. He glanced at his master as he closed the door behind himself. At one time, the master been young and full of vigor and life. He'd exuded charm and refinement, losing himself in classical books and the arts. He'd once painted, but his artwork was now stacked in the attic like lost trappings of a past life. He hadn't picked up a brush since the fur had started growing on his body and he'd found his teeth becoming razor sharp, his senses heightening.

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That was the day he'd found out about his father's "illness". Jeffrey had taken him aside, telling him the truth of his mother's death, telling him of his father's confinement and eventual suicide, and how he, Jeffrey, had covered them both up. He'd told him of what he could expect, stressing to the scared young man that, with care and caution, he could still have a hale and hearty life.

Nathaniel hadn't believed him. Instead, he'd taken himself to some of the most reputable doctors in England, paying an absurd amount of money for their silence. None had been capable of helping him. None had wished to do much more than lock Nathaniel in a sturdy cage and study him, report their findings, and gloat to the members of their society about the freak they had.

It had been a heartbroken man who had moved here to the manor house, away from London and everything he'd loved—the bookstores, the theater, and the museums. No, he must live in the country, secreting himself away from everyone he'd known, as the "illness" grew worse.

Jeffrey slowly pulled on his coat, deciding to walk instead of taking the coach and horses. He left the manor, his step steady though his heart was in turmoil. He'd thought he'd done right by sending the beautiful young servant to the master, to try to brighten his life. He thought maybe her classic beauty, so rich yet delicate, rare to be found in a commoner, would have his master itching to pick up his brush once more. Jeffrey hadn't thought that the master would rape the young girl, or take her into his chambers to keep her there.

Perhaps there was more of the beast there than he'd thought?

The trip to the village went too quickly for the older man, and he sighed heavily when he reached the doorway that held the sign of the village seamstress. He could see row upon row of tilled soil, and plants of some kind indeterminate to Jeffrey, popping their green heads out of the ground behind the small shack. With a sigh, he knocked on the crudely made door and waited for it to be answered.

* * * *

Melissa sat with her feet upon the steps leading to the bed, her arms crossed in front of herself to fend off the chill in the room. Nathaniel had not returned, leaving her only partially dressed to fret and stew in the drafty room. The gray uniform was a complete loss; the pieces that remained were barely large enough to make rags.

All she had left was the single underskirt that she'd worn under her gown this morning.

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Was it just this morning that she'd left her home, happy with her new job, nervous about making the right kind of impressions, and with her mother's warnings to do what she was told without complaint so as not to lose her employment, ringing in her ears? She'd done as she was told, she'd been obedient, as her mother had told her, and now look at the mess she was in.

She squirmed slightly on the soft bed, the ache between her thighs throbbing as her pulse rate sped up. Thoughts of the library and the things that the master had done to her there, the way he'd made her feel, sent a rush of pleasure shivering through her. He'd been gentle, somehow even at the end when his body had slammed against hers. He'd taken her virginity, she knew this much, even being as naïve and innocent, and as sheltered, as she had been.

Her mother had told her a little when her monthlies had started. She'd said that the blood signified the loss of life due to no child being implanted inside of her. When Melissa asked how a child was put there, her mother had told her that her husband would do such. That she would marry and her husband would expect her to allow him to touch her and to do ungodly things to her, and she was to lie back and accept such as God's will and her duty.

Mother had never told her about the wild feelings of pleasure, or the flames of desire that had made her feel as if she were burning alive from the inside out. She'd never explained about the caresses or how someone else's fingers upon her breast could send a flooding wetness between her thighs. She'd only talked about duty, acceptance, and a woman's place.

Melissa started as she heard the click in the lock, her arms coming up to shield her breasts from whomever opened the door. She almost sighed in relief when she saw the furry hand come through, then his white shirt and then him, Nathaniel. He held a tray piled high with things from the kitchen which he carried with studied care to the bed, sliding it up onto the high mattress before returning to the door to close and lock it.

"Jeffrey went to the village to speak to your parents. This way is best, you won't be forced to lie and I won't be forced to brave a chance of being discovered by having to come and retrieve you." He slid the key onto the top of an elegant wardrobe that was anchored to the wall. It was much too high for her to reach easily, but he had no problem.

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"It is no better, sir, for your servant to lie than it would be for me to, for it is still a lie told," she whispered, wondering at her daring in the face of the beast.

He smiled, his lips parting to show off his white fangs. "Very well said, little miss, for someone with no formal education. Or have you some?"

"My father was taught. He showed me how to read and write. I...I borrowed books to learn more when I could."

Nathaniel was intrigued. His little captive was more than he'd thought her to be. He went to the wardrobe, opening the wide doors and pulling out a soft black velvet dressing robe. Holding it out, he motioned her down from the bed. "You look cold. You could have covered up in the bed while you waited for my return, Melissa."

She couldn't help the shiver that went through her at hearing his dark, deep voice growl her name the way it did. It was as if he savored the sound of it or the feel of it upon his tongue. "W-what sort of message would that have left, sir, when I had told you that I wouldn't be willing to stay in it?" She stepped slowly off the bottom step, her small hands cupped over the abundant flesh of her breasts, trying to hide them from his sight.

"Little one," he laughed, the sound rusty as if he weren't used to exploring such a happy emotion. "I've seen your breasts. Put your hands down," he ordered, throwing the robe across her shoulders.

She closed her eyes, taking a deep breath before dropping her hands, once more the obedient girl. She felt his hands close over them softly, heard his growl of appreciation before she felt his fur against the side of her face as he brushed his knuckles against her cheek.

"Look at me, Melissa. I am a man, nothing more. This cursed affliction has changed me into the beast you now see before you. Can you not look through the curse and see the person beneath?" he asked, watching as her eyes opened slowly.

He gently caressed her heavy breasts, rubbing the soft tips until he heard her gasp, her beautiful green eyes going half blind with the pleasure he was giving her.

"S-sir..." she began, her soft voice stuttering as he grew bolder in his cares.

"Nathaniel. It is a man's name, Melissa. That is what I am, a man. Not a dog to sit at your feet or a wolf to ravage at your breast, but a man who wishes for you to see him as what he is." He growled softly in his

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throat, his cock throbbing in his pants, longing for another taste of her depths.

She gasped as he dropped to his knees in front of her, the robe sliding from his shoulder to the floor. He moved almost quicker than she could see, with the grace of the beast that he claimed not to be. His hands dropped to the soft curve of her waist, pulling her near as his mouth covered one hardened tip.

Her heart leaped, and her pulse raced as he pulled that morsel into his mouth, suckling hungrily, nibbling upon it with the very tips of his fangs, though he never hurt her. His tongue lapped at the pebbled bud, curling around it and drawing it deeper.

Melissa's hands went to his hair, her fingers digging into the long thick mass, pulling loose the ribbon that held it tied at the nape of his neck. She moaned, a husky sound that sent his passions racing, and arched her back against his arm that held her to him. "O-oh my, s-sir," she stuttered, hardly able to think for the sensuous torment he was inflicting upon her breast.

"Nathaniel," he murmured, never removing his mouth from around her nipple. "Call me Nathaniel."

"N-Nathaniel, my l-legs feel s-so funny," she moaned, feeling them shake.

His hands went back to her waist, holding her still, his nails digging into the fabric of the only garment she still wore. He rent the fabric with a finesse that kept her from knowing it was loose until he stood suddenly, and it fell to her feet. He lifted her in his arms, carrying her with tender restraint back up the wide stairs and placing her upon the wide bed.

Naked, she was an amazing sight, lying upon the dark duvet cover, her body pale and pink. Her legs were long, slender and curved, her feet delicate with pink toes he longed to run his tongue around. Her hips were lush, firm, her hip bones gentle bumps that framed the golden curls guarding her woman's flesh.

Her waist was small, easily spanned by a man's hand, and giving way to the gentle rise of her ribs that drew his eyes up to the full, rounded mounds of her breasts. Almost too big for her slender frame, they sat high upon her chest, firm with pale pink aureole surrounding small nipples that begged for his mouth.

She was beautiful, exquisitely formed, and for the first time since he found himself the victim of this cursed disease, he longed to pick up a brush and paint once more.

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"You will model for me," he growled, his voice losing some of its raspy quality. "Like this but against a burgundy spread." His hands reached for her, turning her, moving her body until she lay upon her side, her hair over her shoulder, her nipples peeking through the golden curls. Her hand was down by the vee of her thighs, her fingers spread as if trying to hide the tender flesh from his eyes, her other arm above her head, stretched out, her hand palm up, fingers curled.

Her eyes were heavy lidded, gazing at him, their green amazingly bright. Her lips were parted, swollen, the bottom one wet from her tongue. There was a light pink flush upon her slender cheeks, telling him of her passionate nature.

He groaned, pulling at the shirt he wore, not caring when it ripped as he tore it over his head. His shoes were next, thrown across the room, one landing on the top of a small dresser, tipping over a vase of flowers that Jeffrey had placed there.

He ripped at the ties of his breeches, pulling them off, then stood before her, his amber eyes begging her to not be afraid, to not find him offensive or repulsive. He stood before her, bare and hurting, knowing that if she turned from him, he might as well become the monster in truth as well as appearance.

Instead of fleeing, she rose to her knees, her hand rising slowly to touch the hair upon his chest. "Why are you like this?" she asked him softly.

"I...I don't know," he said quietly, watching her hand come closer and then finally sift through the thick fur that covered his chest. "I've been to doctors but no one seems to know why."

"W-were you always like this?" she stroked through the thick black stuff, finding his skin under it and feeling the rapid racing of his heart.

"See the painting, the one over the fireplace?"

She nodded, having noted the finely done painting earlier. In it was a young man, his hand on the shoulder of an older woman whom he strongly resembled. Both were extraordinarily blessed with fine features and beauty, though it was the man's eyes that held her attention the most. Eyes that were a soft amber, gentle and kind.

"That is you?"

* * * *

She took a deep breath, leaning forward to take the small cup of water she'd brought with her to soothe her throat, for the reading made

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her dry. His eyes were upon her, she could feel him watching her, though he never moved or touched her.

"Brenna, love, do you wish to stop for the night?" he asked her softly, wishing he could allow himself to touch her golden beauty. It was not his place to be anything but her master, her employer. He could only watch her and yearn to feel the passions she displayed when she read the books she brought to him. He could only dream of feeling her hands around him as he pleased himself to the sound of her voice and the visions he saw in his head.

"No, Master. I but needed a moment to quench my thirst. You are not too tired?" she teased, a glint of amusement in her soft blue eyes.

He growled, but there was no rage in it. He only did it to hear her laugh, soft and sweet, trilling through the old room that was his haven.

"That is what I thought. Come, my fierce master, lie back and allow me to amuse you more," she whispered, her finger stroking over the fur of his face. She picked up the book from her lap.

"That is you?" she continued...

* * * *

"Yes, and my mother," Nathaniel said, his gaze roaming over the picture she made, unable to help the surge of lust that made him hard, his cock bobbing in front of him.

"She is beautiful," she said softly, but her eyes were on him, the soft amber of his eyes, the handsome fine features and slightly crooked smile framed by thick black hair that waved from a widow's peak on his broad forehead, all that the artist had captured with a flare that made them seem almost living. "W-what happened to make you as you are?"

"My father," he growled, his tone showing his loathing. "He cursed me with this. He made me what I am."

"How?" Melissa asked, moving closer to him to touch his hand.

He felt the hopelessness of his situation wash over him. There was no cure, no real reason for the disease, and no one had heard of it before. "I do not know. All I do know is that for a week of every month, I turn into this, a beast, a monster that must hide away and not allow anyone to see its hideous face. I cannot stay in polite society for I am never sure when the first of the symptoms will arrive. He slumped down next to her on the bed, his head falling into his hands.

"But for the rest of the time?" she asked him quietly, her hand resting against his furry shoulder.

WENDY STONE

"I am as you see there. But how can I be happy or live my life knowing that at any time I could become the monster I am now?" He turned to her, the first person besides the doctors and Jeffrey that he'd been able to tell of his disease. She hadn't run from him, she hadn't screamed or called him a beast or monster. She hadn't made him feel diseased and unclean as some had.

His arms wrapped around her, pulling her onto his lap, feeling the soft weight of her body pressing against his. Her naked skin felt good against him. He smelled her scent, let it fill his nose. He held her tightly, burying his face in her mass of gold hair, enjoying the touch of another human.

* * * *

She let him hold her, feeling the length of his cock pressing against her bare thigh. It was like rubbing up against a warm, mink pelt, except this pelt lived and breathed.

"Will you stay with me, Melissa? Will you be my happiness?"

His words were soft and for a moment she wondered if she'd imagined them. But she felt him next to her, his body stiff as if waiting for another heart wrenching blow. "May I read your books?" she asked him softly.

"Every one, twice if you'd like," he offered, his voice eager.

"Will you growl and fuss as you did earlier?"

He hesitated. "It seems the rage comes with the disease. But I can promise that I will never hurt you, Melissa. I will have myself locked away before that even becomes a thought in my head." He stared down at her, so much hope in his eyes that she couldn't help but smile.

"Can I have clothing?"

He laughed a harsh sound that reminded her of a wolf's howl. "Must you?" he asked her back, making her giggle.

"I might catch my death of cold, sir, and then whom would you have to bully and boss?" She reached up, her fingers stroking the fur on his cheek.

"Nathaniel, Melissa. Please call me Nathaniel. I could keep you warm. I'm like a huge fur coat," he said, holding her close and rubbing his hands down her back.

"You are that," she said, snuggling close. "Will I stay here with you?"

"Would you like that?" he asked slowly, his hand rubbing down her arm and over her thigh, sliding up the inside of her legs to nudge the

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creamy columns open and find the wet flesh between. He dipped his finger into her heat, gathering her slickness upon the tip to swirl it around the hidden bud of her clit. "Would it be such a hardship to let me give you pleasure every night?"

She caught her breath at the sudden surge of sensation that swamped her, centering upon her lower belly and that place that his finger caressed with such offhanded ease. "I...I am not one of those women who s-sell their bodies casually, Nathaniel," she said, trying to sound stern, but failing as her breathing faltered to a gasp and her body tightened as pleasure spread easily through her.

His hand slipped from her flesh and he set her aside carefully, his growl the only sign of the restrictions he was putting on his lust.

"If you wish to stay as purely a companion, Melissa, I will try to stay my hand." He stared at her his amber eyes glowing eerily. "It will be difficult, but I will curb my lust if that is what you wish." He hurriedly hopped down from the bed, walking to where her underskirt lay upon the floor, picking up the discarded robe and holding it out to her. "I cannot see your beauty without wanting it, Melissa. I have never been so aroused by any woman as you make me feel." He kept his eyes downcast, not looking at her as she took the robe and held it in her hand.

She stared at him, seeing him not as a beast, but as a man in pain. A man whose life had changed, drastically and horribly. She saw him as that man and could not say him nay, the robe slipping from her fingers to land on the floor at his feet.

"Melissa?" he asked, hope permeating his voice.

"I'll stay," she whispered, her heart pounding with so many mixed emotions.

"As?" he asked, his hand coming up to hover near her face.

"As whatever you wish for me to be, Nathaniel."

A huge smile crossed his face, and he jumped onto the bed, grabbing her in his arms and rolling with her across the huge mattress, landing with her beneath him. His chest pressed against her soft breasts, his stomach slipped over her curved waist. He was cradled in her hips, his cock, hard and throbbing, slipping between her thighs. "I'm so glad, Melissa. I don't know how long I would have been able to keep from touching you."

He bent his head, his mouth searching for hers, finding her lips easily, and brushing soft, sweet kisses upon them, causing her to giggle, a soft sound that he found utterly enchanting.

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"Are you going to fuck me again, Nathaniel?" she asked him softly, no longer stumbling over the word.

"Yes," he whispered, his lips caressing her chin and then sliding down to her throat. "Are you going to fuck me back?" he asked.

"I...I want to. I...I don't know what to do." She bit her lip nervously as his mouth slipped over her throat, his tongue lapping at the tender flesh over her pulse.

"Touch me, like you did earlier," he breathed, inhaling her scent and letting it wash into his soul. He felt her fingers sift through the fur on his shoulders, rubbing against the flesh there. He moaned, for her touch was warm and loving, even if it was a trifle hesitant. He could feel his teeth elongating as her scent filled him, and he became even more aroused. He fought the lust for blood rising inside him, for he wanted this time to be gentle, to show Melissa what making love could be like.

He wished to remain the man in her bed. His hand swept down her shoulder, caressing the side of her breast with his thumb. He could feel them against his chest, her pebbled nipples pressing into his flesh, being caressed by his fur as he moved over her.

"I don't want you to fear me," he looked up at her face, so perfect in the dim light coming from the shuttered windows.

"Or to laugh?" she asked. "Your fur tickles."

"Yes, laughing when being made love to is not exactly good for the male ego," he quipped, rolling his eyes and hearing her laugh. It was such a lovely sound that he vowed to make sure she did more of it.

"I will try not to laugh or fear you, Nathaniel," she said. "But I don't know how to do this, either."

"It will be my honor and my pleasure to teach you," Nathaniel said, his voice raspy and harsh but so much gentler than the growl and snarl he'd used earlier. "Just relax," he urged, brushing her hair back from her face with one tender hand.

His lips feathered over her, soft and sweet, his tongue lightly touching the seam of her mouth, teasing the corners. "Part your lips for me, little one," he urged. "Do not be afraid of my tongue."

She did as he bid, feeling the heat of his breath against her lips only an instant before his soft fur touched her face and then his mouth was on hers. His tongue pressed between her parted lips, gently stroking over their soft lushness, gliding over the smooth, hard curve of her teeth before finding her tongue.

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He coaxed her into responding, desperately fighting the beastly urges he felt that roared at him to take her, to make her his own in the way of the beast that was inside of him. When her tongue pressed against his own, when her mouth opened wider, her head lifting slightly as if she wanted more of him, he could have roared his triumph.

He kept his kisses soft, kept his tongue gentle, keeping a tight rein upon the beast inside of him.

* * * *

Melissa felt the moan like a living creature, as it burst from inside of her. His lips were hot, his mouth wet and dark, his tongue teasing as it played with her own in long drugging kisses. She felt every nuance of pressure from his lips, not only with her own but deep inside, in that place where she felt passion the most.

In the library he had been wild and fierce, strange and frightening. Now he was soft and kind, tender and loving, but he still rendered her breathless, made her yearn and twist her body against him. She wanted more than his mouth; she wanted his hands upon her, his body against hers and inside of her once again. Kissing him back only made the yearning stronger, even as it sent strange shuddering sensations of pleasure through her.

"You taste so good, Melissa," he groaned, his kisses growing rougher as if a piece of the beast had slipped free of his restraint. She moaned, feeling his cock throbbing against her stomach, pressed between their bodies.

Her hands were buried in his fur, her body writhing under the passion of his kisses. She was learning quickly what brought the greatest pleasure, hearing his moan when she daringly slid her tongue into his mouth, tasting him, touching the amazingly sharp points of his fangs. She slid her leg up, luxuriating in the feel of his fur against her smooth thigh, enjoying the sounds of his pleasure as her own rose to join them.

He took as much as he could, allowing her to touch him, to kiss him, until he thought he'd go mad with need. Grabbing her wrists, he held them to the bed in one of his massive hands. He ripped his mouth from hers, his breath coming in harsh pants as he now found her throat with his mouth, his fangs sliding over her flesh, scraping but never breaking her skin. He nipped at her shoulder, then buried his face between the lush mounds of her breasts.

"You cannot touch me," he groaned, lifting his face. "You have to keep your hands there."

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"Did I...Did I do something wrong?"

"No!" he snarled. "You did everything too right. I want to ravage you right now, Melissa. If you touch me, I will." Before she could say another word, his hand went to her breast, squeezing the firm flesh, his mouth finding her nipple, drawing it in and sucking upon it. His tongue lapped at the treasured morsel, his teeth nibbling at the tip. He heard her moan, felt her arch under him, lifting her breast to give him access to more.

Melissa felt his mouth at her breast, feasting upon the soft flesh there. He grazed the fat, swollen tip with his fangs, causing her to arch even more as sensations of pure lustful desire coiled into a hard knot in her belly. He made her feel wild, wanton. He made her ache with wanting him. She couldn't help the way her hips arched, the way they rubbed against him, needing to find something to assuage that ache.

She heard him laugh, harsh, deep, the sound rolling over her, the vibrations tickling her breast. His teeth scraped against her flesh, never drawing blood. Wherever he touched seemed to burn, to beg for more. She could hear cries coming from her mouth, and she squealed when he nipped the skin over her ribs before laving it with his tongue. She felt him move lower, his tongue dipping into the small opening of her navel, tasting her there, lapping at the soft skin of her lower belly and making her muscles tighten as she sucked in her stomach at the feel of him.

"W-What are you doing?" she moaned, his chin brushing against the golden fleece at the apex of her thighs.

"I'm going to release your hands, Melissa. Then," he smiled, baring his fangs at her in a way that sent shivers of dark, exquisite pleasure over her. "I'm going to feast."

"But..." she started to say as her wrists were released. He moved quickly, his mouth finding and sliding between the swollen lips of her cunt, his tongue dancing against her clit. She cried out, his tiniest movement sending her soaring closer to a brink she had never known existed. As his fingertips traced over her skin she shivered, her body writhing as he drove her higher, that knot of tension in her belly growing tighter until she couldn't breathe. Her hands fisted into the duvet, her body arching, held stretched tight begging for that last tiny touch that would send her over.

* * * *

Nathaniel had never felt anything as soft or as wet as the flesh of her womanhood. Pink, sleek folds that begged for the attention of his tongue,

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a taut little bud that cried out for his mouth and his teeth, he thought she was the most beautiful female he'd ever loved. He could feel her writhing under him, his hands coming under her thighs to hold her open for him. She tasted sweet with a slightly musky tang that drew him back for more. He gorged himself upon her pleasures, feasted upon the sound of her cries, reveled in knowing that she was deriving the same exquisite ecstasy that she'd brought to him.

"Do you want to come, Melissa?" he asked her on a growl. He didn't wait for her answer, instead latching onto her clit with his mouth, flicking his tongue over it in a fast rhythm meant to drive her over that last peak.

Melissa cried out, her eyes turning darker as pleasure fractured through her. Her hands fisted in the fur at his shoulders, holding on to him tightly. Her legs lifted, her body bent and cleaved to his, rocking under his as he finished with her.

Nathaniel watched as she threw herself backwards on the bed as he continued to pleasure her with his mouth, his hold too strong to break. His name was on her lips, sobbed in pleasure. He could taste the sweetness of climax on his lips and tongue.

When she finally relaxed upon the bed, Nathaniel looked up at her, his face still buried in the soft flesh between her thighs, his fur wet with her spendings. He took one last lap at the amazing flavor of her juices before rising above her.

Her eyes were closed, her face turned to the side, her breasts heaving as she fought to regain her breath. There was a flush upon her cheeks that spoke of her pleasure, her pale skin pink and slick with sweat. Before she could recover, he moved over her, his cock finding her sheath and pushing inside.

She was tight, her muscles contracting around his cock in the after spasms of her climax. He pushed in, feeling the first few inches of his cock bathed in the sweetness of her, growling at the heat and erotic texture of her wet, velvety passage. Pulling back, he thrust again and again until he was firmly seated, her cunt cupping him as if made just for his cock.

His breathing was ragged, for even having had her just a while before; she aroused him as no other had. She drew him in, making him want to thrust and stroke his body inside of her until he found his own sublime pleasure. He had to fight the beast and the urges of his body that begged him to ravage the poor girl, to dig his claws into her hips and his

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teeth into her throat and ride her, letting the taste of her very essence slide over his tongue until he erupted inside of her.

But he mastered it, instead letting his body rest upon her own, cupping her face in his shaggy hands, stroking her cheeks as her eyes opened, renewed desire visible in the intense green. "Are you all right, little one?" he asked her, trying desperately to concentrate upon her and not on the emotions churning inside of him.

"I...I think so." She let out a little moan as he shifted, his cock going deeper.

He reached down, lifting her thigh, wrapping her knee over his arm, opening her for his possession. He could feel every inch of him inside of her; feel every touch of her against him. It was as if the beast was aware of even the air she breathed, wanting it for his own because it had touched her.

Slowly he pulled from her, hearing her moan, feeling her hands tighten where they rested upon his arms as if to hold him there.

Just as slowly, he thrust back inside, grinding his hips against her. He felt her jerk, felt her body tense and heard her moan, smelling the scent of fresh arousal coming from her, the smell of her heat driving him crazy. He kept his pace slow until he couldn't prolong it anymore, feeling her arms wrapping around him, her hands sliding over the muscles of his lower back and buttocks, pulling him closer, urging him for more.

He gave it, thrusting harder, battering into her with tender torment, hearing her pleas and cries in his ears mixed with his own growls and grunts. His lips found hers, his mouth ravishing, his tongue thrusting in time with his body. He felt her stiffen, heard her scream his name as she came, felt the velvety muscles inside of her clamp down on his cock, convulsing around it until he could hold it back no longer.

With a groan he slammed into her, his cock swelling inside of her. He jerked as he finally came, spurting his hot seed into her depths, holding her against him desperately—his head back, his eyes closed tightly as the heated pleasure flooded his being.

When the spasms subsided and he could once more breathe, he looked down at her, watching as the fans of her lashes fluttered against her flushed cheeks. Her lips were parted, her breath a rapid hiss. He could hear the swift beat of her heart in her breast, and smell the scent of her spendings in the air around them.

For the first time in two years, since the beginning of his curse, he was content. He rolled to the side, pulling her with him, letting her rest

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her head against his shoulder. He kept her there, her body tucked tightly to his side, his hand upon her hip, the other around her, resting on her waist and let his body relax, falling off to sleep easily.

* * * *

Brenna heard his soft growl and felt the bed shift as he rolled his big body to the side. It wasn't often that he fell asleep as she was reading to him, but those times he did were her favorites.

She closed the book after marking the page, setting it carefully out of the way. Slowly, so as to not disturb him, she crossed to the other side of the bed, lifting the covers and slipping under them.

The sheets were warm from his body, and she gloried in the feel of them, wishing she could chance stripping herself bare. She wondered what he would do if he woke to find her in his bed, her naked body twined with his like in the books that she read to him. Would he love her then? Would he take her and make her his as she so longed for him to do?

She'd been with him for as long as she could remember, the memory of her time on the streets forgotten as he'd forged new and wonderful memories for her. He'd spoiled her, dressing her in satins and silks, giving her anything her heart could want and asking only that she spend a few hours every night reading to him. It was so little when she wanted to give him so much more.

His name was Garren. It was an ancient name, one that she'd never heard until he'd told it to her. He wasn't like a normal man; his body could shift and change into shapes of animals, though she'd only seen him as the wolf. He could be a man, too, if he wanted, but holding that shape required a lot of energy, and he tired of it quickly.

His natural form was the one she saw nightly, furred, but still with the shape of a man, powerful, fierce and exciting. He'd never asked for anything from her but that she read to him, he'd never even hinted that he would accept anything else, but she wanted to give it. She'd give him everything she was if he would but ask.

She loved him.

With a sigh, wiping at the tear that streamed down her cheek, she moved silently to his side, reminding herself that she needed to be up and away before he woke. She settled next to him, running her hand through his fur and whispering his name.

"Garren, I love you," she said as she let her eyes close.

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She didn't see his eyes open, nor see the anguish in the deep blue of them as he heard her words and felt her slender body against his own.

Chapter Three

Brenna climbed up on the bed, her gaze roaming over the solid form outlined so intimately under the sheet. She knew from personal experience Garren slept nude since clothing hampered him in the night. She knew from the few times she'd climbed into bed with him and pressed her body against his own.

His body was a study of tactile pleasure—soft, silky fur, resilient skin, hard muscle and bone. She loved to rub against him, to knead his flesh under her searching fingers. She yearned for the day she would grow brave enough to touch that certain piece of rock hard flesh, to wrap it in her hand and stroke him as she'd watched him do. She wondered what it would feel like, and if Garren would enjoy her touch as much as he seemed to enjoy his own.

Perhaps she could ask him to teach her. Perhaps she could coax Garren to change his mind and make her his own. Perhaps she'd wake tomorrow and find that the sun had risen from the west and would now set in the east. She shook her head, sighing heavily at the thoughts.

"Is something wrong, pet?" Garren asked, using the name he gave her when he was in a fine mood. He smiled, showing off the sharp fangs that caused so many to fear him.

"No, Garren, nothing but my thoughts coloring my mood. I'm fine." She lifted the book in her hands, wishing she could throw it on the floor. Who cared about whether Melissa and Nathaniel would be happy when her own happiness was in such jeopardy?

"You do seem rather tense, pet. Perhaps you'd like to forget reading tonight?"

"What would we do then?" she asked him, her eyes lighting up as she thought of a number of different ways for them to entertain themselves.

"Well, I thought you'd go to bed and I'd do the same." Garren watched as that wonderful light that made her blue eyes sparkle seemed to dim and her face to fall. He knew what was in her head, for the

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thoughts rang through his own, swirling into a confusing mist that had kept him awake the night before, long after her soft breathing told him she was asleep.

"No, I'd much rather read to you, Garren, then find myself in my room once more. Please, may I?" she asked him, holding up the book.

"Yes, on then, let us find out if Nathaniel and Melissa shall have a happily ever after." He shifted down further under the covers, moving his legs. Brenna looked lovely this evening, her bright blonde hair streaming freely over her shoulders in thick, lush waves. Her eyes were huge and bright in a small oval face that seemed inordinately delicate. She had a tiny stubborn chin and a long thin nose that had an aristocratic bent.

Her mother had been a slattern, walking the streets at night to make enough to keep her fed and sheltered. She must have run afoul of some lord or another who paid her the few coins to sample her generous charms and was thence gifted with Brenna, though that ungrateful wench hadn't considered Brenna a gift nor the joy she should have been to her.

She lost Brenna when Garren had spotted the filthy little ragamuffin living in an alley, getting scraps and handouts from the other whores on the streets. She'd been half starved and half wild, but had come right up to Garren when he'd approached, tilting her head and staring up at him in his disguise as a man. She studied him, as she might an insect under a magnifying glass, before reaching up with one horridly dirty hand and touching the thin silk of his white shirt.

He'd taken her with him, coming back to repay the kindness of her mother for the way she'd taken such proper care of the poor dear. He had scared her so badly that the woman had been sent to the institute at Bedlam.

That had been Brenna's lucky day. Now she lived in luxury, her every need met as long as she read to her master every night.

Her fingers reached out for him now, as they had that long ago night, touching his chest gently, her knuckles brushing against the hard flesh under the soft fur. "I will read to you, Garren," she said quietly, before sitting back and lifting the book. She rested the edge on her legs, reaching between the marked pages with delicate fingers and opening it upon her lap.

"Chapter Three," she began her voice slightly huskier than usual. "The Man in the Body of the Beast..."

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Jeffrey returned from the village, stopping along the way at a small shack and picking up some things he needed from the old woman there. His heart was heavy as he made his way along the long road and past the ancient cemetery, pushing through the small side gate and into the yard just as the sun was beginning to set.

Melissa's parents had shown mixed emotions when told that their daughter was needed to live-in as a maid now, instead of coming home as was her habit. Melissa's mother had been ecstatic, more so when given the pouch of coins Jeffrey had been instructed to deliver to them. There was enough money there to have paid for a maid's salary for a year, but it was the master's wishes that they receive it.

Jeffrey would deliver another pouch of coins in a fortnight and then another after that until Nathaniel tired of Melissa or the poor girl ended up dead, as Nathaniel's mother had. If only that lovely lady hadn't gotten pregnant, if only she hadn't made the mistake of being seduced by Nathaniel's father during one of his saner moments, she might still be alive today.

Another child, perhaps another son to be persecuted by this curse would have been an atrocity, at least in Nathaniel's mother's eyes. So she'd taken arsenic, a fitting ending as it was the king's poison. Nathaniel had been the one to find his mother's twisted and convulsing body, lifting her in his strong arms and racing to try to save her. But the poison was too fast, and he was too late. She perished in his arms, her last sight her son's tortured face.

Jeffrey could only pray that Melissa would not conceive. If she did, the consequences could serve to drive Nathaniel over the edge and into the beastly madness he fought against so desperately.

* * * *

"Beastly madness?" Brenna asked, her nose wrinkling at the term.

"Oh, it is a fine madness," Garren said, his teeth flashing as he laughed. "Madness as black and deep as the depths of the ocean."

"You're teasing me," she laughed, her eyes sparkling.

"If that is what you wish to believe, Brenna pet, then yes, I am teasing you. Now read to me please," he ordered her in his usual raspy growl.

"Hmmm, oh yes ...fought against so desperately..."

* * * *

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Jeffrey opened the back door of the manor, passing into the kitchen and setting down his packages. He fed the fire, putting on a pot of water to make tea before turning back to his packages and opening them.

Quickly fixing the herbs he needed, he put them into a bowl and set it carefully aside, washing his hand and throwing the wrapping and stems into the fire where they bloomed with flames wreathed in black. Taking down another bowl, he carefully mixed up enough herbs for tea, placing it into the kettle and pouring in the water that was now hot to let it steep.

He set about making up a platter of frytours, fried cakes that he'd gotten yesterday, setting it upon the big tray service and pouring the tea into the pot, adding milk and sugar and cups to the tray.

With a sigh, he picked up the heavy tray, carrying it up and into the library and setting it down in front of the sofa. That done, he went to find the master.

Nathaniel sighed, breathing in the sweet scent of Melissa's hair. She was snuggled against him, her back resting against his chest, curved into the shape of his body. His arm was over her waist, his hand entwined with hers. He sighed again, feeling relaxed and at peace for the first time since the curse had taken his body.

"Are you well, Nathaniel?" she asked, looking back at him, her eyes wide. "All those sighs sound so sad."

"I've never been happier, little one, than I am right now," he pressed a kiss to her cheek, tucking her head back against his shoulder. "I cannot remember a time when I felt so at ease."

He felt Melissa snuggle back against his furry form, feeling the heat and softness of her body as it rested against his own. She'd been such a surprise, beyond anything he could have imagined, responding to his body with a joy he'd never known.

His gaze grew warmer remembering all she'd done, the words she'd used, the things she'd done to him. He smiled as she gave a small sigh of her own, watching as she closed her eyes. Dipping his head, his lips touched her hair and he tightened his arms around her, wanting her to feel safe in his furry embrace.

Nathaniel knew the moment she fell asleep, for his beastly senses were attuned to her breathing, to the sound of her heart beating, to the slightest sound that came from between her sweet lips. Gently pulling his arm out from under her head, he laid her against the pillow, sitting up and staring down at her.

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She was exquisite, but her beauty was not just on the outside. Inside, she was sweet and good and caring, everything that he desired but knew he should walk away from. He would end up hurting her, as his father had his mother, until in the end, she would either leave him or kill herself.

The thought of Melissa's lovely body contorted in pain as his mother's had been sent a shiver of anguish through him. Was it his lot in life to be alone? Must he bear this curse with no recourse and no hope of happiness?

No answer seemed forthcoming as he stared at her and he sighed once again. He was about to lie back down, to gather her into his arms once more, when he heard a scratching at the door. Rising, he threw on the dressing gown he'd brought when he went to her, and pulled the edge of the duvet cover up to shield Melissa's nakedness from the man at the door. He hurried over to answer it before Jeffrey decided to pound upon it and wake her up.

"Did you talk to them?" he asked with no preamble as he threw open the door.

"Yes, Master Nathaniel, I did. I also gave them the coin you authorized."

"And? Come on, man. Don't be all day about it." Nathaniel heard his loud tone and glanced back to where Melissa was sleeping, hoping he hadn't disturbed her.

She still lay where he'd left her, her face turned toward them, her eyes closed. She looked like some fairy princess waiting for her handsome prince to come and kiss her awake, slay the beast, and carry her off on his charger with him.

This beast wouldn't be slain so easily, though, he thought with a grimace.

"Her mother was thrilled with the coin you sent and the order for gowns and uniforms, sir. Her father..." Jeffrey's voice trailed off as he followed Nathaniel's gaze to the bed and saw Melissa's sleeping form. His heart sank. "Master Nathaniel, it would be remiss of me if I didn't remind you of the consequences your actions with the young miss could cause."

"What consequences?" Nathaniel growled, irritated with Jeffrey's attitude.

"Becoming with child, sir," Jeffrey said.

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"Well, don't beat around the bush, Jeffrey, say what you think, man." Nathaniel rubbed his forehead, the rage that had been growing in his stomach now causing his head to pound.

"Would you want to pass down the illness that has made you like this, sir?" Jeffrey asked him pointedly.

"Mind your own business, Jeffrey," Nathaniel growled, the warning coming out harshly.

"You asked me, sir. I just voiced my concerns. Her father wasn't happy with the idea of her staying here in the manor. He thought she belonged at home. I told him we were staffing the place fully and she would be in no danger here. He believed the lie," Jeffrey started to turn, stiffness in his every move at the insult to his dignity. "I have set up tea for the two of you in the library; I shall bring the tray here instead if you wish."

"Jeffrey..." Nathaniel began, only to stop and stare at the man's tense back helplessly. "Haven't you ever wanted something, wanted it so badly that it wouldn't leave your thoughts until you had it? Then when you have it, you realize you only want it more?"

Jeffrey sighed. He knew what the master meant. He'd once felt that way about a woman and had to watch her die. "Yes," he said softly.

"Then you understand how I feel?"

"Yes, I do, Nathaniel, but it doesn't mean it's what is best."

* * * *

Brenna's voice trailed off and she glanced up at Garren. He was staring at her, his troubled blue eyes dark with his thoughts.

Her own thoughts swirled around until she was dizzy with the confusion of them. She wanted Garren; there was no doubt in her mind about that. She wanted him to take her in his strong arms, to press kisses to her mouth, to take her innocence and make her a woman. His woman.

"Brenna?" he asked, startling her from her thoughts. "Is something wrong, pet?"

"No," she said, but inside her heart was screaming yes. "I just needed to rest my voice for a moment." She reached for the glass of water she neither wanted nor needed, and took a sip. Her hand shook as she went to return it and the glass slid out of her fingers, falling to the bed to spill across his chest.

Garren roared at the sudden coldness of it, jumping away from the spill and out of the bed. He stood next to it, his hand brushing the cold water from his fur.

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Brenna's eyes grew wide as she saw him for the first time, naked but for the short fur that covered his body. It was black and thick, growing in a small ruff around his strong neck. The hair on his head was longer than that on his body, for when he was in human form, it would fall to his mid back. He was covered in fur from head to toe, except for his cock.

That hung down his thigh, thick and long even in its flaccid state. It was pale next to his black fur, the skin bare, looking even more naked next to his pelted form. As he moved around, trying to brush off the water, she could see the pair of large balls hanging from their fur covered sac under it.

He was so different looking than she, but so beautiful, his body sculpted and heavily muscled. She couldn't help but wonder what his cock would look like hard, as it was when he would get aroused by the stories she read. She'd read enough about erections but although she knew the idea of what one would look like, she lacked the practical knowledge.

Garren stopped dead in his tracks, realizing that he stood naked before his young ward. His gaze shot from his chest and the cold water he was trying to get off of his fur, to her, sitting upon the bed, her mouth open as she stared at his naked form. No, not at his naked form, at his cock, her eyes were definitely locked upon that unruly piece of flesh.

As soon as he noticed her staring, it twitched, beginning to rise, to lengthen and widen, until it stood proudly, as if basking in her admiring gaze. He bit back the groan that wanted to come from his lips, trying to force himself to get back into the bed, to force himself to relax as if it was an everyday event for her to see him nude.

But his legs refused to move. He could do nothing but stand there as she climbed down from his high bed, coming around the tall posts to stand before him, so tiny next to his towering form.

"I always wondered what it would look like," she murmured. "I wanted to pull the covers off of you when you played with it. I wanted to watch while you stroked it while you listened to me read. I wanted to help, to touch it myself," she said softly, reaching out with one hesitant hand, her palm carefully cupping him.

Her skin was hot against his length, almost searing in the intensity of sensation it aroused. He growled, low and deep in his throat, fighting the urge to thrust himself into her hand, to show her the way he liked to be stroked, to let her touch him until he exploded in her beautiful little fingers.

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"It wasn't the story," he groaned as she wrapped her fingers around him, her hand stroking over the bare skin of his cock. "It was watching you that always made me come, Brenna, never the stories."

Her eyes searched his blue gaze for the truth of his words. "Then why would you never let me help?"

"Because you can't," he growled, finally finding the strength to pull from her. He grabbed for the blankets, climbing quickly back under the bed. His hand was on his cock, holding it, willing it to soften. If she touched him again, he wasn't sure if he would be able to control his long fought passions.

She came back around the bed, climbing up the stairs and kneeling before him. "If you won't let me touch you, will you at least let me watch?" Garren didn't know which one of them was more startled by her words, her or him.

"You want to watch me come?" he growled hoarsely.

"Yes, if you won't let me help then I want to see you do it."

A shaft of painful pleasure shot through him. He could feel his cock grow wet with the prequel to his pleasure at just the thought of letting her watch, of feeling her eyes upon him as he stroked his cock in front of her.

"Please, Garren?" she wheedled. He'd never been able to refuse her anything except for what she truly wanted.

"You cannot touch me," he growled, slowly shifting aside the blanket so that he was bare from his knees up. His cock rose strong and proud from between his legs, throbbing and so hard that it was almost painful to the touch.

"It makes me feel so strange," she whispered, her gaze feasting upon the sight of him.

"Strange how?" he asked, his hand coming to rest around his shaft, pulling upon it slowly at first as he waited for her to answer.

"I feel...empty," she said softly, her hands going to her lap and pressing lightly against her sex. "Here."

His growl startled her, as did the look in his eyes. They were fiercely intense, almost fiery, as if they would scorch her skin and burn the clothes from her body. He watched as her face flushed, her nipples growing hard and pushing against the thin material of her gown. Her breathing grew labored and her eyes dilated.

His eyes roamed over her body while his hand stroked his cock, long strokes, sliding his thumb over the swollen and aching head to

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gather the droplets of clear, thick fluid that gathered in the small slit. He could hear the squelching sound that his hand made and felt his breathing grow faster until he was panting, his heart pounding in his chest. "Undo your gown," he said, the demand coming from his lips before he realized he was going to say them.

Her hands went to the buttons, fumbling over them, her fingers shaking with the intimacy of the act. He knew she could feel his gaze upon her flesh, watching with heated intensity as inch by slow inch she revealed her soft skin until finally she pushed the gown off of her shoulders so that it bunched at her hips. The gown was caught there, between her softness and the bed. She sat before him, her slender form cloaked in nothing but the thin, sheer silk, the rounded curves of her small breasts pushing against the fabric.

She was a pink, gold, and cream delight, from the top of her head to the tips of her small toes. Every curvy inch of her was smooth and sleek. He wanted to see more.

"What color are your nipples?" he asked, groaning as his hand moved faster over his shaft, the friction building like fire upon his skin.

"Color? I'm not sure," she said nervously, catching on the plump morsel of her lower lip between her teeth. Her hands went to the thin straps of her chemise, slipping them down and off her shoulders.

Garren watched the fabric droop across her skin, catching upon the tips of her breasts and holding there, his breath held while waiting to see those plump peaks. Brenna closed her eyes, and then pulled the straps down the rest of the way until her upper body was completely exposed to him.

He forgot how to breathe, his hand stilling on his cock as he stared at her beauty. She was fine boned, slender, with skin that seemed so perfect as to be translucent. Her breasts were small, but capped with strawberry colored nipples that stood hard and perfect upon the center of each small mound begging for his lips.

Sleek flesh covered her ribs, following their curve to dip deep into a waist so tiny he could span it with one of his large hands. He could see the well of her navel, the swell of her lower belly, smooth and tempting to his hands and lips. The rest was covered by her gown, leaving him with the insane and almost irrepressible urge to rip the offending material off her body and drag her up to him.

"Am...Am I pleasing to look at, Garren?" she asked breathlessly, stuttering the words.

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"Any more pleasing and I would die," he groaned, his hand beginning to move over his shaft once more, his eyes roaming over her exquisite loveliness. "What do your nipples feel like?"

"D-do you want t-to touch them?" she asked and he could see her tremble.

"God, yes," he growled. "But I dare not. If I were to touch them, then I'd want to kiss them. That would lead to things we cannot do, Brenna. Touch them for me," he urged suddenly. "Tell me what they feel like, how you feel."

Her hand rose obediently, her fingers brushing over her breast, slipping over the pink crown. He saw her head tip back as a soft moan came from her. Her tongue slipped out, licking over her lips and leaving a wet sheen that he found himself longing to taste with his own tongue.

"How does it feel?" he growled. "Tell me."

"H-hard, Garren, but soft at the same time, and I feel so strange inside," her voice gave way to another soft moan as she touched it again.

"Grasp it in your fingers, twist it," he ordered.

"Oh," she breathed. "I...I can't believe I'm doing this. I feel hot, G-Garren and flushed. It's...It's like I can barely get enough air in my lungs."

"Wet your fingers in your mouth, Brenna," Garren ordered, his hand stroking slowly over his cock. He didn't want to come yet, he wanted to savor Brenna's pleasure, to show her how to find it herself before he found his own. "Now twist your nipples again," he growled. "How does it feel?"

He watched as she sucked upon her fingers, her tongue peeping from between her lips to lick their tips. Taking them from her mouth, she caught to the tip of one of her breast in their wet grasp, pulling and twisting it. "Oh," she cried. "It feels differently than before. Almost as if it were your mouth upon me, Garren."

Garren saw her hips moving against the bed and knew she was aroused, he could smell it in the air. He could almost feel the sensations through the heavy veil of pheromones that were now in the room. His hips jerked and he squeezed his hand around the base of his cock, gritting his teeth as he fought to stave off his climax, wanting desperately to watch hers first.

"Do you trust me?" he growled, his snarl harsher than normal.

"Yes," she breathed, her hand squeezing her breast, kneading the small mound of flesh.

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He sat up, holding her with one hand at her bare waist, stripped the gown and underskirts off her in one swift move. She sat there, now naked but for a thin pair of pantalets, her stockings, and the tiny slippers that matched her gown.

"Oh!" she cried out startled by the swiftness of the move. His gaze roamed over her bare flesh, seeing the dark triangle at the junction of her thighs that the thin fabric could not hide.

"Will you take those off for me?" he asked, nodding toward the thin pantalets.

Her skin flushed a rosy color and she nodded, standing upon the stairs and pulling at the ribbon that held the garment taut at her waist. Loosening it had the material dipping and she wiggled out of the garment, her breasts swinging gently at her movements.

When they were off, she kicked off her slippers, she stood up, clothed in nothing but fine white silk stockings held up by thin blue garters decorated with tiny white bows. The sight of her, cream and roses, gold fleece covering her mound, small breasts with their hard, begging nipples, was almost more than he could stand. He felt the desire to take her rising in him and fighting it down, clenching his fists at his side until he could once gain control over himself.

"You are lovelier than I'd even imagined you could be," he whispered, not trusting his voice.

He watched as Brenna fought the urge to cover her bare flesh with her arms, instead standing tall and proud in front of Garren. Her hands twitched, but she left them by her thighs.

"M-May I touch you now?" she whispered, staring up at him from under the thick screen of her lashes.

"Oh, God, I want you to touch me, Brenna. I want it more than I want my next breath. But if you did," he ground out, his eyes closing at the pain his denial was causing him, "I don't think I could stop myself from taking you."

"You don't have to stop, Garren. I want you to take me. I want to belong to only you," she cried out, her hand reaching for him.

"NO!" he growled, his eyes snapping open as he grabbed her wrist just before she could reach him. "You are not meant for me, Brenna. I'm sorry, but, it's impossible." He let go of her hand as if it were fire, searing his flesh. "I can teach you how to find your pleasure, Brenna, but that's all. I must not touch you, and you cannot touch me. Not if I'm to stay sane."

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She nodded, sitting down once more. He could see the tears that welled up in her eyes but refused to let them fall. "What do I do?"

Garren sat up further in bed, pushing a couple of pillows behind his back. He took three more of the satin covered cushions and handed them to her. "Lie down with your feet toward me," he ordered her.

"Should I take these..."

"No, leave the stockings," Garren couldn't help the fierce smile that came to his face. "They look quite fetching," he admitted.

Brenna blushed again, cursing her fair skin when Garren burst into laughter.

"You are going to blush more before we are done," he told her, chuckling.

Brenna rolled her eyes, but set her chin stubbornly. She wanted this, she wanted him "What next?" she asked, lying back on the pillows and staring at him with a stubbornness in her eyes that he knew meant trouble..

"Caress yourself," he said, grinning when she raised an eyebrow at him. "Run your hands over your body and touch your breasts and your stomach. Slide your hands over your thighs. Wherever it feels good for you to be touched, Brenna, I want you to touch."

She bit her lip, letting her hands start at her stomach, sliding them over the firm flesh and up the slight ladder of her ribs, finally cupping her breasts. She closed her eyes, hearing his moan and the wet sounds that she always heard when he stroked his hard cock. Becoming bold, knowing that he was watching her, she plucked at her nipples, stroking them, twisting them like he'd told her to do before, and feeling that same aching emptiness between her thighs.

But this time it was different. She could feel the cool air on her legs, feel it against her woman's mound. With a sigh, she parted her legs, eager to feel the coolness against the fiery flesh between her thighs.

The cool air brushed over her swollen lips, exciting her more. She heard Garren groan and opened her eyes, seeing him looking at her there, between her parted thighs, his eyes riveted upon her woman's flesh.

"Pull your lips apart for me," he groaned, his hand moving quickly now over his swollen shaft.

She slid her hand down, feeling the soft skin of her stomach, the crinkly, soft hair on her mound before finding the swollen slit. With a feeling of trepidation and anticipation, she pushed her fingers into her

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wet flesh, parting the swollen lips and splaying her thighs further apart, one leg lying across his legs. "Like this?" she whispered, a moan following at barely a hair's breadth.

"God, yes," he growled, his eyes on the soft, pink wetness she'd uncovered. She knew he could see the glistening of her juices, the wetness that proclaimed her arousal. She saw his nostrils flare and knew he scented the musky aroma of her arousal. The look in his eyes, the passion and the admiration, had her gasping for breath.

Brenna watched his eyes as she stroked through the wet flesh. Her fingers brushed over a hard knob of flesh and she jumped, feeling a stab of pleasure unlike anything she'd felt before. She did it again, and then again, her hips beginning to move as she learned what she liked, feeling his heated gaze making her even crazier with desire.

Soon she was writhing upon the mattress, her heels grinding into the softness, lifting her hips so that she could press harder against her fingers. Her other hand was on her nipples, stroking and pulling on them, twisting them. She could hear Garren next to her, his panting and groans driving her to explore even more, to take herself further, until suddenly, it was as if time stopped and the huge knot inside of her exploded, shaking her with sensations of prickling heat that wrapped over her body, mercilessly flooding her with waves of incredible pleasure.

She screamed, reaching for him, needing to feel his skin against hers as white lights shattered in front of her eyes and her body convulsed in ecstasy. She barely heard Garren's grunts and then his howl as he came also, his body twisting so that his seed landed across her arched body in heated spurts. One long strand landed across her lips and she opened her mouth, licking at the pearly fluid.

Brenna couldn't move. She didn't even know if she was breathing and couldn't find the energy to care either way. She wondered if she were dead, for how could such pleasures exist for mere mortals to partake of? Opening her eyes slowly, she looked down her body at where Garren lay, his body relaxed, that formidable staff now only half hard. He was staring at her and she sent him a breathless smile.

"Is it always like that?" she asked him, unashamed of what they had just done.

"No," he whispered. "It's never been like that for me," he admitted. "But we can't do this again, Brenna."

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She stared at him, amazed at his words and at the way his cock had begun to rise once more. "Why?"

"Because I want you too badly. I need you too much. One of these days looking won't be enough for me and I'll take you and make you mine. I can't let that happen."

"Why?" she asked again. "When it is what I want, too?"

"Because you deserve more than me. You deserve a man whose arm you can be seen upon, whose life can intertwine with yours. You need someone to grow old with, to bear children and raise them with. I can't give you any of that, Brenna, no matter how much I wish it."

"You can't know that, you can't know what would happen if we were to..." her voice trailed off for he hadn't said anything about a commitment between them.

"If we were to what? To marry?" He laughed harshly. "Little Brenna, you can't possibly want to marry something like me."

She got up, standing next to the bed and retrieving her gown. Pulling it on over her head, she did up the buttons, not noticing the slick feel of his seed as it soaked into the fabric. "I shall be back tomorrow to read more, Master," she said, giving him the title she'd always used. She needed to get away, to think, to lick her wounds.

"Brenna..."

"No," she interrupted. "It's fine. You're right. I couldn't possibly want to be with a man like you. Not when I could be with men like my father or the other ones who took my mother home and let her earn their money on her back. They were such upright citizens that they used to kick at me or spit upon me if I got in their way. Good and kind men who looked down upon me with revulsion and disgust, they helped me out so well. Why, I can't believe I ever dreamed of wanting to be with a man like you who's always been so good to me." She turned her ire building as she stomped toward the door.

Garren watched as she slammed out, unable to say another word. It was the first she'd spoken of that time before he'd found her. He'd thought she'd blocked it out, but it seemed she remembered all along. With a sigh, he turned on his side, seeing the book that she'd left, and picking it up.

He brought it to his nose, smelling the scent of ink and paper, the leather used in binding the pages, and the subtle but irresistible scent of Brenna upon the leather cover.

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She would get over him; she was young and would realize in time that it was better they stay friends. But would he?

Chapter Four

The footsteps outside his door were hesitant, the knock almost too soft to hear—at least, for the ears of a human. But Garren heard it and he smiled ruefully. He wondered if Brenna would face him or if she would be too embarrassed by what had occurred between the two of them the night before.

"Come in," he said, his voice low but with a hint of amusement mixed with something else. Could it be nerves?

"Do you wish for me to read to you, Master Garren?" Brenna asked him, pushing the door open just a bit. She was dressed differently tonight, having come to him straight from her bath, her hair still damp. She wore a thin blue dressing gown over her night shift.

He could smell her from where he sat in front of the fire. It was slight but the feelings it triggered were so strong as to stagger him with the rush of lust and desire that filled his loins and his heart.

"If that is what you would like to do, Brenna," he growled, wondering how he would get to his bed with his cock now throbbing and hard with his passions. He watched as she pushed open the door, his gaze roaming over the soft body that he'd seen intimately but had yet to touch. His heart lurched as he saw the look in her eyes. Uncertain and worried, the blue darkened almost to a stormy gray, they searched his face as if to determine his mood.

He tried to smile, but it seemed to be more of a grimace, baring his fangs to the nervous girl. "The book is there, Brenna," he said, pointing to the bedside table. "If you'll turn your back, I'll get into bed."

"Why should I turn my back, Master Garren?" she asked him softly, a hint of impish mischief to her tone. "I've seen every magnificent inch of your body, sir," she reminded him unnecessarily, though a blush suffused her cheeks.

"Magnificent?" he chuckled. "I shall keep you around as I grow older, dear girl. You can feed my sagging ego as this poor old body

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starts to decay." He gave her a stern frown, cocking an eyebrow at her. "Now turn around and wait until I say you may look."

She did so, facing the mirror that sat above the huge fireplace. With a small smile upon her face, she watched as he doffed his robe, dropping the soft fabric over the end of the bed before climbing into it and settling himself amidst the pillows. When he'd gotten comfortable, he glanced her way, meeting her avid gaze in the mirror.

"Why, you little minx." His laughter filled the room. "I shall have to watch after my modesty from now on with you around, shan't I?"

"I'm sorry, Garren," she said cheekily. "But you do have such a fetching bottom it's hard to resist looking." She came to the bed, perching upon the edge in her usual spot. She watched as he ducked his head. If she didn't know better, she'd have thought he was blushing.

"Yes, well, shall we get on with the story? I, uh, marked the page after you left me last night."

She leaned forward, her breasts brushing against his arm as she took the book off the nightstand. For a moment, she thought she heard him groan, but she wasn't sure.

"Are you ready?" she asked, opening the book and skimming the page until she found where she thought they'd ended.

"Yes," he growled, his arm burning from the pressure of her breasts, his erect cock straining at the sheets so much he bent his knee to hide it from her sight. "Go on, read."

She cleared her throat and began to read. "Jeffrey..."

* * * *

Nathaniel began, only to stop and stare at the man's tense back helplessly. "Haven't you ever wanted something, wanted it so badly that it wouldn't leave your thoughts until you had it? Then when you have it, you realize you only want it more?"

Jeffrey sighed. He knew what the master meant. He'd felt that way once about a woman and then had to watch her die. "Yes," he said softly.

"Then you understand how I feel?"

"Yes, I do, Nathaniel, but it doesn't mean it's what is for the best."

* * * *

Melissa's eyes fluttered open and she looked around the deserted room. Nathaniel had gone and she was alone. She sat up, holding the duvet cover to her breasts and pushing her long hair out of her face.

Once more he had left her with no clothing, she noticed, slightly amused at the situation.

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Pulling the cover around her bare shoulders, she moved to the edge of the bed, hearing a clatter as the tray Nathaniel had brought in earlier moved with the blanket. She reached for it, smiling at the different array of things he'd brought. There was a small pot of tea, now grown cold, bread sliced by a clumsy hand, some torn half way through. A chunk of cheese sat upon one side of the bread, one edge jagged as if it too had been pulled apart. Some apples and a thick slice of ham were on another plate.

There was no cup for the tea, no butter or jam for the bread. But the tray touched her heart anyway at the thought that Nathaniel had tried to prepare something for her, a kind gesture from a loving heart that beat in the breast of a beast.

She sighed, looking around the room to see if there was a cup or a glass that she could use for the tea. She was thirsty and hungry. Finding nothing, she tipped the pot until it ran into her mouth.

She swallowed a little then held the rest in her mouth for a moment, grimacing at the harsh taste. It was a strong mix of leaves, nothing that Melissa could recognize. Instead of swallowing the rest, she spit it into the chamber pot, wiping her mouth with a corner of the blanket. She would make do with an apple, she decided, shuddering at the horrid taste left upon her tongue.

Just as she was about to take a bite, the door to the room burst open and Nathaniel came in. She jumped, startled, and wrapped the blanket around her more securely.

"You're awake," he said unnecessarily.

"Yes, sir, I am. I don't usually sleep during the day," she said, feeling a trifle shy around him now that they were out of bed.

"Neither do I, but if it meant being with you, I'd spend my days in that bed gladly," he whispered, walking toward her and cupping her chin in his big rough hand. He bent down, letting his lips rest against hers for just a moment, the kiss chaste and unhurried, more one of affection than of passion.

"Jeffrey talked to your parents, Melissa," he said when he finally lifted his head. "They are content with the matter and the monies that I sent them to compensate them for your leaving."

"May I visit them?" she asked, dropping her gaze to the buttons on his shirt, noting that he'd fastened them crookedly.

"I...ah..." His voice died out when her fingers reached out, brushing against his stomach as she unbuttoned his shirt, doing it up

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again and smoothing her hand over the placket. He exhaled sharply, catching himself as he leaned forward. Instead, he shook his head, trying to find his thoughts. "Uh, I would let you visit, Melissa, but I must ask for your word on one thing."

"I will come back, Nathaniel, if that is what you are worried about. I gave you my word earlier," she dropped her hands from his chest as if suddenly realizing what she was doing.

"No, that isn't it." He took her hand, leading her to the bed so that she might sit on the edge. He leaned against the bedpost, studying her intently. "I need your word that you will tell no one of my affliction."

"Is that all?" she asked with a laugh. "Tell me, sir, do you think anyone would believe me?"

* * * *

"I would have," Brenna said. "Believed her, I mean," she added when she saw the confused look upon Garren's face.

"You would have believed her if she'd come to you and said she was working for a man who was part wolf?" Garren laughed. "Brenna, girl, when you first saw me, you had problems believing it."

"But now I like looking at you," she said, her fingers curling in the sheet that covered him, fisting slowly and pulling the material down.

Garren grabbed it before it got to his stomach, narrowing his eyes in warning at her. "Read the story, Brenna," he growled out the order.

But she saw the tented sheet and knew that he was as aroused as she was, remembering the night before and the pleasure it had given them. She gave him an innocent look from under her thick lashes and picked up the leather-bound book once more.

"There is no..."

* * * *

"...way of telling what would be believed. It would just be best not to mention that you work for a beast," Nathaniel said, his words tinged with the hatred he felt for this form.

"I promise, Nathaniel, since it means so much to you. I'd like to visit them. I'd like to get my clothes." She looked down at the blanket she still had wrapped around her naked form, her golden hair falling over her face.

Nathaniel reached out, one clawed hand carefully pulling the lock of hair back, running it through his fur covered hand before tucking it gently behind her ear. "I don't know, I sort of like you dressed like that," he said huskily.

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"It might make cleaning rather difficult," she said.

"You won't be cleaning anymore, Melissa. Your duties are to take care of me, and that is all." He leaned forward, his hand closing around one edge of the blanket and pulling it slowly away. "You shall be at my beck and call, day," he dropped the blanket, exposing part of her upper body, reaching for the other side and pulling that out of her hands as well, "and night," he finished, his hand going to her breast, lifting the plump mound in his palm.

Melissa moaned as he fondled her, feeling her nipple harden under his caressing fingers. Her back arched, and she dropped her arms to her sides to give him more access to her body, opening herself to him.

Nathaniel leaned forward, cupping her breast, lifting it and bending his head until the taut tip brushed his lips. His tongue slipped out, lapping lightly at the pink nipple, circling it with just the tip of his tongue. A dark smile appeared on his face when he heard her growl, her voice low and guttural, filled with need.

His eyes went to her face and he blinked, backing away to study her more intently. Her lips were parted and for just an instant, he thought he'd seen fangs where her gleaming white teeth were now.

"Nathaniel?" she asked huskily, her eyes opening to see him studying her. "Is something wrong?"

"Uh, no, I just thought I saw..." he stopped, shaking his head. It was silly. "Nothing," he finished.

"Then why have you stopped?" she whispered, her fingers coming up to trace the soft fur that was over his cheeks. She leaned closer, her lips brush his, moving her mouth over his and teasing him with small tastes. She moaned again, pressing closer, the blanket dropping back to the bed, her thighs parting to draw him closer to her.

His stomach pressed against her loins, his chest against her breasts. His hands went to her back, sliding under the smooth fall of her hair and caressing the slender muscles that flexed under her sleek flesh. Pulling her closer, he felt her breasts press against his shirt, her nipples taut and leaving a trail of fire through the thin linen.

"Unbutton my shirt," he ordered her. "Take it off of me."

Her hands went to his shirt, her fingers fumbling at the buttons she'd just done up so easily a few moments before. She pulled too hard and one popped off, rolling across the floor, making him laugh.

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"I guess that's only fair considering what I've done to your clothing," he rumbled, his chuckles vibrating against her fingers. "But it was your own fault, that gown was positively obscene."

"It was the gown that Jeffrey gave me," she said.

"Then I shall have to give him a raise," Nathaniel said, chuckling harder, his hand going to her cheek as she finished with the buttons. Her hands slid up his chest, she pushed them against the flow of his fur, ruffling it until she reached the tops of his arms. She slipped her hands over them, caressing him as she pushed the shirt off of his shoulders and down his arms.

Nathaniel let the material slide over his hands and fall to the floor, eager for more of her touch. She nuzzled into his neck, her hot breath stirring the hair on his throat, sending a shiver through him. She growled again, her teeth brushing his skin, the shiver turning to a shudder of pleasure at her aggression.

"God, Melissa," he groaned, grabbing a handful of her hair and pulling it back, bringing her face up to his. Her mouth was hot and wet, her tongue a fiery blaze against his own, sending his passions flaming until he could barely think.

It was as if the first two times they'd made love that day hadn't happened. He wanted her so badly, needed to feel the heated depths of her cunt stretched tightly around his cock, to feel her under him, arching in pleasure. He grabbed her shoulders, pushing her back, kicking off his shoes before leaping onto the bed.

Melissa laughed, feeling a wicked freedom in her soul. Her hands reached for him. "Are you going to fuck me?" she whispered into his ear, dragging him down on top of her, spreading her thighs so that he was cradled in the curve of her hips.

"God, yes," he sighed, his mouth covering hers, stopping her wanton laugh with his kiss. It was one of wet, hot need, a melding of mouths designed to drive passions higher.

"Ouch!" he cried, pulling his head back and tasting blood. "You bit me," he growled, his eyes glowing amber.

"Did I?" she panted, licking lips that suddenly felt different, thinner, stretched across her teeth. Her vision grew blurry, spots darkening her eyesight, until she reached up and clutched him, suddenly afraid. "Something's wrong, Nathaniel."

He stared down at her, seeing her eyes lighten, the color changing to a blue so light to look almost white. "No," he whispered, rolling and

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pulling her up next to him until she sat on the side of the bed once more. "Can you see me, Melissa?"

Her eyes turned, looking in his direction, her tongue slipped across her lips, wetting them as she squinted. "Y-yes, I think so. But it's different, you look different," she said slowly, her voice growing huskier. She inhaled deeply, as if she were going to sigh. "You smell good," she said slowly.

"Oh, God, Melissa, I gave it to you," he cried, rubbing her bare arms as she looked up at him with her new vision.

"It's so different, Nathaniel. I can see you, but you look...strange. You're you, but not you," she said, shrugging her shoulders at being unable to explain it any better than that. Her hands reached out, and he let her grab him, her fingers kneading his skin as she stared at him. "I can smell your sex," she whispered. "I can smell musk and sweat, but it's not like just smelling them."

"You can taste them on the air," he said, his heart aching in his chest as he thought of what he'd done to her. She would now be as much of an outcast as he was.

Melissa stared about her, then her gaze focused on him. She growled low in her throat, her hands roaming over his naked chest, her fingers sifting through his fur. "Everything feels so different," she said. "Even the way you feel when I touch you is more intense."

"I'm sorry." He wanted to pull away from her, but also to take her in his arms and hold her, to tell her that he would protect her, take care of her so that no one would find out her malady. The two conflicting desires left him standing undecided, allowing her to touch him as she would.

Touch she did, stroking over his arms, across his back, pulling him closer so that her breasts rubbed with infinite care against the fur on his chest, her nipples growing even harder as that soft hair flowed over them. Her gasps had him growling, her moans had his hands clenching at his sides, letting her do as she wished and trying to hold on to the human part of him that didn't want to see her hurt.

"We shouldn't," he groaned, trying to ignore the wild clutch of lust that had his cock throbbing against his pants. "Melissa," he hissed, as her teeth found the place on his shoulder where his neck started, her new fangs scraping at the flesh beneath the fur. "We can't," he tried again.

"Fuck me," she growled, looking up at him with her new eyes. "Fuck me and make me yours."

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His head was shaking even as his mouth found hers, wanting to deny what was happening, deny the wildness he felt inside of her that called to the beast in him. He wanted to ravage her, to dig in his claws and feel her arch under him, to plunder and ravage her slender form until she was too weak to move, and then he wanted to do it all again.

He could feel her under him, wanted to feel the heat of her cunt stretched around the girth of his cock. He could feel her heat against him and, with a growl that was pure animal, the beast won.

He lifted her in his arms, throwing her back on the bed, following as he ripped at the last piece of clothing that remained on his body. Tearing his pants off, he saw her through a haze of red lust, leaning back on her shoulders, her blonde hair spread around her in a mass of golden waves. Her legs were parted for him, her sex already glistening with the juices of her arousal.

She laughed when he growled, stalking her across the wide plain of the bed, and her hand rose in the air, her nails sharp and gleaming in the light. She beckoned him to her, her palm touching his face, leading his lips to hers.

Heat seared into flame, blazing passions as their lips and tongues merged. His hands grasped at her, pulling her closer, spreading her legs further apart. With a desperate groan, he drove himself into her, feeling her flesh part before the raging staff of his cock, surrounding him in velvety heat unlike anything he'd felt before.

Melissa's head fell back against the bed, her mouth open as an unearthly cry came from between her lips. Her hips jerked up to meet his thrusts, her fingers dug into his back, urging him to move faster. Searing friction built, his cock sawing into her, rubbing against her clit with every stroke. His hand found her breast, his fingers kneading the heavy flesh, playing across her nipple.

* * * *

Brenna stopped reading. She could feel the flesh between her legs growing wet, swelling and itching with need. She looked up from the book, meeting Garren's gaze with her own, her eyes heavy with her arousal.

"Are you all right, pet?" he asked her, his voice a husky growl that was deeper than normal.

"No," she whispered. She looked up at him, her eyes filled with tears. "Is this why you won't make love to me like in the stories that I read to you? Is it because you're afraid I'll turn into what you are?"

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Garren closed his eyes, blocking out the sight of her anguished face. "It is but one of many reasons, Brenna, but it is the most important."

"What if I wished to become as you are? What if I wished for you to make me one of you?"

"Brenna..." he began only to be interrupted.

"No!" she shouted. "Why is it only you who has the right to decide what should happen to me? Do you plan to marry me off to some fine gentleman? Perhaps someone who will spend his time away from me with the strumpets down by the docks? You know the place, where you found me?" She wiped one hand under her eyes, trying desperately to call back the tears that seemed determined to spill down her cheeks.

"I would never marry you to anyone you didn't want," he said, sitting up in the bed, his sheet falling to pool at his waist. "You know that, Brenna. I want nothing but your happiness." He reached his hand out to her, almost as if begging her to understand why he was doing as he was. "I cannot condemn you to a life such as this. To walk around at night in a disguise so that others won't know what you are, to hide your face during the day because the sun burns into your eyes until it feels as if your brain must be aflame, to face down this beast inside that demands much that would disgust you. Brenna, these are only a few of the things I face daily."

"But I would have you," she sobbed, covering her face in shame that she couldn't control her emotions better. "I would be with you, like Melissa is with Nathaniel. I could share your fate so that you wouldn't have to be alone anymore, Garren. It is why you took me, is it not? I was cast-off, unwanted garbage from a coupling that shouldn't have happened."

"You are not unwanted, Brenna," he argued. "I wanted you from the moment you looked at me. I knew you as a companion, as a child that made me smile when naught else could. You were a joy to me. You ARE a joy to me."

"But nothing else?" she asked, wiping her eyes on the sleeve of her dressing gown and watching his face. He tried so hard to hide his feelings from her but they were there to see. One just had to look into his eyes to know the tenor of his thoughts.

There was anguish and loneliness in his eyes now, darkening the strange blue color until they seemed almost black. "I cannot put you through this. I will not, not for something so selfish as keeping you with

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me. You will find someone else. You will!" he stressed. "Then you will thank me for having the forethought to deny this one thing."

He looked down at his lap, unable to look at her anymore. All he wanted was to lift her in his arms, to tell her of his true feelings, to make her his in every way he could so that she would never be able to leave him. But he couldn't make her like him.

The slamming of the book made him jump. She dumped it off of her lap, stood upon the stairs, and looked at him with eyes that flashed blue fire. "You are incredible," she hissed at him, furious. "You deny us both; you deny your feelings for me and all for the sake of some idiotic honorable notion? You are a fool, but then again, so am I for I love you, fool or not." She stamped her foot, then turned and walked from the room.

He expected the door to slam as she left, but she closed it quietly behind her. The almost hushed click of the latch sounded louder than a slam in the silence of the room. He rose from the bed, tearing the covers off and flinging them away from himself, letting the beast that howled within him have free rein as pain flared bright within him.

A lamp flew from the end table, slamming into the back of the fireplace to rain glass and oil onto the flames below, sending them shooting up into the chimney. His chair was knocked to the floor, the glass decanter of brandy sitting next to it, shattering into bits beneath his fingers. He picked up the book, the cause for his problems, wanting to rip into the binding, to tear it to bits so that he would never see it again.

Lifting it, he noticed the small sheet of thin paper that fell from the binding as it ripped under his sharp claws. For a moment, he thought of ignoring it, but his curiosity forced him to set the book down and to pick up the paper.

The handwriting was familiar, a fine script that he would recognize anywhere. It was his mother's handwriting and it caused an ache in his chest. He slumped backwards, sitting down upon the hard wooden stairs.

The letter was short, addressed to him, and just that fact surprised him enough to calm the rage that had taken him.

Garren Our Dearest,

My son, if you are reading this it means your father and I are no longer with you. We worried for so long about what would happen if you were to have visited upon you the same affliction that your father had.

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We decided that it would be to your advantage if we were to write this tale.

The erotic nature of the piece was to disguise the truths behind it and to keep it out of the hands of anyone else who might read it. We'd hoped it would make it into your hands only if you needed to understand why your life is the way it is. Please, son, finish the story, read it carefully, understand it, because it is not just a tale of tribulation and love, it is meant as a guidepost for you. It is not just the allegory it might seem on the surface.

*We wish for you a long and happy life, Garren,
Your loving parents,
Nathalie and Michael*

Garren stared at the letter, his hands shaking. His parents had passed away before he'd reached his majority, dying together on a ship that had foundered as they were making their way home from one of the many trips they took together. It was how they would have wanted to leave this earthly plain, together.

He stared at the book. Nathalie and Michael, Melissa and Nathaniel, the names were so close but he never would have thought that they would be the same people. Had his parents ever actually loved this way? Had his mother been afflicted because of what had been between them?

He searched his memory, trying to remember if they'd ever appeared to him like this. All he could remember were the happy times, the love that had been between them. Their joy in their love and in the life they created had kept him going after their deaths, and even when he first became afflicted with this cursed disease.

He picked up the book from where it lay by his feet, staring at the rip in the binding where his mother's note had been. Did he dare hope that this contained a cure?

Chapter Five

Garren picked up the leather-bound book, his hands shaking as he searched through the slightly mangled pages, looking for where Brenna had left off. He would read every word if there was even a small chance that he could rid himself of this blasted curse.

He turned to the page that he could smell Brenna's scent upon the most, for she'd rested her hand upon the book while they'd fought, holding it open to the spot she'd stopped reading. He wished he could call her in, have her help him, for reading was difficult with his beastly eyes.

But he wouldn't, for if she knew there was a chance that he could be cured, her hopes would rise. He couldn't bear to break her heart, not if this was a fool's folly. Grabbing his robe from the edge of his bed, he slipped it on, belting it loosely, going to the chair she'd found him in earlier and sitting close to the fire to help himself see the print. Squinting, he read the words out loud. "Melissa's head..."

* * * *

...fell back against the bed, her mouth open as an unearthly cry came from between her lips. Her hips jerked up to meet his thrusts, her fingers dug into his back, urging him to move faster. Searing friction built, his cock sawing into her, rubbing against her clit with every stroke. His hand found her breast, his fingers kneading the heavy flesh, playing across her nipple.

He felt her lips under his, felt her tongue slide across his mouth, her hands moving around his body, pressing against his chest until he rolled over. Straddling him, she slid down on the long, thick shaft of his cock, her mouth half open, her eyes staring into his. Nathaniel's hands went to her waist, guiding her, holding her to him while he ground his body into hers with a force that bordered on animalistic.

He had no control, thrusting up into her, his head back against the pillow, his heels digging into the mattress. His arms were rigid with the

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desire that flooded through him, his amber eyes glowing eerily as he gazed at her beauty.

She was his, the thought flashed into his mind and he growled at the lightning-like streak of pleasure that shot through his nerve endings like liquid fire. She was his to do as he wished, to fuck or make love to, to keep with him as a companion. He was no longer alone.

* * * *

Melissa heard his grunts as he almost brutally pounded his body against hers, his cock a blur of motion between her spread thighs. Every frantic stroke slapped against her clit, forcing the pressure to grow like a bubble approaching its bursting point. Her heart raced, and her blood rushed through her veins, causing her head to swim. She thought she would die if she didn't reach that pinnacle of pleasure that was just beyond her reach.

Nathaniel lifted her suddenly, pushing her off of him and onto her hands and knees on the mattress. She groaned when his body slammed into hers from behind, his hands on the smooth, rounded curves of her bottom, squeezing and teasing her flesh with just the tips of his nails. He started moving slowly, pulling almost all the way out of her, watching as his cock split her velvety softness, then sliding inside her heat and wetness with a growl of his own.

"Harder," she panted, turning her head to look over her shoulder, crying out when he bent over her, his hands finding the large mounds of her breasts and pulling on her pink nipples until they reddened and grew taut.

He jerked against her, giving her what she wanted with soul shaking thrusts that forced his hip bones into her smooth flesh. The rhythm of their bodies had the old bed shaking, the headboard slamming into the wall, a counterpoint to her frantic whimpers and piercing cries.

His hand reached around her hip, and his fingers slid down her stomach and slipped between her thighs, to find the soft curls, parting wet lips, trailing over her woman's flesh until he found the taut bud of her clit and circled it gently, timing his thrusts so that he could drive her higher. He wanted to feel her come, wanted to know that moment when she crested that final ledge and soared off into the sweet darkness of release. He wanted her cunt to clamp down until he couldn't move inside her. He wanted to feel her contractions of pleasure around his cock.

He wanted to steal her soul and keep it as his own, bind her to him until she could think of no other but him.

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"Nathaniel!" she cried, turning her head, reaching back for him.

He lifted her against himself, holding her weight easily, her back to his chest, his hands roaming over the sleek, taut flesh of her body, sliding with sweet familiarity back between her thighs. He felt her hand on his, guiding it to where she wanted it the most, and he smiled, a grimace of fangs and flashing white teeth as she growled her need.

Her head lolled back against his furry chest, and he knew she could hear his heart pounding against her ear. With the changes in her body from what had happened, he knew she would be able to hear the blood rushing in his veins, smell the distinct aroma of arousal upon his skin. The thought made the beast inside of him growl, begging for release. His lips found her cheek and slid over her throat, his fangs pressing against her pulse, scraping against that small spot on her neck.

"Yes," she moaned her voice husky to his ears. "It feels so good."

Nathaniel pulled gently upon her hair, moving her head to the side, feeling the shiver that shuddered through her. Her hand came up to his head, her fingers twining in his hair, pressing him against her. His jaw moved, his teeth nipping with infinite care against her flesh, never once breaking the skin, though the desire was there.

His growl was that of the animal inside, his lusts driving that beast to fight to escape the tight confines Nathaniel kept upon him. He slid his tongue across that thin flesh that covered her pulse, feeling the rush of her blood under her skin. With only the slightest bit more pressure, he would feel that blood flowing across his tongue, and taste her essence for the very first time. The temptation was great, so much so that he stiffened against her.

Melissa's hips undulated against his, forcing his cock to move inside of her, rubbing against delicate flesh that quivered with every heated stroke. Her breath was a bare pant, her eyes closed tightly. She struggled against him, fighting his restraining hands.

"Don't stop," she begged, the husky growl of her voice sounding like the sweetest of siren's songs to his sensitive ears. "Please, Nathaniel, don't ever stop."

He pushed her back down on the bed, grabbing her hips in his huge hands to hold them still. His eyes were amber fire, tinged red with lust for the golden haired beauty who turned to bare her own lengthening fangs at him. With a growl that she echoed, he slammed into her, losing the last bit of himself that he'd tried desperately to keep from her as he pummeled her slender body with his cock.

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He felt her cunt clamp down upon him, felt her muscles convulse around him and, with a deep shudder, let loose of his control. His body jerked, his head fell back and a roar of release came from his mouth as he spewed his seed inside her heated depths.

It felt as if it lasted forever, his balls clenching and contracting, his potent come spurting inside of her to her womb. When it was done, he was weak, drained, needing nothing more than to rest in her arms. He felt her slump under him, knowing she had found the same intense pleasure that had just shaken him. He let her relax, managing to lower himself down so he lay against her, curled around her like a furry blanket.

* * * *

Garren took a deep breath, pushing his long hair out of his eyes. He could picture himself and Brenna taking the place of the characters in the book, as he always did when she read to him. Now his cock was hard, throbbing with desire, and he was alone, as he always was. What would Brenna say if she knew he was as much a virgin as she?

He shook the thought away, instead going back to the book. He had to find the secret, to see if there actually was a cure and then... He didn't dare let himself hope.

He squinted back down at the book. "Chapter Four: The pain of change. Jeffrey watched..."

* * * *

...from the doorway, seeing the couple once more entwined upon the bed. With a sound of disgust never noticed by the sleeping couple, he put the tray he carried on a small table, picking up the one that Nathaniel had brought up earlier to carry out with him.

Taking it to the kitchen, he scraped the remains of the food into a plate for the dogs and started to empty the teapot, stopping when a familiar smell met his nose. He lifted the pot, sniffing carefully at the thick brew, his heart beating faster in fear.

Somehow Nathaniel or Melissa had gotten hold of the herbs and brewed them into a tea. How, he didn't know. He could only hope that neither had drunk the bitter brew. He stared into the pot, noting that it was still almost full, and breathed a sigh of relief. If they did have some, they didn't drink enough. Nathaniel would never suspect. Jeffrey would be fine.

* * * *

Melissa's eyes fluttered open, blinking sleepily. She was warm and content, a slight throbbing coming from between her thighs reminding

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her of the wonderfully passionate man who'd made love to her so ferociously. Sighing, she stretched, only to feel long, furry arms coming around her waist, pulling her back against his body.

"Hello," she whispered, looking over her shoulder at him.

"Mmm, hello back," he said, rubbing against her. "How do you feel?"

He watched as her brow furrowed, her eyebrows drawing together. She ran her tongue across her teeth and a smile blossomed upon her face. "Normal," she said finally. "No fangs or weird vision left."

Nathaniel sighed, his relief evident. "Thank you, God," he whispered against her hair, burying his face there as he hugged her. "I didn't want to be responsible for you turning into someone like me."

"If I had, Nathaniel, would it have been so bad? We could have been together then," she whispered, turning in his arms to face him.

"Yes, it would have been bad. I don't have any way to tell you of the struggle I go through to tame the beast that is inside of me. It's an everyday battle to keep from losing my temper and going into a rage. For if I did, I could kill someone. I don't want you to ever have to face something like that." His hand came up, his fingers gentle upon her face, pushing the heavy fall of her hair off her forehead.

"I remember feeling so wild. I...I wanted you to bite me. I wanted to feel your teeth in my throat, Nathaniel." She stared up into his furry, handsome face and felt a tiny hint of fear. "Is that what you meant by the beast?"

"Yes, that's part of it. I wanted to bite you," he admitted, letting his forehead drop against hers, closing his.

"But you didn't, you couldn't?"

"No," he whispered, kissing her lips gently. "I could never willingly hurt you."

She responded to his kiss, letting her tongue rub against his tenderly, feeling his care for her in every soft touch he gave her. A soft moan escaped her, followed by a loud rumble of her stomach, which had her pulling from his lips and chuckling.

"I haven't fed you since this morning," he said shamefacedly. "You must be starving."

"Well, I had a sip of that tea you made. But Nathaniel, and I hope you don't take this the wrong way, it was terrible. It was very bitter."

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"I'm sorry, I've never been much use in the kitchen. But Jeffrey is very adept. What if I ring for a bath and have Jeffrey fix you something to eat?"

"That sounds wonderful," she sighed. "But what about you?"

"Oh, I plan on joining you in the bath," he said, chuckling, drawing her near for another quick taste of her soft lips.

"I meant dinner, Nathaniel," she said, rolling her eyes. "Won't you eat with me?"

He rolled away from her then, gently disentangling his arm from under her soft body, jumping down from the bed to walk to where an ancient bell pull hung in the corner. His head was down, his shoulders up, and if she didn't know better, she would swear he was embarrassed.

"Nathaniel? Are you worried about your manners?" she asked as understanding dawned. "Are you afraid I'll think any less of you if you slurp your soup or eat with your fingers?"

He turned, yanking on the pull a little harder than necessary. "No," he said, though his belligerent attitude definitely implied the opposite was true. He grabbed the robe off the floor as he walked back to her, holding it out for her to slip on.

Before she could belt it, he picked her up off the bed, setting her down on the floor and whirled her around to face him. His arms went around her inside the fabric, holding it open so that he could pull her naked form against him once more.

"Yes," he whispered against her hair. "I am mortified that what was once so easy for me now comes at such a price. Holding utensils, sipping off spoons, even holding something as fragile as crystal, makes me feel like a bull in a china shop. I drop things, break glass and get food in my fur, Melissa. I don't wish you to see me like that."

"Have Jeffrey bring enough for two," she said, her voice muffled against him. "We'll think of some way to get it into you."

He squeezed until she groaned, begging him to release her before he crushed her ribs. When he let her go immediately, she laughed, reaching up to touch his face with a soft hand.

"My gentle beast," she whispered. "It is amazing, but I feel as if we'd met in another life."

"They say wolves mate for life, little one. Perhaps..." His voice trailed off as there was a knock at the door. He reached down, tying his robe tightly around her slender waist before going to the door to open it.

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He didn't seem to notice his nakedness, and neither did Jeffrey, who stood in the doorway, his face impassive as he glanced over at her.

"Yes, Master Nathaniel?" he inquired in his formal manner.

"We wish a bath and then dinner. Is there someone who can help you with the water, Jeffrey?"

"Of course, sir. I shall also have Miss Melissa's dress brought up to her so that she might dress for dinner. Shall I serve it in the dining room, sir?"

"Uh, no, bring it here. Enough for us both, Jeffrey, I find I have a fine appetite tonight." He glanced over at Melissa and noticed her blush, laughing lightly as she gave him a look that promised retribution.

"Something else, sir, a letter from your uncle was delivered. Would you like me to read it to you?"

"No, not now. Bring it up, though, Melissa can read it to me later." He watched as the man bowed stiffly, turning on his heel and marching with almost military precision out the door and down the hall. "I wonder what's bothering him," he mused, closing the door behind the servant.

But the thought was swiftly forgotten as a pillow landed, hitting him squarely in the face.

"That's for embarrassing me," she said, holding onto another of the satin cushions from off of the bed.

She squealed, turning to run when he suddenly charged her, a huge furry beast with a gleam in his eyes that spoke of revenge.

Their play lasted until there was another knock upon the door, Melissa this time belting her own robe as Nathaniel grabbed for another from his wardrobe, hoping to hide his rampaging cock. Melissa kept her face averted, feeling the eyes of the men upon her as they brought in a huge tub, filling it with bucket after bucket of water, and then leaving a goodly number more on the hearth next to the fire.

She knew her lips were swollen from his kisses, her eyes lambent from the desire he inspired so easily inside of her. Her breasts ached to be touched by his hands, and her thighs trembled with the yearning that had her woman's flesh hot and wet. Watching him as he stood by the fire, his amber eyes softly glowing as they gazed at her, didn't help the need inside of her, either.

He made her feel things she'd only dreamed of, things she used to wish for upon the stars that bedecked the heavens in the short summer nights. He made her heart race with emotions that were all so new, so astonishing, that she could only wonder if they would last.

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When the last man walked out the door and Jeffrey arrived with platters of food covered by silver domes, she walked toward Nathaniel, her blue gaze riveted to his amber one. She barely saw Jeffrey as he set up a small table, placing their food upon it, bowing quickly to Nathaniel before leaving and closing the door behind himself.

He helped her from her robe before dropping his and stepping into the steaming water with a soft growl. "I don't know if this is the best idea, I take forever to dry," he said, laughing when she did.

"Just promise me you won't shake. I had a dog that used to do that every time I gave him a bath," she said, smiling down at him and took his hand to help get into the high sided tub.

"Are you comparing me to a dog, lady?" he growled.

"Well," she said slowly, smiling. "I haven't seen your tail yet, but..." She squealed when he grabbed her, yanking her to him, his wet fur sticking to her skin as if to keep her next to him. She floated lightly in the water, her body brushing against his as his mouth found hers.

When he'd kissed her senseless, his lifted his lips slowly. "Can a dog do that?" he asked her smugly.

Melissa snuggled against him, her hair dragging in the water at her back. "I've never let one try, thank you," she answered him primly. "But you may do that whenever you wish."

"Ah, I love *carte blanche*," he whispered, nuzzling her ear and then her neck. "But you might be asking for trouble now. You must be sore, Melissa."

"A little," she admitted, leaning up to plant a kiss upon his lips. "I'm more hungry than sore, though."

He turned her so that her back was to him and grabbed the cloth that Jeffrey had left and the large scrub brush he used when he bathed. He used the cloth to soap up then, starting at her neck, rubbed it across her skin gently, slowly bathing her. She moaned, shifting under the cloth as he roamed over her breasts, lifting each lush mound and circling around her nipple, teasing her with tantalizing touches of his hand.

He cleaned her thoroughly, the cloth slipping into the water as his fingers explored the soft folds of flesh between her thighs, doing much more than washing. He brought her to her peak quickly, her soft cries and moans filling the air as much as the steam that drifted from the top of the water.

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Afterwards, she leaned against him, her breathing ragged, listening to the racing of his heart. "Y-you haven't..." she asked him, her voice trembling, feeling the hardness of his cock against her back.

"No. You're sore, Melissa. I may look like an animal, but inside I'm a man. I *can* control myself," he said, stressing the word and making her laugh.

"Of that I have no doubts, Nathaniel." She roused herself enough to duck her head back, wetting her hair. Taking the soap in her hands she started to work up a lather, startled when she felt him take the bar from her.

"Let me? Please?" he asked, gazing into her soft green eyes as she turned to face him in surprise.

"Yes," she said, smiling before turning away, holding onto the sides of the tub as his hands gathered her wet tresses, and, starting at her scalp and working his way down, he lathered them gently, his fingers rubbing against her. It felt wonderful, his long, lean fingers rubbing into her scalp, and then lower.

She sighed when he reached for one of the steaming buckets, checking the temperature of the water before carefully pouring it over her hair. When it was rinsed clean, he helped her gather it up, wringing the excess water out and then wrapping it in a towel around her head.

She turned, smiling at him, mischievously. "Your turn," she said, reaching alongside the tub for the huge scrub brush.

"You don't have to..."

"I want to, Nathaniel. It would please me to be able to please you," she said, her smile widening. "Besides," she said, "I refuse to sleep next to anything that smells like an old bear rug."

His mouth dropped at her comparison, his eyes growing wide. "A-a bear rug!" he roared. "I'll have you know that I don't..." His lips clamped down as she burst out into peals of laughter.

Nathaniel's eyes narrowed, his teeth clicked together in his mouth. He growled at her, his lips parting and his fangs showing. The snarl that came next should have scared her silly, but instead, she moved between his legs, going up on her knees in the tub to wrap her arms around his neck and to press her lips against his. Ignoring the mock snarl, she wound her fingers in his damp fur, pressing her body against him.

"I'm sorry, Nathaniel. You don't smell like a bear rug. I like the way you smell," she whispered against his lips, feeling him relax once more, his big hand molding her to his body. "Can I scrub your back? Please?"

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He nodded, moving forward, his eyes never leaving her as she moved to sit behind him on the edge of the tub. Taking the brush and the soap, he worked up a big head of lather and then handed her the brush.

She scrubbed his back, hearing his moans when she found a spot he particularly enjoyed having scratched. She did his arms next and then climbed down to the end of the tub and pulled his large feet and long legs out of the murky water, washing his feet with her hands and then his legs with the brush. Then she slid up his legs, holding up the scrub brush and cocking her eyebrow at him.

"Just watch what you scrub with that thing," he said, his hand dropping into the water and going down to his cock, covering the sensitive flesh.

She laughed, scrubbing across his chest and stomach, laughing more as he squirmed under her, ticklish. When they were through with their play, more water was outside the tub than in and it was cold, the buckets emptied.

She helped him dry off, taking one towel off the big pile for herself and using the rest on his large body, until, finally, they both sat on one of the big chairs pulled up to the table, each wearing one of his robes. She brushed his drying hair back from his face and leaned up to kiss him before turning to the plates of food that Jeffrey brought in.

Lifting the domed lids, she stared at the difference in the food that was on the plates. Her plate held a slice of venison, covered in a sauce made with juniper berries and mushrooms. His held a jumble of meat, barely cooked, in some kind of sauce, the smell of which made her rear her head back in disgust.

"What is this?" she asked him.

"I know it looks disgusting, but Jeffrey assured me it's what I should be eating to keep up my strength. He uses some kind of herbs to help with my changing needs when I am the beast." He ducked his head, nuzzling his face into her neck. "You smell much better than that does. Maybe I should make you my dinner," he said, nipping at her skin and listening to her squeal.

"Stop that," she laughed. "You can't eat this. It looks awful." She slipped the dome back on the food, shoving it back across the table. "You can share mine."

She carefully cut the meat on her plate, holding her fork up to his lips where he looked at it dourly for a moment before dutifully opening his mouth and letting her slide it inside. He smiled as he chewed,

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enjoying the sweet taste of the meat, and the care with which she was taking care of him. If anyone had asked him, he couldn't remember ever being as happy as he was at that moment.

After they finished the food on her plate and the apples that she'd taken from the tray earlier, she took the towel off of her head and used his brush on her hair, sitting in front of the fire to help it dry.

"Would you read this to me?" he asked her, holding out the missive sent by his uncle. The man was his last living relative, unmarried and worried constantly about Nathaniel's health, checking up on him weekly. His letters were usually short, inquiring about his needs and about the state of his affairs.

Jeffrey usually read them to him and wrote his replies, shipping them off by messenger back to London where his uncle lived. But now that Melissa was with him that would be one duty that he could relieve Jeffrey of and ease the poor man's burden.

Melissa sat on Nathaniel's lap, feeling his hands playing with the tie of her robe while she read the short note. It was as he thought, asking of his health and his welfare, telling him of the state of his properties and a little of the gossip of that influential city. He ended it as he always did, with a wish for his nephew's health and a longing for his return.

"He sounds like a sober man," Melissa said, relaxing against him.

"He always was, for he worried about my father, and then about me and my mother." Nathaniel yawned widely, his hand covering his mouth. He kissed Melissa's fabric covered shoulder and set her on her feet.

"Come, you've worn me out today with your demands for my body, little one," he said grinning down at her as she narrowed her eyes at him.

She took his hand and led him to the bed, blowing out the candles they had lit along the way until only one remained. He slipped the knot from her robe, allowing her to do the same to him, then lifted her in his arms, laying her gently upon the large mattress. Blowing out that last candle, he climbed into the bed with her, pulling the covers up around them, and feeling her curl up into him, her head upon his shoulder. He buried his face in her hair, breathing in her sweet scent, and fell asleep listening to the sound of her heart beating.

* * * *

Garren stretched, looking longingly at his own bed for a moment. But he decided to go on, for the answer had to be in the book somewhere. Otherwise, why would his mother have so desperately wanted him to read it? He rose for a moment, standing in front of the open window and

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letting the bitterly cold air from outside blow over his body. The moon was full, shining on the snow that thickly covered the lawn, making it appear brighter outside than it was.

Christmas was but weeks away. It would be wonderful if he could give Brenna the one gift that she truly wanted, the one gift that he truly wanted to give her, himself as a whole and healthy man, capable of standing by her side. This year, he truly wanted to be involved in the festivities, not just hear about them from Brenna when she returned home from the neighborhood parities and dances. He wanted to see the lights and the decorations, go to the parties, and meet his neighbors as a man, not as a pretense.

He stared up at the brightness of the full moon, his heart wanting to break with the agony of the hope that he was refusing to allow to sway his thoughts. But he couldn't resist sending one heartfelt plea, one prayer to the God that he'd always cursed.

"I don't know if you're up there. I don't even know if you listen when someone prays to you. But if you do, God, please, for Brenna and the love that we could have together, please let there be an antidote or a cure to this curse. Let me be a man worthy to call her my own. I ask for nothing more than a way to make her happy." He let his head rest against the window frame for a moment, just waiting to see if there would be some sign, wishing that God would send him something to let him know that things would work out.

But there was nothing. With a sigh, and after throwing more wood upon the fire, he went back to the chair and lifted the book into his hands once again. "It was well past..."

* * * *

...midnight, and all was silent in the old house. Melissa woke, feeling the bed shake under her. She sat up, staring blindly around the darkened room. "Nathaniel?"

"God, Melissa, help me," he growled from beside her. She leaned across him, grabbing the candle from the table and lighting it with a match from the drawer before looking at him.

He was a horrid sight, his hair mussed, his body contorted in pain.

"My God, Nathaniel, what is it?"

"The change," he growled. "But it is too soon, it shouldn't happen yet for another three nights." He snarled at her suddenly, his hands grabbing his stomach as the pain seemed to blossom there, growing until it was almost unbearable.

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"What can I do?" she asked her hands out to touch him, but she was afraid. Not of him, but of hurting him, for she knew he would tear off his arms before wounding her in any way.

He rolled suddenly, his face burying in the softness of her stomach, his hands grabbing her around her hips. "Don't go away," he moaned. "Don't leave me alone."

"I'm not going anywhere," she insisted, running her hands over his head, holding him and rocking slowly. "I'm right here."

She could feel his mouth open against her skin, felt his teeth scrape against her flesh, but once more he didn't bite her. His body convulsed, his skin grew hot under her hand, almost as if he were fevered. She could do nothing but hold him and pray, rocking against him and begging God silently to make it end.

It took almost an hour, an hour of agony for Nathaniel and terror for Melissa as she held him. His face contorting, his muscles seeming to move, bones creaking as his body changed shape slowly. He began to sweat and to cry out more and more, unrecognizable sounds leaving his lips as his body changed from beast to man.

As suddenly as it started, it ended. He lay quietly in her arms, his skin gleaming in the light of the candle. His shoulders were still broad and muscled, though not quite as big as the beast's. His neck was strong, his hair, black and curly, lay like wet satin against his neck and down his back.

He lay so still that Melissa was afraid. Had the pain killed him? "Nathaniel?" she murmured quietly.

For a moment he didn't move, then he slowly looked up at her, his eyes uncertain as if afraid of what she would think of him now that he was a man.

Melissa was stunned. She'd known he would be handsome, but she hadn't expected the face that looked up at her. His skin was clear, although his cheeks were flushed from the pain. His forehead was broad and smooth, his brows black slashes against his pale skin. His eyes were a soft amber color, framed by exquisitely long and thick lashes that any girl would be jealous of. He had high cheekbones and a long, thin nose. His mouth was wide and generous, his lower lip full. He had a square jaw that right now was firmly set, as if he expected her to turn from him.

"Are you all right?" she asked him gently, her hand reaching out to touch his smooth skin. Smooth it was, without even the hint of whiskers that would normally darken a man's jaw at this time of day.

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"I feel tired and sore, but those are usual after effects of the change," he said.

Melissa started. His voice was soft but deep with a soft accent she found hard to place. It was nothing like what she'd grown used to, no growl or snarl, just a genteel timber that she felt to her toes.

"Well?" he asked, pulling away from her and seeing the red marks upon her stomach, made by the scraping of the beast's teeth as he tried to keep from screaming at the pain. "I hurt you," he said, his hand touching the marks gently.

"No, they don't hurt. You didn't even break the skin, Nathaniel." She stared at him a moment more before tipping her head to the side. "You can see me also now, can you not?"

"Yes," he agreed, his amber eyes softening as they touched on every part of her. "You are so beautiful, Melissa. I thought you such in the eyes of a beast, but in my eyes, you are exquisite."

She smiled, one of such radiance that it made him blink.

"But the change came three days early. It has never done this before. It is the same every month. I change and then exactly seven days later, I change back. It hasn't varied in any of the time since I turned twenty-one, six years ago." He pushed his large hand, his human hand, through his hair, shoving it off of his forehead.

Melissa couldn't stop staring at him. He was as beautiful as the picture had portrayed him, even more so lying beside her naked. His chest was full and as firmly muscled as before, but the skin was satiny smooth, his male nipples were oval shaped tan disks. She found her fingers itching to touch him like this. She wanted to explore the differences, the size and shape of his body from one form to the other.

Oh my, would his...his thing have changed size?

"Melissa? Have you heard a word I've said?"

Her gaze lifted from the blanket covering his groin and she flushed bright red, staring into his knowing amber eyes. His smile grew from a twist of his full lips to a big grin and he reached out his hand, playing with the ends of her hair.

"Uh," she said, embarrassed. "I was thinking about other things, Nathaniel, I'm sorry. What were you saying?"

"Oh no, I think we should talk about those other things you were thinking about," he said, twining a length of her blonde hair around his wrist and pulling her...

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"...closer. Ahh," Garren growled, shutting the book. "If I read about one more orgasmic feast I shall go mad." He rose, dropping the book next to his bed. He sat on the side of the ancient piece of furniture, knowing now that it was the same one as was in the book. "The change came three days early, but they didn't know why. And my mother almost changed, but it stopped." He threw himself backwards on the bed, cursing the book, cursing his unruly cock that was still hard and throbbing, cursing his parents while he laid there, grinding the palms of his hands against his eyes.

"I have to think. There has to be a clue."

The voice startled him, coming out of the dark near the door. "A clue to what?"

Chapter Six

Garren sat up quickly, pulling his robe across his lap from where it had fallen open when he'd thrown himself on the bed. "What are you doing here?" he asked her, his voice sharp.

"I couldn't sleep. I thought maybe we could...talk," she said quietly, staring down at her folded hands. "So, what did you mean by a clue? A clue to what?"

"A clue to understanding the minds of women," he snarled. "What else?"

"If it is that difficult," she said, her shoulders stiffening and her back straightening, "don't bother on my account." She turned, ready to storm from the room.

Garren watched her, knowing he should just let her go, but he couldn't. He couldn't let her hate him. "Wait," he called as her hand touched the door of his bedchamber.

"What?" she said, not turning around.

Before she could move he was there, with the speed of the beast, silent with the grace of the great predators, his hands coming to rest on her shoulders holding her gently.

"Don't leave yet," he whispered, coming up behind her and letting his body press up against hers for just an instant. He wanted to groan from the way she felt, soft and rounded, her body pressing against his, her head on his shoulder.

"Why?" she managed to whisper.

"Because I don't want you to go," he said quickly, letting his hands slide down her arms, running them with a tender touch over her long, slender fingers before twining around them. He held her there with just the light touch of his palms against her own, the sensation of his fur brushing between her fingers, and nothing more.

"I don't want to go, Garren." Her head tipped and she looked at him from over her shoulder. "Ever," she added the truth of her emotions in the clear blue of her eyes.

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He pinched his eyes shut, amazed at the way that one single word could send the blood rushing to his groin and his heart pumping with joy. "Then stay with me for a while, help me ward off the night," he whispered, his breath tickling her ear, his lips caressing the soft skin under it.

He felt her nod more than saw it and, letting go of her hands, lifted her gently into his arms, carrying her against his chest, against his heart. He sat her on the edge of the bed, tying his robe tighter around his lean waist before joining her, sitting so close that their knees touched.

"You are so beautiful, Brenna," he whispered, his huge hand coming to her cheek to cup the fragile skin, feeling her heat, her life against his palm. "I used to dream about being able to touch you, to hold you like Nathaniel did to Melissa. But then it got so painful..." he growled, his fingers brushing over the soft gold of her hair.

"Why?" she asked him breathlessly, staring into his eyes.

"I couldn't have you," he whispered. "What man could take something as good and kind and pure as you are and lead it to a beast? I couldn't ask you to love me like that, like what they have. I had to give you a chance to find a man." He almost spat the word for the thought of someone else touching, kissing, just being with his Brenna tore a shaft of pain through his soul that felt as if it would never heal.

"I don't want just a man," she whispered, moving closer. "I want you, who are so much more than any man could be to me."

"No," he said, shaking his head in denial though his heart was singing. "No, what you feel is gratitude, Brenna. I took you from a hell not of your own making and gave you a place of safety. What person wouldn't feel thankful? It's easy to mistake that for love."

"So I don't know my own feelings or thoughts?" Her voice grew husky, an amazing imitation of his ire. "I'm a confused girl who has no idea about what she wants?"

"I didn't..."

"Yes," she interrupted, pulling herself away from his hand. Her own came up, her finger pounding against his chest, emphasizing every point she made. "You did say that, many times. Every time I've ever told you how I feel, or tried to tell you, you tell me that. I'm not a child, Garren. After last night I cannot believe even you could doubt that."

He watched a blush stain her cheeks at the mention of what they had done the night before. His body reacted predictably, his cock stirring and straining under his arm that he laid across his lap.

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"I don't doubt..."

"Yes," she interrupted him again. "You do. I love you, Garren. It's not gratitude; it's not some childish infatuation. It's love, strong and enduring. It comes from here," she said, holding her fist to her breast. "And here," she held it to her forehead. "And here, too," she finished softly, her hand pressing between her thighs, cupping her own sex.

Emotions swamped him, emotions he'd held in bay for so long they seemed almost too powerful to contain. He stared at her for a single moment before grasping her arms and yanking her against him, his lips crushing down upon hers.

It was a punishing kiss, one that held every bit of emotion that Garren had felt as he'd watched her grow and fell in love with her, with her beauty and her goodness and even her irrepressible mouth. He waited for her to fight him, for her to push him back, to struggle against what he was inside. He waited for her anger, for her loathing because he didn't know how to kiss a woman; he didn't know how to love. All he knew was how to be the beast.

She didn't. Instead, her lips softened, parting under the fury of his, inviting his tongue between with a soft sigh. Her hand rose, her palm sliding across his cheek and into his hair, holding him to her as if afraid he would pull away. She held him against her, moaning softly into his mouth as his tongue finally slid between her lips, rubbing with a heated intimacy against her own.

Brenna knew she'd won when his lips gentled, his kiss becoming fiercer, but the care he'd always shown for her twining with that ferocity. She felt him tilt his head, changing the direction of the kiss, rubbing his lips across hers with devastating effect. His arms held her close, no longer trapping her body against his, now gently cradling her until she reached between them, opening his robe.

"What are you..." he began, feeling the material part.

"Shh," she whispered. "Please Garren, don't ruin this moment," she begged him, pressing against his furred body, her fingers sliding inside the robe to hold herself against him.

The fabric of her gown was cool against his fur. He couldn't have lifted a finger to stop her if the gods themselves had demanded it. Her next words, said so softly, with a tiny moan escaping at the end, sealed his fate.

"Kiss me again, please, Garren?"

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How could he deny her? How could any man have? His lips found hers once more, lifting her against his chest until she straddled his hips, her knees coming down inside of his robe, pushing it further aside. Her gown trailed across his cock and he fisted his hands in the back of her robe, hearing the thin material rip under his grasping claws.

Her thighs came around his hips as she settled against him, soft, silky skin that he wished he could feel against his own without this blasted layer of fur between them. He could feel her fingers rubbing against him, her palms pressing against his back. He wanted nothing more than to rip the scant bit of clothing she wore off of her beautiful body and drive himself into her, lose himself in her.

But he couldn't. He couldn't chance this. He couldn't make her take the risk of becoming like him, not even if it were temporary. The pain of making her an outcast like himself would destroy him. He forced himself to open his hands, let his palms run down the slender curve of her back and grasp her waist, lifting her gently and setting her away from him.

"W-what?" she whispered, looking into his rigid features. "No, God, Garren, please don't deny us this chance to be happy. It's just a book, just someone's ideas put into words. It's not a true story."

"Shh, little pet," he said gently, laying one furred finger against her swollen lips. His tongue came out, licking his own lips, and he could swear he could still taste her upon them, the darkness of her arousal, and the sweetness of her essence, still there upon his mouth. "I don't know what would happen if I took you, Brenna," he said, being as honest as he could possibly be without letting her know about the book. "I've never..."

She stared at him, her eyes suspicious. "You've never made l-love to a woman, fucked a woman before?"

"No," he said, turning his head and staring over at the fire so she wouldn't see his embarrassment. "I've never even kissed a woman before you. I couldn't after I changed into this, could I? What woman would have me?" The words were said in a bitter tone, but he couldn't change the way he felt about the life that had been forced upon him.

"I would," Brenna said, reaching out to him. "I would and gladly," she repeated, smiling as she ran her hands through the fur ruff at his neck. "I love you, Garren."

Those simple words shook him to his soul, making him shudder with the restraint he had to put upon himself to keep from reaching for her. He closed his eyes tightly, his fists clenched, the image of her sweet body as she gave herself to pleasure the night before burnt upon his memory.

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"Garren?" she asked him. "Can you not try? Can you not reach out and take what I offer in the manner upon which it is given. I love you. Do you not love me in return?"

He laughed his voice hoarse and thick with emotion. "If I didn't love you, Brenna, this wouldn't be so damned hard."

"Tell me?" she whispered, going to her knees upon the bed next to him. "Please?"

His eyes opened and he stared at her, her small form so close to him that he could feel her heat, smell her scent, infuse himself with the wonder of her. He just couldn't take her the way that she wanted. "I love you, Brenna," he said quietly, making a decision that he hoped he was strong enough to go through with.

He took her in his arms, but not before pulling open her robe and sliding it off her shoulders. It fell like a gossamer veil to the floor, his quickly following. Stroking his strong fingers over her arms, he looked down at the sweetness of her form barely covered by thin silk. It clung to her body, outlining her curves, emphasizing the hardened bumps of her nipples, even hinting at their pale color.

"May I take this off of you?" he asked her hoarsely, pulling at the small ribbons that tied down the front of the thin silk.

She nodded her eyes wide as she stared up at him.

His hands were clumsy, shaking with passion and nerves as he reached for the tiny ribbons, tearing one off in his eagerness to see her once more. "I'm sorry," he said, holding the tiny ribbon between his massive fingers.

"You bought this for me, so I guess it's yours to take off of me anyway you wish," she whispered, her breath coming faster as he parted the thin silk. The tiny sleeves fell from her shoulders, pooling to her waist, trapping her hands.

"Don't move," he whispered as she tried to free herself. He pulled the ribbon from her hair, letting those silky tresses fall around her shoulders in a gold waterfall of lush waves. He lifted a handful of the stuff, burying his face in it, breathing in the clean scent and the aroma of flowers that clung to it. "You always remind me of lying in a field of wildflowers," he growled, threading it through his hands, lifting his face and staring down at her.

She trembled under his gaze, shivering as his hand reached out gently, cupping the smooth slight curve of her breast.

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"So soft," he whispered, enthralled by the way she felt. "So smooth and firm," he groaned, staring at her straining nipple, his voice growing even huskier.

She shivered under his hand, her head falling back as she bunched her hands in the fabric of the gown, stark streaks of wonderment shooting through her. Then his fingers touched her nipple, tracing the pale pink circle of puckered flesh before flicking gently over the hardened bud. Her back arched as she tried to get him to touch her further, to hold her in his big hand. She wanted to feel his lips around her taut tip, to feel his tongue and teeth against her flesh like the women in the books she read to him.

His hand slipped down to her waist, holding her with one hand while he slipped the gown down her body and off of her long, slender legs. Then he was laying her down on her back on the mattress, lying next to her, his leg coming up to cover her thighs.

"Tell me if I hurt you?" he asked her, his eyes uncertain, his hands shaking as he reached for her.

"You won't," she said, the conviction in her voice making him brave enough to find her lips with his once more.

The kiss started gently, a brushing of skin against skin, a tender tasting of tongues, then grew heated, her moan of pure pleasure inciting his lust. She tasted like sin, pure and simple, the wet depths of her mouth enticing him to return, until she strained against him, her back arched, her body begging for his hands.

"Please," she whispered when he lifted his head, his dark eyes glowing in the dim light of the fire.

His hand seemed too big, too clumsy to touch the pale skin. He was frightened he'd bruise her, though her movements under him, the way she took his hand in her own, guiding it to her breast, squeezing her hand over it to force him to cup her small mound, belayed his fear. She moved under him, squirming as she tried to part her thighs, trapped under his heavy legs.

"I hurt, Garren," she panted, moaning as he took her plump nipple between his fingers, plucking at the tender bud. "Please, I need your hand," she begged.

His leg lifted, allowing her to slide her thigh out from under him, Her hands rose to his, sliding it down her body, pressing his open palm against her skin. She hesitated for only a brief instant as she reached the

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top of her mound, staring up into his eyes, watching as he watched his hand against the pale softness of her stomach.

She quivered under him, whether fear or desire, he didn't know. He could only pray it was desire and not a need to please him that had her pressing his fingers into the soft curls that covered her sex, hiding the petal pink wetness of her cunt from his eyes. He brushed against her skin, marveling at its softness, its silkiness, under the rough callous of his fingers.

Then she pushed him farther and for the first time, he felt the wet flesh of a woman's heat. It sent a shudder of desire through him; a tremor of delight that was also pain, for his cock throbbed with the need to be inside her, to feel the wetness of her stretched around him. He wanted to know what she felt like, to experience with her the velvety heat that she'd read about to him.

He bent his head, needing to distract himself from the burning ache in his groin. Instead, his mouth found her nipple, the taut bud teasing his lips with its hardness, tempting his tongue with the flavor of her skin. His fingers gently explored her moist folds, slipping over the tiny pearl of her clit and feeling her body tense under him.

Her hands fisted in his fur, and her body arched as he gently strummed that small rigid piece of flesh. He slid his finger farther down that sleek slit, finding her heated opening, the thin membrane of flesh that guarded that portal of pleasure still intact, barring all but the tiniest of his fingers to enter.

He wouldn't take the proof of her virginity, though his body demanded that he make her his, merging their bodies and finding out the joys of the flesh together for the first time. He couldn't, for if he wasn't successful, he would have to let her go. That thought made the beast inside of him howl with frustration and the man ache with pain. But he wouldn't let her see either, for tonight he would shower her with pleasure.

His lips moved from her breasts, his tongue trailing down the small curve of her breast, smiling darkly as she shivered, pressing his head against her body with her small hands. He followed the slender line of her stomach, slipping his tongue into the taut well of her navel, hearing her breathy exclamation and the shudder she gave when he traced it around that tiny opening.

Nuzzling his nose against her warm skin, he spread her thighs apart further, sliding down to lie between her splayed legs, staring with

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wonder at the wet pink flesh he'd seen only once before. "You're even beautiful down here," he whispered, kissing the top of her slit gently.

He felt her thighs tense, saw her hand coming down as if she would cover herself from his gaze. It slid over her flesh, her slender fingers trembling lightly as she sought to hide herself.

Garren chuckled at her shyness, lowering his face to nuzzle at her fingers, sliding his tongue along the tense seam of those long digits until she moved them slipping between them as she opened her hand. He purred at his first taste of a woman's flesh, of Brenna's sweet flesh, for she was everything he'd imagined she would be in his fevered fantasies. Salty and musty, with that sweet tang of her lust, it exploded upon his senses. He wanted more; he wanted to hear her cries, to feel her legs tighten and her hips dance under his mouth until she flooded his face with her sticky come.

Growling out his lust for her, he grabbed her wrist, pulling her hand away almost roughly. Before she could protest, he was pressed against her wet flesh, his mouth nibbling at the plump lips of her sex, his tongue coming out to lap at the thin folds, licking and tickling the pearled clit.

She mewled beneath him, her wrist still in his hand, forgotten in his haste to pleasure her fully. He spread her open beneath his mouth, his tongue a flickering flame to drive her to her brink. It didn't take long as he suckled her clit into his mouth, his long fangs gently nibbling against the hard knot of flesh.

Her cries had his hips jerking against the bed, rubbing his cock against the mattress, wishing it was her tight cunt instead. But he couldn't, he wouldn't take her.

Brenna couldn't believe the sensations building inside her. It was as if last night were just a beginning, a taste of what her body was actually capable of feeling. His mouth was hot, his tongue long and thick, running over her wetness, lapping at it as if he couldn't get enough. Her hips wouldn't be still, thrusting against his mouth even as she begged him for more, her cries growing sharp in the silence of the room.

The bubble of need grew in her loins, bigger and tighter as his mouth performed splendid wonders. Then he growled, the vibrations so intense, she couldn't stop them. She exploded in heated chills of pleasure, his name on her lips as she rose in the bed, bending over him.

He made it last for what seemed like forever, his tongue gently lapping at her clit now, sliding down to taste of her juices as if he

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couldn't get enough. He pushed her back until she was against the pillows once more, her body shivering as contractions of erotic pleasure shuddered through her.

He took her from one peak to the next, stopping only long enough to let her relax before once more feasting upon her sweet cunt. She took all she could, crying out when the sensations grew too heated for her to bear, holding on to him as the only sane thing in a world grown mad with lust and love.

She finally pushed him away, curling to her side, shuddering, tears streaming down her cheeks as she tried to catch her breath. Brenna felt Garren move up behind her, his body curling around hers, his fur, damp from her spendings, brushing against her skin as he kissed her shoulder.

"I...I can't," she pleaded, feeling his hand move over her hip and slip down to gently caress her furred mound. "No more."

Garren grinned behind her, a smile that was taut with the desperation he felt. He'd never wanted her more, never needed to release his seed any more than he did now. He felt as if he would explode his body hurting from denying his own desire. But his hands were gentle, his caresses soft upon her flesh. He managed to curl around her but hold himself away, not letting her feel how hard and heavy he was with need.

"Y-you didn't f-fuck me," she accused as she turned and looked at him over her shoulder.

"No, and I won't be tonight, love." He watched as she tried to accept the fact, smiling as a huge yawn took her by surprise. "Let's just sleep. I've wanted to wrap you in my arms all those times you snuck into my bed when you thought I was asleep. I just didn't dare."

"Why does it not surprise me that you knew?" she grumbled, stretching and snuggling back against him. "You will not send me back to my room?" she asked.

"No, I like you here too much. Now sleep, tomorrow will be here soon." He reached down and drew up the blanket he'd torn off the bed earlier, pulling it over the two of them.

She fell easily into dreams, her breathing deepening, her body growing lax and heavy against him. For him, it wasn't as easy. His groin throbbed and his cock seemed to be trying to whisper to him how close she was, how naked in his arms. He tried to ignore it, to close his eyes and sleep, but he was too restless. Finally, he pulled away from her, making sure she was covered snugly before stepping off the bed and finding the book.

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Just the thought of reading the love scene between Melissa and Nathaniel had him gritting his teeth, glaring at his unruly cock that refused to subside. But he had to know if there was a cure, he had to know if he could have a future with Brenna.

He grabbed his robe, adding another log to the dwindling flames to ward off the chill wind that had grown outside and sat in his chair, pulling it closer to the fire for he dare not light a candle. He didn't want her to wake and wonder why he was reading himself when it was so difficult to do. He'd managed to throw her off once, he didn't know if he could again.

Opening the book, he found the place he had stopped. "'Oh no, I think we should talk...'"

* * * *

"...about those other things you were thinking about," he said, twining a length of her blonde hair around his wrist and pulling her closer to his naked chest until she rested upon it. Her breasts pressed against his skin and he groaned at the sensation. His fur kept him insulated from the arousing feeling of skin against skin. To have her like this now was almost more than he could bear.

"L...I can't believe this, Nathaniel. I can't believe that you are a man now, and no longer the beast," she leaned over him, her long golden curls hanging around them, curtaining them from the rest of the room. "Are you sure you're okay?"

"Sore, little one, and tired, but it's the mystery of the thing that will bother me." He kissed her then, long and gently, enjoying the way she felt, her skin soft and warm, her body slender and beautiful, resting easily in his arms.

"Have you done aught different?" she asked him, her head tilted as she too thought of how it could have happened.

"Well, hmmm, there was a saucy little minx that kept dragging me to her bed today," he said chuckling as she growled and nipped his chin.

She stroked his chest, letting her head rest against it just under his chin. "There must have been something else unless you need me to stay available so that you might fuck me on and off during the day to keep your human shape?"

"Would you mind?"

"Hmm," she mumbled sleepily. "I must earn my keep, I suppose."

He chuckled again at the put upon tone to her voice, letting his furless hands roam over her body, stroking her in ways meant to comfort,

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not to entice. "Sleep, little one, for if I am to continue to stay human, you will need your rest."

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Garren breathed a sigh of relief, grateful that they slept.

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"You must kill her, that's all there is to it," the man's voice said, his face indistinct in the harsh darkness of the stables.

"I can't," the other man protested, his voice outraged. "Giving him a drug is one thing, committing murder...well, that is something I just cannot do."

"Don't quibble, man. You are being well paid to do this job and to do it right. Now get rid of the girl, kill her and leave the body for him to find. Do it right and he'll believe he did it in a fit of beastly madness." The man grinned a flash of white teeth in the dark. "That's absolutely brilliant. Make him think he killed her and then he'll go mad all the faster."

"You cannot be serious, you cannot seriously want me to kill her and make it seem as if a beast did the deed?"

"You will do it, unless you wish for others to learn of all that you've done. Now be a man. I want this done soon, tonight if possible. I've been patient long enough."

There was a rustle of clothing and the heavy clip of booted feet, and the man was alone in the stables, staring at the place where the other had been. He was to kill the girl. Just the thought of murder made his gorge rise in his stomach and his heart beat frantically in his chest.

He had to do it; there was no use for him to argue about it. He'd done too much, wronged too many since this thing started. He would have to do it. He would have to kill the girl and frame the beast.

Turning, he walked from the stables and made his way slowly back to the house.

Chapter Seven

"You must kill her," Garren read, his voice soft so that he wouldn't wake Brenna, "that's all there is to it," the man's voice said, his face indistinct in the harsh darkness of the stables."

"I can't," the other man protested, his voice outraged. "Giving him a drug is one thing, but murdering her...well, that is something I just cannot do."

"Ahh, the plot thickens. But who would want to kill my mother? What was this drug they were talking about?" Garren turned to the next page of the book, the rustling of pages sounding almost unnaturally loud in the quiet of the room. "Chapter Five: Confusion and Confessions..."

* * * *

Nathaniel woke, his head barely turning on the pillow before Melissa straddled him, her naked breasts a glorious thing to see in greeting the morning. "Good morning, love. You slept well," he said. His hands, wondrously human hands, rose to her waist.

"I slept wonderfully, though I will admit to missing my fur blanket," she teased, giggling when he grabbed her ribs, tickling the sensitive flesh with his furless fingers. She squirmed and wiggled, finally falling to her back on the bed where he leaned over her, his hand gently pushing the hair from her face.

"You are so beautiful, Melissa. Promise you won't leave me now that the change has taken place. We can stay here just as I do when I am the beast." The words were rushed, as if he feared her response.

There was a pounding upon the door, interrupting their play and his quiet plea, leaving him cursing his frustration to the room at large, grabbing his robe and striding to the door to pull it open. "What?" he demanded, though without the inhumanity of the beast in his voice.

"S-sir, you've...the change...it occurred so soon?" Jeffrey stuttered, stepping back in surprise. The tray he held in his hands slipped and Nathaniel caught it before it could fall, spilling the food that was on it.

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"Last night, Jeffrey. Isn't it marvelous? Perhaps it means that I'm growing out of the curse?"

"Perhaps so, Master Nathaniel. You should rest the day, perhaps send the girl back to the village and spend the day in bed." He let the younger man take the tray and followed him into the room. "I can escort her there and return her to you tomorrow, sir."

"But why would I want Melissa gone, Jeffrey? That makes no sense. She is perhaps the reason that this marvelous thing has happened." He smiled over toward the bed to where he could see her tousled golden head above the bedclothes.

"I'm just saying that you should rest the day, Master. That is all," Jeffrey hastened to add. "Perhaps eat, for I'm sure you are not completely yourself as of yet." He indicated the tray upon which were two platters, one which contained his normal fare of half cooked beef coated with herbs. The smell had Nathaniel wrinkling his thin nose in disgust.

"I'd rather have normal food now, please Jeffrey. I doubt that even the dogs would eat that fare. Please return with another breakfast. I think I'm in the mood for eggs this morning." He lifted the other platter, taking it with him to the bed. "Leave it outside the door, would you Jeffrey? That's a good man."

The dismissal was obvious, but for a moment Jeffrey stood, watching Nathaniel, the man, as he fussed over the young maid. It was obvious that he cared for her and just as obvious that she felt for him as well. He sighed, lifting the platter and carrying the drugged food out of the room. He must not have eaten his dinner the night before; the herbs that brought on the change were very fragile, losing potency if not eaten immediately.

Melissa was the cause of this. She distracted the master, kept him from his routine. She had to be removed from the home and taken from the master's sight so that Jeffrey might get him back on that routine. But how? Killing her now would be impossible. Since the master wasn't in his beast form, he would be suspicious of any reason to take Melissa from his sight.

He had to get the drugs into the master somehow.

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Drugs caused this. Garren's eyes grew wide, his breath short as he wondered, if drugs had made his father the way he was, then what was keeping him like this? He trusted his people; he'd had to, for his survival and to keep the secret of his true form. None had ever betrayed him, for

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he paid a hefty salary that inspired their loyalty. Was he being secretly drugged also? His eyes scanned down the pages, almost too excited to read the words until one passage caught his attention.

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Nathaniel grabbed Jeffrey by the throat, the plate of drugged food falling to the floor at his feet and spattering over the old musty carpeting. "What is this?" he roared.

* * * *

Garren closed his eyes, forcing himself to calm. His mother's note said to read the entire book, and he would obey that. He trailed his finger back to the page, searching for the passage he'd left off at.

* * * *

He had to get the drugs into the master somehow.

His thoughts heavy, his heart even heavier, for his task was not to his liking, Jeffrey hurried to the kitchen to prepare more food.

Nathaniel's heart had never seemed fuller, for being with Melissa brought him nothing but joy. He tipped the small cake he held in his hand to her lips, urging her to take a bite even as her hand caressed his face, bemused by the fine features and handsome mien that now reposed there. She opened her mouth obediently, tiny crumbs sprinkling from her lips as her sharp white teeth bit into the cake.

The crumbs fell to her naked breasts and she lifted her hand to rid herself of them, only to be stopped by Nathaniel's throaty growl.

"No, let me," he ordered, dropping the cake back to the plate and pushing it to the side. His lips found her skin, his hand trailing over the satiny flesh, turning over to brush the back of his fingers, now gloriously free of fur, against her breast. He nibbled on her skin, his tongue coming out to lick up the tiny crumbs, before moving lower.

Melissa moaned, lying back against the sheets as he found the pearled pink tip of her breast, his lips opening to claim their prize with relish. He suckled hungrily upon the taut tip, teasing her with flicks of his tongue and tiny nibbling bites of his teeth. He felt her arch under him, a cry of pleasure wrenched from her lips as his mouth became more demanding.

"I want you," he moaned, staring up into her face now flushed with the passionate needs he aroused within her. "I need you, Melissa. Promise to never leave me," he ordered. "Promise to stay by my side until we are both gone to meet our maker. Promise it," he said harshly, shaking her in his need to hear her say the words.

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"I...I will never leave unless you send me from you, Nathaniel," she whispered, her hands coming up to caress his face. "I...I couldn't even if I wanted to, for my heart resides within you now," she admitted, her expression anxious. It was too soon, she knew, for her to admit her feelings. Would he think her nothing but a frivolous girl to grant her love to any handsome boy that looked her way?

The smile that lit his handsome face stole her breath and he rose above her, finding her mouth with his own. "We shall marry," he decided, whispering it between kisses.

Her hands pressed against his chest, holding him back not by her own strength but by his desire to please her. "What?" he asked, staring into the cherished blue of her eyes.

"You cannot marry a commoner such as me, Nathaniel," she whispered though her words were firm. "You are an earl, a peer of the realm. Your blood runs blue, my lord. Mine is the red of peasants no matter the culture of my words. It is enough that you love one, you do not have to cause the scandal of marrying a commoner."

"It is because I love you that I do not care if there is a scandal." He sat up, feeling the anger that her words caused eating at him. "You are no more common than I, Melissa. Your heart is true and pure, as pure as your body until I stole your maiden's veil away from you. I wish but to make an honest woman of you and any child you might bear me, so how can you lie there and tell me nay?"

"It is because of how I feel, because of my feelings for you that I must, my love." She sat also, hazel eyes gazing into soft amber, seeing the hurt and anger reflected there and in the stubborn set of his jaw. "Do you think to ruin our day by pouting?" Her hands reached out, finding his sides and tickling them.

Nathaniel gave a disgruntled grunt, grabbing her hands and pinning her to the bed. "I am not pouting," he grouched, though his lower lip stuck out. "I am angry that you do not realize your worth, nor do you understand my wish to make you mine in the eyes of our Lord, as well as in the eyes of man."

"Then say them to me now, for is not our Lord everywhere? Speak the words of joining to me; let me speak them to you. It will be enough." She searched his eyes, hers filled with hope.

"Now?" he asked, staring down at their naked bodies.

"We came into this world as such, why not?"

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"Why not, indeed." Nathaniel sat up, pulling her up also, turning so that he faced her upon the bed. He ran one shaking hand through his hair, pushing it back and out of his face, the long length falling around his shoulders in thick waves. "I...I have no bride's gift...wait."

He rose from the bed, going to the small desk that sat in the corner of the room, pulling open the front. His eyes searched the many tiny recesses before he finally pulled open a small drawer, holding up a small ring. He closed the desk, sliding the ring upon his littlest finger before returning to the bed.

He moved the platter once more, smiling gently at her as he sat next to her and took her hand. "Melissa, I've known you so little time in reality, but my heart recognized you even when I was in the form of the beast. You've tamed my fierceness, you've given me back hope, and laughter, and life. You've taken me from the bleak dark of night and brought me back into the light. I love you," he said, kissing the back of her hands. He slid the ring from his finger, sliding it onto hers, kissing it gently, and then holding her hand next to his heart.

A tear started, glittering against the clear blue of her eyes as she stared up at this noble man. His words held her heart in their thrall, his touch sent her senses spinning, and, for just an instant, no words would come.

Nathaniel reached out, wiping away the tiny tear with the side of his thumb. "Happy tears, I hope," he said softly, leaning down to touch her lips.

"Very happy, Nathaniel, how could they not be? I've wished upon the stars in the heavens for someone like you, dreamt of you, prayed to find someone who my heart would recognize as my own. Though I never expected him to have fur and fangs," she added, laughing lightly. She reached up, cupping his cheek in her palm, feeling the bristle of whiskered growth. "I would love every part of you, fangs, fur and claws, all of it matters aught as long as we are together."

"You will become my wife?" he asked, his eyes searching hers.

"Here, now, in the eyes of God, I am yours, body, heart, and soul, Nathaniel. I shall stay yours until you no longer want me."

"Then we shall be together until the heavens fall, love, for I shall always want you." His mouth found hers once more, sealing the vows they made one to the other with the gentleness of his kiss.

It stayed gentle only moments, and then emotions, desires, needs flared, to turn his lips passionate, finding their match in hers. His tongue

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claimed her mouth, his lips twisting to rub and ravish until neither could breathe. He tore his mouth from hers, panting heavily, his hands sliding down her to fill with the bountiful beauty of her breasts.

She arched into his hands, pressing the aching pink tips into his palms, throwing her head back as the magic of his touch sent shivers of molten desire to boil in her belly. "Nathaniel," she growled, a throaty cry that tugged at the remnants of the beast still deep inside.

He wanted her with a wildness, a fierceness he'd known only as the beast, the emotions stunning him before driving him to flip her over on the bed. He forced her body down until her belly was pressed to the mattress, ignoring her startled cry, his lips trailing scorching kisses over her shoulder and down the long line of her spine.

His teeth nipped at her ribs, feeling each delicate bone beneath the sleek muscle and flesh covering it, following the curve of her warm skin to her waist, his hands spanning the tiny width easily. His mouth moved lower, tracing over the top of her heart shaped bottom, finding the valley that split the pale globes and teasing it with his tongue.

Melissa tried to squirm out from under him, her body reacting violently to his kisses and caresses. She wanted to touch him, to kiss him just as he was her. It felt strange to be held, to be caressed as he was caressing her now, his tongue plying gentle swirls over the soft rosette hidden between her bottom cheeks.

Nathaniel felt her hips jerk and slid his hand between the slender ivory columns of her thighs, finding her swollen and wet, her pretty pink flesh ready for his possession. He heard her moans, felt her trying to turn to let herself feel the sharpness of his teeth on one precious globe. "Don't move, Melissa," he growled.

She felt as she had the day before, in the library, held captive to his touch, to his kiss. She hadn't been able to protest then, had barely been able to breathe from the strange sensations he'd sent screaming through her body. She didn't want to protest now, only to touch him, to hold him as he once more became part of her.

His hands cupped her flesh, kneading soft resilient skin, holding each globe so that his mouth might press a more intimate kind of caress to her softness. His tongue traced tiny circles over the puckered bud before pressing against it, his fingers stroking over the knot of her clit and thrusting gently into her wet core.

Melissa wanted to buck against his fingers, to beg him to touch her more, but the things his tongue and his mouth were doing made her too

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breathless to speak. Strange feelings were shattering through her, strange sensations that seemed dark and inescapable tightening the desire in her belly until she thought she would burst.

Nathaniel reached for the drawer in his night side table, pulling it open slowly, reaching in for the small vial of precious oil. Lifting his head, his eyes were drawn to her face. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes closed, her breath coming in heated pants as she writhed against his fingers. It was a sight that would arouse even the most spent of desires, sending his pulse racing, and a heavy throbbing to thud in his cock.

"Hold still, Melissa," he whispered again, this time gently as he used his thumb to pry open the top of the vial, never taking his other hand from the sweet flesh of her sex. He poured a small stream onto her, shutting the vial quickly and dropping it to the bed beside them. "Hold very still," he whispered, his fingers rubbing into the oil and coating with the viscous liquid.

He heard her whimper as he pressed his finger against that tiny pucker. His gaze went to her face, seeing her expression, the concentration, the way her teeth dug into her bottom lip. "Am I hurting you?" he asked, feeling the tight ring give way under the pressure of his finger and then the heat of her around him.

"N-no, it feels s-strange," she whispered.

He pushed in another finger, feeling her body jerk and tense up under him. "Relax, sweet one," he whispered, using his thumb on the hardened flesh of her clit. "Relax and let me do this."

Melissa felt his fingers moving in her bottom, the feelings strange, not quite painful, but not quite pleasurable either. Then his thumb was moving over her clit and a moan was startled out of her, for those tiny caresses sent fiery flames to her belly, making her push back against the fingers. She wriggled her hips, wanting more of those caresses, begging with tiny cries for more.

She felt his fingers leave her, pull from her sex and from her bottom, but before she could cry out her disappointment, he was pushing against her again, something bigger, something that hurt when it pushed past that tight outer ring of muscle.

Her body went rigid beneath him. "Oh!" she whispered, squirming under him.

"God, Melissa, don't move. You're so tight, little one." He moved his hips, tiny motions that had him burrowing deeper into her until finally he lay against her, buried inside of her.

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She could feel him pulsing and hard. She felt stretched, invaded almost more than she could handle. He was so hard, lying against her, his weight holding her to the bed. Then he moved, pulling from her, leaving a feeling of emptiness behind. Melissa groaned, burying her face in the blankets. She felt his hand slip round her thigh, pulling her body up to reach between her legs, his fingers sliding into her wetness, his thumb slipping rhythmically across her clit.

He moved against her with a sensuousness that stole her breath, his hips shaking as he sought to give her pleasure before giving in to his own. She was so tight, so hot around him, her sex wet beneath his caressing fingers. He could feel her moving, her hips jerking in tiny circles as pleasure started to numb the slight pain. Her cries became louder, her face flushed, her lips parted with her panting breaths.

The heat of her spongy walls, the tightness of them had his pulse racing, his head spinning as the sensations built, growing until he could feel himself losing control. He pulsed into her, hearing her cries, feeling her sex spasm with bliss around his fingers, her body bucking under him.

He filled her bowels with silken ropes of creamy come, shaking with the intensity of his feelings, his head thrown back and a roar of pure pleasure coming from his lips.

When it was over, he gathered her into his arms, pulling gently from inside her body, holding her close to him. His hands stroked over the long length of her golden hair, feeling the satiny tresses. "Are you all right?" he asked her gently, afraid of her answer.

"Hmm, yes, love. I did not know such to be possible, Nathaniel." She almost purred in his arms, arching like a contented kitten.

"I worried I had hurt you or frightened you," he said, pressing a kiss to her hair.

"A little at first," she admitted, turning her head to stare into his beloved amber eyes. "But then it was just strange, and then..." her voice trailed off and her cheeks bloomed with color.

"And then..." he coaxed, kissing her warm cheek.

"Then it was...wonderful, blissful. May we do it again sometime, Nathaniel?" she asked him seriously, frowning when he began to laugh.

"If I had not wanted to marry you before, I would now, my love. Yes, we will most definitely do such again." He stretched, rising from the bed after pressing another sweet kiss to her rosy cheek.

"Where are you going? Jeffrey thinks you should rest today, as do I. I was scared last night, the pain you went through was quite terrible,

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Nathaniel." She turned on her back, feeling his seed begin to drain from her body.

He went to the stand, taking a small cloth from the basin there and wetting it with water from the pitcher close by, he cleaned himself first. Then he got a new cloth, wringing it until it was just moist and brought it to her. He laughed as her cheeks seem to grow pinker. "Clean yourself, my love. I shall go and see if Jeffrey has brought us another platter." He stopped to pull on his robe before going to the door, hearing the rustling of the sheets as she moved behind him.

Reaching the door, he opened it quietly, intending to retrieve the food and then to tease Melissa about her blushes as they ate from the other plate. Instead, he stared at Jeffrey as the man stood motionless, the platter of food in one hand. In the other was a bundle of herbs that he'd just started shaking over the food.

Nathaniel's nose, still sensitive even in his human form, smelled the aroma of those same herbs that Jeffrey used on his food during the change. He stared in confusion, not understanding for an instant why Jeffrey would be putting those herbs on his food now, for he was a man again, and not a beast.

Understanding dawned, and, with it, a growing horror as he thought back to the times he'd eaten those same drugs, the way the food made him feel, the medicines Jeffrey pushed upon him the days before the change to try to thwart its hold upon him. These herbs, that medicine, it was what caused the change!

Nathaniel grabbed Jeffrey by the throat, the plate of drugged food falling to the floor at his feet and spattering over the old musty carpeting. "What is this?" he roared. He grabbed the bag of herbs in his hand, holding it up as he stared at the man he'd trusted above any other.

"It is just herbs, master," Jeffrey stuttered, for behind the eyes of the man he could see the savage nature of the beast longing to get out.

"Just herbs? You expect me to believe that? Then I guess you wouldn't mind eating some of them yourself?" He shook the older man who hung from his hands like a wet rag doll.

"I...I meant no harm, Master. Surely you know of my loyalty to you and your family. I was with your father until his death. I sat with you when your mother took her life. I helped you through the changes and kept you safe and away from those who would hurt you. You cannot think I would wish you ill, Master." Jeffrey cowered in his hand, holding up his own as he pled for his life.

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Nathaniel turned, shoving the older man into the room, feeling this betrayal to his soul. "Why? You must tell me why you've done this to us, Jeffrey, to me and my father, and my mother whom you professed to love with your very soul. How could you hurt her so by taking away the one thing she loved with her whole heart?"

"Nathaniel?" Melissa called, stepping down from the bed, belting the huge robe snugly around her tiny waist. "What is it?"

"You drank of the tea I made yesterday, did you not, Melissa?"

"You know I did, but it was a bitter brew, as I told you, Nathaniel. What is this?" she asked, holding out her hand to Jeffrey and going to help the older man up.

"Do not touch him!" Nathaniel snarled, grabbing her and holding her close to him. "He has been poisoning my food, Melissa, all these years with this same mixture. He's the cause of the curse, the reason that the beast came to be. You drank the tea, the tea I brewed from these herbs. Then you changed, but like me, when I first changed, it didn't last, and only showed as a lengthening of the teeth, a growth of the nails." He lifted the bag with the herbs in it. "Where did this come from?"

Jeffrey stood on his own, brushing off the knees of his black breeches with shaking hands. He held his head high, though his cheeks were wan and pale. "An old woman in the village, Master Nathaniel, she makes the blend for me from an ancient recipe."

"Why, Jeffrey? I thought of you as family, as the father I'd never known. Why did you do this to us?" Nathaniel felt Melissa's arm coming around him, squeezing gently as she stood at his side.

"It started so many years ago, sir; you were but a lad when I was approached. I...had a small problem with gambling and had borrowed money from the wrong people. I was desperate for a way out of the predicament I was in. I was also young and foolish." Jeffrey shook his head, his disgust for himself evident. "I should have gone to your father as soon as I was offered the deal, told him everything. But I was proud and jealous and spiteful."

"Who approached you?" Melissa asked.

Jeffrey closed his eyes, a huge sigh coming from deep inside of him. "If I tell you, he'll kill me."

"If you don't tell me, I'll kill you. I wonder what eating the entire contents of this bag would do to you, Jeffrey." Nathaniel held the bag up in his hand, his intent clear.

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"It would indeed kill me, sir," Jeffrey said, pushing a strand of gray hair from his face. "It is probably what I deserve for the evil I have done. But I will plead for my life if it becomes necessary."

"Tell me who got you to do these things to my family, Jeffrey, and I might be persuaded to give you a head start before I come after you to kill you." Nathaniel's voice deepened, turning into a throaty growl reminiscent of the beast.

"Y-your uncle, sir. He came to me all those years before, offering me enough money to end my problems and to make my life easier if I would but feed the herbs to your father and become his treasured servant and keeper. I had no idea at first what it would do..."

"You lie," Nathaniel hissed a line of white forming around his lips. "You bastard, you lie!"

"No, sir," Jeffrey yelped, jumping back as Nathaniel surged forward, the lust for blood in his eyes. "He was here last night, sir, he wants me to...to..." he glanced helplessly over at Melissa.

"He wants you to what, Jeffrey?" Melissa asked him, putting her small body between the two men.

"To kill you, miss. He knows that you will distract the master, keep him from the routine that keeps him the beast, as you've already done. He wants you dead, mutilated as if the beast had done the killing. He said that it would be the last straw to push Nathaniel into the madness of the drug." Jeffrey reached out a shaking hand toward Melissa. "I told him no. I told him that giving the drug was one thing, but murder, that was something I couldn't do."

"My uncle," Nathaniel said, his arm falling away from Melissa's shoulders. "Why would he want me dead? I am his last living relative."

"Money," Jeffrey said simply. "He wishes it all, your title, your lands, all your money. It will be his if anything were to happen to you without an heir."

"He drugged his brother, his nephew, wanted to kill me, all because of greed?" Melissa was shocked, her hand going to her throat.

"It is an evil thing done by an evil person." Jeffrey bowed his head, waiting for the master's next words.

"You've put me through hell, Jeffrey," Nathaniel said. "I cannot forgive the things you have done to my family and to myself."

"I never expected such, Master Nathaniel." He took a deep breath, holding it for a moment before letting it out in a long sigh. "I shall pack my things and wait for the police to come and collect me, sir."

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He started out of the room, his head bowed.

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Garren growled softly, staring at the book. He wanted to rip the man apart, for not only had he torn apart his grandparents, forced his father to live in exile, he'd ruined Garren's own life. His teeth seemed to lengthen, his chest rumbled with his anger. Rage turned his vision red.

He wanted to howl out his anguish and his rage, to ease the burning in his chest that seemed to flame until he could barely control the pain it caused. He dropped the book to the floor, saving it from the rasping of his claws as they dug into the chair, ripping at the upholstery until it was tufts of fluff in the air.

Still the rage burned, his desperate need to feel Jeffrey's neck in his claws, to tear out the throat of the man who had turned him into this beast causing him to jerk from the chair, knocking it over in his ire.

Brenna sat up in the bed, her eyes cloudy with fatigue, pushing the hair from her face. She turned at the noise of the chair hitting the floor, jumping at the loudness of it and the inhuman growl that came from the shadows of the room. "Garren?" she called cautiously, disturbed by the animalistic sounds he was making.

He came rushing at her, a huge beast, barely recognizable as the loving man who'd made her feel such passion and pleasure earlier. His teeth glowed in the light of the fire, clear drops of saliva dripping from them as he bared them. His eyes flamed red, a mad rage in their depths. His claws were outstretched, as if to tear her apart.

Brenna screamed, falling back to the bed as he leaped at her.

Chapter Eight

Her scream echoed throughout the chamber. Brenna found herself held tightly to Garren's chest, his body convulsing against hers, his shoulders shaking almost as if he were sobbing. Slowly, her hands came up to hold him to her, stroking the soft hair of his head, rocking him against her as she would a child.

"What is it, Garren? What has you in such a state?" she asked him, her voice soft but with a hint of panic in its depths and a tremble of the fear she'd felt still shivering through her.

He raised his furry head from her shoulder, staring down into her beautiful face. "I...I love you so much," he whispered.

Brenna's smile was brilliant, her face lighting up to create such an aura of happiness it was hard for him to look at her. "And such feelings have you roaring and tearing apart the room?"

"No," he said, ducking his head and feeling the anger drain away as she held him close. "It was the thought of losing you, of never being able to love you the way I want to. I couldn't stop the rage."

"You never have to lose me, Garren. I want to be with you, I want to be yours. You know this." She held his face in her hands, her eyes gazing into his with a passion she hoped he could feel. She slid her naked body out from under the blankets that covered her, blushing as his gaze roamed over her smooth, slender curves. "Take me, Garren," she whispered, her eyes staring up into his. "Make me your own, body, heart, and soul."

His growl startled her as did his sudden move, sweeping her into his arms, drawing her naked body against his own. His moan was heartfelt, feeling her slim form pressed so closely to him, only the thin layer of his robe keeping them separated. He wanted to lift her, to pull her onto his cock, impale her with its rigid length. He wanted to feel her around him, her flesh hot and wet, clinging to his cock with every forceful thrust.

He wanted to rage at the moon for he couldn't do it. He couldn't take her, not like this, not now. Not while he was still the beast.

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"I...I can't, Brenna. Please," he begged, holding her at arm's length from him, his entire body shaking with the hold he held over his passions. "Don't ask this of me again, not now. Not while I am like this," he said, staring down at his hairy body with disgust. "I cannot take the chance that I might harm you in my lusts or cause one of our children to be stricken with this same infirmity. I just can't, Brenna," he said, his eyes pleading with her to understand.

Brenna felt the defeat before her sigh gave away the emotion. She couldn't fight with his will to protect her. But then she glanced up, seeing the fabric tented on the front of his robe, something he no longer tried to hide from her. A small smile came to her lips as she trailed her fingers across it, before glancing up at him.

"If I cannot have you, Garren, might I touch you instead? I wish to know how a man's cock will feel in my hand."

"Brenna..." Garren began, his voice shaky as just the thought of her fingers on him brought him close to release. "I don't think..."

"Please," she whispered, her fingers busily undoing the knot at his waist. "I but wish to touch it, perhaps to taste your essence as you have tasted mine." The robe slipped from his shoulders, falling to the bed behind him. His arms hung down at his sides, his hands in fists so tight she could see the white knuckles through the black of his fur.

His body was hard, his skin hot under the thick fur that covered him. She rubbed her hands through the fur on his chest, using her nails to scratch gently. "Please?" she asked again, staring into his eyes.

Slowly Garren rolled onto his back on the bed, pushing his robe out from under his body. He watched her watch him, seeing her eyes study his body, wishing she could see him without the fur that made him such a freak. Her eyes swept down his body, pausing as she gazed upon his cock, that lusty piece of flesh that seemed to pulse before her, wanting so badly to be touched by her soft little hands.

She knelt beside him, her legs next to his arm. Reaching out slowly, she cupped his hard flesh in her hand, almost jerking back when he moaned loudly into the quiet of the room. "Did I hurt you?" she whispered quickly.

"No!" His voice was loud and emphatic, making her smile. Her fingers trailed over the smooth flesh, feeling the veins that ran through it, wondering at its silky texture and warmth.

"It's so big," she whispered, closing her fingers around his cock, caressing him with long strokes, leaning ever closer to the dark thick

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head. Her other hand went to the soft furry sack below that contained his egg shaped testicles, slowly cupping them in her warm palm, massaging them with gentle squeezes.

"Yes," he groaned, feeling as if he'd stepped into a small piece of heaven, watching her small breasts bounce with the movements of her arms. His hand reached out slowly, his fingers slipping over her breast, feeling the plump, hard nipple grow in his palm.

"May...May I kiss it, like they do in the books, Garren? Please?" she asked him, her eyes never leaving his groin.

"Oh, God, I might not be able to control myself if you do, Brenna." He groaned when she bent forward anyway, her lips touching the dark tip of his cock, the heat of her mouth slipping over his flesh. His eyes closed and he dropped his hand from her body to grip the sheet under him. She was hot, wet suction around his cock, her lips moving down the length of his shaft, her tongue tasting him, swirling around him with devastating effect.

The taste was strange on her tongue, salty and musky, her lips stretched around him, his girth filling her mouth. His hand went to her head, gently moving her hair from across her face, his eyes opening to watch her. Brenna desperately wanted to please him, to give him the same intense pleasure he'd given to her.

She tried to remember everything she'd read, using her hands and her mouth to please Garren, feeling her own arousal grow with every growl and grunt he gave. Her hand stroked over his cock and she felt him tense, his fingers digging into her hair, holding her to him.

With a growl he let loose, unable to control the beast inside of him that craved release in the depths of her mouth. His seed burst from the head of his cock, heated pulses that filled her mouth. She swallowed almost convulsively, desperately trying to keep up with the outpouring of his lusts; thrilled inside that she'd been able to bring him such pleasure.

He relaxed against the bed, his hands now caressing her hair, feeling her busy tongue still licking around the head of his sensitive cock. "Brenna," he moaned, dragging her up his body, finding her sweet lips with his own. "I didn't hurt you, did I?" he whispered between long, drugging kisses.

"No," she sighed, enjoying the way his arms felt around her. He was warm, his fur cushioning her body against his hard form. She yawned and he laughed.

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"You need sleep, my pet." He stroked the soft line of her naked back, reaching down to pull the covers up she'd pushed down when she'd sat up.

"Garren," she sighed. "I love you." She snuggled her nose into his fur and let sleep take her.

He felt her body grow limp and heavy, shifting slightly until he got comfortable. With a long sigh, he gave into the one thing he dreamed of doing. He held her in his arms and drifted off to sleep.

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Garren stared at the cover of the book, the bright sunlight of midmorning streaming over the faded blue leather cover. He sighed, both dreading and anticipating opening the old book and staring at the small print, letting it form into words that took him into the life of his parents.

His father had been drugged for years by Jeffrey, and his grandfather before that, all in the name of greed. That same greed had been responsible for the death of his mother and the baby she'd carried. He couldn't remember his parents ever speaking of an uncle or of Jeffrey to him. He had no clue as to what had happened to either. All the answers to his questions were buried inside this leather-bound book.

He opened the book slowly, carefully straightening the pages that had been wrinkled by his rage the night before. He found his page, stopping only to stare at the door to his room, to make sure that he'd locked it. Then, with a deep breath, he ran his finger down the page to find where he'd left off.

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"I never expected such, Master Nathaniel." He took a deep breath, holding it for a moment before letting it out in a long sigh. "I shall pack my things and wait for the police to come and collect me, sir."

He started out of the room, his head bowed.

"Wait," Nathaniel said, his voice rough with emotion that he'd thought he'd be able to keep under control. "I need answers."

"I'll tell you what I know, sir." Jeffrey turned once more, folding his hands in front of him.

"Will I continue to change now that I know about the drugs?" Nathaniel asked, his hands clenched as he waited for the answer.

"The drugs controlled the change, sir, but without them, I'm not sure of the effects. There...is an antidote. But it is dangerous. Even the least little discrepancy in measurement and it could kill you." Jeffrey looked

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down at his clasped hands. "I can get the drugs from the old woman and bring them back to make the potion for you, sir, if that is your desire."

"What is in the potion?" Melissa queried her voice thin.

"Mandrake root, nightshade, and hemlock, to name a few of the ones that I know. The rest, well the recipe is ancient and the old woman would be able to tell you better."

Melissa went to Nathaniel, her hand slipping into his. "You could die," she whispered, staring into his dear face.

"I could go mad from the beast let loose inside of me, Melissa. I could die just as easily by the hand of a hunter or another who found out my secret." He turned to face her, wrapping his strong arms around her waist. "It is the only way to secure a future for us, my love, a future free of the beast."

Worried green eyes met his, for he fought to hide the fear he felt inside of himself. He would never let her see his worry. He smiled, stroking his fingers through the satin of her golden tresses. "I want to stay human, to stay a man for you, Melissa. I want to know the future we might share together as man and woman."

"I don't want to lose you, Nathaniel," she whispered, a single tear trailing down her silky cheek. "I only just found you."

"You won't lose me, beloved. I'm made of sturdy stuff." He gazed into her eyes, seeing her acceptance in their hazel depths. "I love you," he whispered, kissing her softly. He looked at Jeffrey from over her head. "I shall dress and accompany you to the village to meet this old woman. You and I still have much to discuss."

Melissa dressed in the gown she'd worn to start her first day of work, a day that seemed so long in the past now that so much had happened to her. She paced the floor, her thoughts in turmoil. Could they trust Jeffrey? Could this be just one more trap to kill Nathaniel, an evil plan formed in the mind of the servant to save his own hide?

Jeffrey had seemed so devoted to Nathaniel, so honest in his caring of the young master, she found it hard to fathom that it had all been an act. Would he actually use this potion as a way to kill him now that he'd been found out? She flounced to the bed, tearing off the stained and used sheets. Wadding them into a bundle, she could smell Nathaniel's scent amongst the fabric. She quickly tossed them aside, going to the small cupboard in the hall that held sheets, and then remaking the bed.

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She took her time, fluffing and arranging the many pillows, then found a cloth and began dusting the furniture, anything to take her mind off what might be happening to her beloved.

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Nathaniel walked beside Jeffrey, refusing to take the coach which would cause a stir in the small village. He wanted as few people to notice them as possible. His heart was racing as the reality of what such a discovery could mean to him. If he were cured, he could return to London and to the life that had been taken from him. The culture of the theater, the museums and parties he could now attend once more, all with Melissa on his arm. She would be beautiful, dressed in silks and satins, her hair coiffed in the most current style.

She would love the theater, the ballet, and the parties. She would shine in the life of luxury that he would give her. They would have children, many of them, and fill his London home with the sound of laughter and love.

All he had to do was to survive the cure.

Jeffrey knocked softly on the door of a small hut on the very edges of the village. There were no windows, only the badly hung door, and smoke streamed from the crooked chimney, showing that a fire was lit within. He waited a moment and knocked again, twice, and then the door slowly opened.

"You can't possibly be wantin' more of the herbs, Jeff me boy," an old voice cackled and a crooked and gnarled hand reached out, grabbing onto Jeffrey's arm.

"No, Matilda," Jeffrey said, looking for all the world as if he wanted to brush off the old hand and run from the woman who owned it. "I've come for the cure to the poison."

"The cure?" the old woman asked her voice raspy as if she'd breathed in too much smoke. "It is a dangerous undertaking, not to be given to the faint of heart. If the one taking the cure isn't strong and true, it will kill him."

"I'm very strong, old woman," Nathaniel spoke up, pushing Jeffrey forward into the hut and following him inside. A single candle lit the interior which was filled with hanging lines of herbs, baskets containing God knows what sitting upon shelves, and small bottles filled with different covered liquids sitting row upon row on a stand. In one corner was a small pallet set in front of a steadily burning fire, a pot boiling merrily above it. It smelled of herbs and growing things, and rich

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bubbling stew inside, a pleasant scent and not one that Nathaniel would have thought this place to have.

"So you are the beast," she said, a tiny, diminutive woman who stood barely as tall as his chest. She was thin and fragile looking, bent and using a cane to help her move about. Her face was brown with age, wrinkled and thin. Her hair, what little was left, was snarled and pure white, falling around her face in tangled strands.

"Yes, I am the one who was turned by those damnable herbs you sold to this man. I want the cure and then I want your promise that you will sell that potion no more. No man deserves the burden of being cast as an animal such as the one that I was turned into."

"I take orders from no one, young master, not even someone such as yourself." She chuckled, staring up at him with eyes that had seen much in this world. "I shall give you the cure and the directions upon how to make it. You must not deviate from the instructions, young master, for if you do, it will kill you."

She scurried around the small room, mumbling to herself, the thocking sound of her cane on the hard floor a distinct counter beat to the thumping of Nathaniel's heart. Excitement rocked him, the idea of being a whole man again, of not worrying about the beast having its existence hanging over his head, making his hopes soar.

Finally, she handed a basket to Jeffrey, a small sheet of parchment on the top with the ingredients and the instructions listed upon it. Nathaniel handed her a purse of coin, much more than the usual price she charged for the other potion. But for this, it was worth it.

She followed them out, rasping her thanks. "All will be well, young master, as long as you didn't beget a child during your time as a beast."

"What do you mean by that, old woman?" Nathaniel asked her, turning and taking a step toward her.

"A child conceived during the time you were under the influence of my herbs could also find themselves as a beast," she cackled, turning and closing her door tightly again behind her.

Nathaniel stared at the closed door, his heart heavy, for if Melissa were to be pregnant... But the chances were slight; they'd been together such a short time. He shook his head, looking at Jeffrey. "Should I trust you to prepare this, Jeffrey?"

The question seemed to hang in the air between them.

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Garren growled low in his throat. He had reached the end of the page and turned it quickly, scanning the text on the next page for any sign of the ingredients needed for the cure. He knew it had worked, for his father had been a hale and hearty man when he'd been growing up. What of his mother? She'd been exposed to the drug also, was she at risk? He growled again, his frustrations growing for he had little time before Brenna would return.

His expression softened as he thought of the beautiful girl. His mother would have liked her, for she was sweet and loving. His father would have liked her for the spunk she showed in facing him as the beast and not fleeing or fainting, though he'd given her little chance to do either. He wanted to marry Brenna, to take her as his wife. He wanted to hold her in his arms every night as he had the night before, to love her fully, as a man. He wanted children with her that they would love and raise together.

Garren sighed, rubbing his eyes with his big furry hands. Turning the page, he continued reading. "Melissa couldn't stand..."

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...the tension she was feeling for another moment, alone in Nathaniel's room. She hurried down the stairs, determined to do something that would ease her nerves and keep her busy until he returned. Going to the library, she threw open the pocket doors, letting in the light from the bright hallway. She'd work on those shelves and uncrate the boxes of books that had been delivered and left in the room. It would keep her busy enough, she knew, until the two of them returned.

The boxes were opened already, as if someone had started the job for her, and she went to the first box, lifting a book from it. Picking up a cloth from where she'd dropped it before, she quickly swiped at the dust from the shelf and started to arrange the many books from the box.

So involved was she in what she was doing, she didn't see the shadow that darkened the doorway of the library, or hear the booted footsteps of the man who entered the library. Her humming as she worked covered the sound of his stealthy movements as he came up behind her. It was his hand over her mouth that was her first clue she was not alone, another arm coming around her waist to pull her against a hard male body.

"My dear," a strange male voice said in her ear. "You and I have some things to discuss."

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Melissa struggled against the arm around her waist, her hands going to the hand clapped over her mouth, trying to loosen it so that she could scream. She was hauled up, her feet leaving the floor until she kicked her heels against his shins, hearing him curse. His hand slipped over her mouth as he tried to position her to where she could no longer kick him, and she managed to get the fleshy part of his palm in her mouth. She bit down hard, tasting his blood in her mouth as his curses filled the air around her.

She was dropped, unceremoniously, onto the hearth at their feet, a large hand slamming against her head, and then she knew no more.

It wasn't long before she woke her head hurting, a foul taste of blood in her mouth. Her eyelids moved, her thick lashes fluttering against her cheeks as she forced her eyes to open, staring around her and searching for the man who'd attacked her.

He had his back to her, wrapping his hand with a square of white linen cloth which instantly turned red from his blood. Melissa could hear his voice, hear him cursing her as he clumsily wrapped the makeshift bandage and tied it using his teeth.

"I hope you bleed to death," she hissed at him.

"So you're awake. I guess I should have expected you to do something as common as biting, considering you're just some wench from the village my nephew has taken a fancy to. Did you flaunt your dubious charms in from of him, knowing he was a titled gentleman?"

"What is it to you? You only want him dead so that you might steal that same title and his lands and monies." She struggled to rise from where she was, only then realizing that he'd tied her hands and her ankles together. "Let me go," she ordered him, glaring at him with just a hint of wildness in the hazel of her eyes.

"You spout orders well for such a common tart. You know, you are attractive in a rough sort of way. If you apologize and promise to behave, perhaps I'll keep you on as my own mistress after I finish with my nephew." He looked down at her, smiling lewdly, his uninjured hand stroking down her cheek.

Melissa snarled, snapping her teeth at his hand while she struggled against the rope that tied her so tightly. "I'd rather die," she ground out.

"That is easily arranged. You interfered with a plan I've been working on for years, girl, and one that is none of your affair. If you could have kept yourself out of my nephew's bed, it wouldn't be

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necessary now for me to kill you." He reached into his jacket pocket, pulling out a long slender knife. "Do you have any last words?"

Melissa saw the knife and felt a terror unlike anything she'd felt before. She felt the cold blade against her cheek and closed her eyes, knowing he would torment her with it before finally plunging it into her. She wouldn't beg for her life, as it would do her little good, at least not with a man such as this one.

"Let her go, Uncle," Nathaniel's voice said from the doorway.

Melissa opened her eyes, gazing at the man she loved, relief leaving her limp. He held a pistol in his hand, the gun pointed at his uncle. She could see the rage in his eyes, a rage that grew as he saw the blood on her lips.

"Nathaniel, my boy, this woman was stealing your books. I tried to stop her and she bit me." He held up his bloody hand, keeping the other one, the one with the knife, against her throat.

"No more lies, Uncle. I know the truth. I know about the drug and how you used it to poison my father and then myself, to turn us into beastly monsters and drive us mad. I know everything. So if you don't want me to use this pistol on you, you'll drop the knife and step away from Melissa, now!"

The man's eyes narrowed and he stared at Nathaniel for just a moment. Then with a move too fast to be stopped, he reached out and hauled Melissa up in front of him, the knife digging cruelly into the soft skin of her throat. "I don't think so, nephew. Now, I think you need to hand that pistol over to my man, Jeffrey. Do it slowly and perhaps I'll let her live after you're dead."

Nathaniel growled low in his throat, his amber eyes changing and turning feral. Melissa could see the beast wanting so desperately to be free, to challenge his uncle and kill him with his bare hands. He turned slowly, holding the pistol out to Jeffrey.

Jeffrey took it, turning it back on Nathaniel.

"Kill him, Jeffrey."

"Wait, Uncle. Before you have me killed, just tell me why? Why did you do this to me, to your brother? Why change us the way you did?"

"Money, what other reason would I wish to see your father dead?" He laughed and Melissa could feel his body shaking behind her. "Well there was one other reason. Your father stole the only woman I could ever love from me. He knew how I felt about your mother, he knew and he went after her anyway. That bitch decided that she'd rather be with the

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titled son and not the second son who wouldn't inherit, and chose your father over me."

His arm loosened and he let the hand holding the knife drop next to his side, pushing Melissa away hard enough that she fell against one of the sofas. "Don't move," he ordered her, before pacing in front of Nathaniel. "She used to tease me, knowing how I felt about her, wearing provocative clothing, rubbing up against me when your father couldn't see. She talked about us being friends and all the while she was laughing at me. Well, I got the last laugh, the bitch. She wasn't so high and mighty when I fed her the poison."

"You killed my mother?" Nathaniel growled out the question, the words barely discernable as rage made his bones creak and his body tremble as if the change were coming on.

"It was easy, the whore sent for me, wanted to tell me that she was expecting, that Darius, your father, was getting better. She was happy. So I acted happy, too, and sent for a bottle of champagne. It was easy to slip the poison into her glass. When she drank it, I hid away the evidence and made it look as if she'd killed herself with the tea she'd had brought in earlier." He laughed hoarsely, his eyes glittering with the memories.

"You ran into the room, screaming for your mommy like such a little boy. You stood over her, watching her writhe and stiffen on the floor, her mouth gaping open as she tried to speak, to tell you that it was I who'd done this to her." He laughed again, though it sounded empty. "Then I showed up, the savior to help raise you since your mother had taken her own life, and your father had gone stark raving mad. Of course, I helped him along in that. You know the rage you're feeling? His was three times that when I told him what I'd done. If Jeffrey hadn't had him shackled and chained to a wall, he'd have ripped me limb from limb with his claws."

"You bastard," Nathaniel growled, his breathing coming in harsh pants, the bones under his skin moving as the beast sought its way out of its fleshy prison. "I'm going to kill you," he snarled, his mouth opening in pain to show the gleaming white incisors lengthening and growing sharper.

"You won't have the chance," his uncle said lightly. "Shoot him, Jeffrey."

Jeffrey stared at the man, and then glanced at the man he had called Master for so many years. His hand shook as he held the pistol, lifting it and aiming it carefully at Nathaniel's chest.

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"No, Jeffrey, the head, shoot him in the head, you blathering idiot."

Jeffrey glanced over at the uncle again, licking his lips nervously before tightening his resolve. The pistol lifted and Melissa, having just freed her ankles from the ropes, screamed.

"No! God, Jeffrey, don't kill him!"

She started to throw herself at him to stop him, when he turned suddenly, the pistol going off. Melissa watched as everything seemed to happen in slow motion, the bullet speeding from the muzzle of the pistol, thudding into the chest of Nathaniel's uncle. He stared in horror at Jeffrey for a moment, then his body slumped, falling forward on the floor, a small spot of red blossoming upon the white silk covering his chest.

Nathaniel took two deep breaths, fighting back the change that still threatened to take him over. When he was under control, he took the pistol from Jeffrey's shaking hand, turning just in time for a small, warm bundle of female flesh to throw herself into his arms.

"I thought he was going to kill you," she said, her arms going around his neck, dragging his head down to her. "I thought you were going to die," she managed to say before her mouth found his.

He kissed her gently, his hand stroking her hair and then down her back, hugging her close. "I'm fine, my love," he said, lifting his head. His eyes went to Jeffrey who'd tottered over to the sofa, falling onto it and staring at the dead body of the man who'd had such a hold on his life for more years than he wanted to count.

"Are you all right, Jeffrey?" Nathaniel asked him.

"I've killed your uncle, Master Nathaniel," the servant said, his hands shaking. "I had no choice, he'd have killed us all."

"He was insane, Jeffrey. And you are right, you had no choice, none at all." He put the pistol down on the desk, turning to hold Melissa tighter.

"I'm sorry that you had to be part of this mess, my love," he said, tenderly pushing her hair from her forehead and inspecting the bump left by his uncle's fist. He placed a gentle kiss there and was about to turn again when the sudden explosion of the pistol going off, caused them both to turn.

Jeffrey sat, slumped, against the sofa on the floor, the pistol he'd taken off the desk clutched in his hand. His eyes were glazed, blood running from the hole he'd put in his head.

"Oh, God," Nathaniel breathed, holding Melissa against him as she turned her face from the carnage. "Jeffrey, why?"

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Garren turned the page, growling his frustration as he saw that the rest of the pages were blank. It was the end of the story and nowhere in the book had been the recipe for the cure. He sat and stared at the leather-bound cover again, trying to control the rage that had him itching to tear apart the pages.

Instead, he opened the book to the back page, the back of the book where the slit from his claw had found the letter from his mother. Carefully widening it further, he pulled back the thin leather. A flash of yellowed paper greeted his eyes and he pulled the leather just a little more, reaching inside and snagging the paper with the tips of his claws, careful to not rip it.

He spread it open slowly on top of the book, the paper old and brittle. In his mother's handwriting, across the top, he saw the words he'd longed to see. It was the cure. With the book and the paper in hand, he rushed to the door, unlocking it and throwing it open, running down to the kitchen.

* * * *

Brenna came home from her afternoon of tea and cakes, eager to see Garren. She hadn't wanted to leave him this morning, instead, wanted to bask in his attentions and their love. But he'd been restless and anxious, finally telling her to go, to enjoy herself, for he had work that needed doing. She had left, but her feet had dragged and her mind had often strayed back to Garren throughout the day.

Now she was home. She handed her gloves and cloak to the butler, giving him her bonnet as well. "Where is Master Garren?" she asked him, her eyes shining and a flush of color on her cheeks.

"Master Garren has been in his room all day, miss. A terrible roaring he's been making, scaring the staff and all." His voice grew lower and he leaned close. "He hasn't answered his door either, miss. We were thinking of sending for you, but now that you're home..."

Brenna turned and headed toward the stairs, her feet flying over the slick surface of the risers. She didn't stop nor slow her step until she was at his door.

"Garren?" she called loudly. "Garren, it's Brenna," she knocked loudly on the door, pressing her ear to the stout wood as a low moan came from the other side. "Garren?" she called again, trying the handle. The door opened slowly and she stepped cautiously inside, suddenly terribly afraid of what she would find.

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She didn't see him at first, for he'd lowered the heavy drapes and it was dark in the room. But then a noise caught her attention and she hurried forward. "Garren?" she called again as she saw him lying on his side on the floor, his back toward her. She dropped to her knees beside him, reaching out to touch him. "Garren, what is it?" she asked, her other hand coming to her throat.

He growled, rolling to his side to face her, his eyes wild with pain. His lips were twisted into a snarl, his teeth snapping together with brutal force. His arms were wrapped around his body, almost as if he were trying to hold himself together.

"B...Brenna," he managed to grit out between his clenched teeth before his body convulsed, his head going back against the floor, a hideous roar bursting from him.

Brenna stared around the room, rushing to the bed to grab a blanket. She saw a thick tin cup lying on its side on the stand, a tiny trickle of dark liquid coming from the rim. "What have you done, Garren?" she whispered, tearing the blanket from the bed and going back to his side.

He writhed on the floor, his body shaking violently, his eyes tightly closed. His hands were clenched desperately across his stomach. He shivered, his fur matted to his skin, terrible sounds coming from between his lips. He rolled back to his side, his back arching, his mouth pulled tight.

Brenna tried to cover him with the blanket, tears of fear streaking down her face. "Garren, what's wrong? What can I do?" She watched as his mouth opened but no sound came out. His arms flung the blanket off of himself and he shuddered, his entire body shaking. "I...I'll get help, Garren. I...I'll get a doctor," she hurried toward the door.

The sudden lack of noise had her turning back. He was still on the floor, his back to her once more, but he wasn't moving. Not a hint of breathing caused his shoulders to move or a shudder or shiver moved his arms or legs. No sound came from his mouth. A terrible fear seemed to bloom in her, wrapping her heart in utter horror.

"Garren," she whispered, tears filling her eyes. Her steps were hesitant, her hands shaking as she fell to her knees beside him once more, reaching for him. "No," she cried, rolling him to his back, his head lolling limply.

A sob shook her shoulders, tears almost blinding her to the changes that had taken place. The fur was gone, leaving his skin smooth and pale.

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High cheekbones were brushed by lashes that were incredibly thick. Long black hair fell back from a face of incredible male beauty. His chest was still wide but without the thickness of the beast, his hands, now relaxed and opened, were large, with the slender fingers of an artist. His clothes hung upon his slightly smaller frame, for while still a tall man, he no longer had the bulk of the beast.

But none of that mattered. His chest was still, his eyes closed and unmoving. Brenna threw herself on his chest, her arms gathering him to herself, sobs wracking her slender form. "NO!" she cried. "I love you, Garren, you can't be dead."

She cried as if her heart were breaking, for in truth it was, broken and in shreds, unable to believe that he was gone. Her tears soaked into the fabric of his shirt. She felt the hand touch her face and shook it away. "No, leave me with him," she cried.

"Brenna?" a male voice said from under her. It was familiar, but without the husky rasp of the beast. "You're going to drown me with those tears, love."

Brenna's head lifted, her eyes going to the warm amber eyes of the man on the floor. She stared at him, shocked. "Y...you aren't dead?" she managed to stutter, sniffing.

"No," he said, shaking his handsome head, his hand touching her cheek. "I thought I was," he said, lifting his head to touch his lips to hers gently. "But I couldn't leave you, Brenna. I love you."

"Oh, God, I love you, too, Garren," she cried, tears once more streaking down her cheeks. She helped him rise, pulling him slowly up from the floor, flinching every time he moaned as if it were her pain. "Is this true? Is the beast gone?"

"Yes, my beloved. The beast is dead and now you must deal with the man." He pulled her down so that she fell across his lap, laughing at the shocked look upon her face. "And..." he said as she cuddled against him, "you will marry me so that I might claim you properly."

A slow smile spread across her beautiful face making her blue eyes seem to glow. "Are you asking me or telling me, Garren?"

He growled, though it was a human sound, bending his head to find her lips with his own. He claimed her with that kiss, groaning at the intimate contact of his human flesh, soft and warm, meeting hers. He tasted her, smelled the perfume of her skin, and heard her soft sighs, all with the senses of a man.

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When he finally lifted his head, her eyes were soft, lambent with the pleasure he'd given her. Her hand slipped from his cheek and into his hair, playing with the soft tresses that fell across his chest. "I'll marry you," she whispered.

Garren's head bent as if to kiss her again stopped only by her fingers against his lips.

"On one condition," she said, smiling shyly.

He cocked his head, staring down at her, his eyes narrowing. "Condition? Very well, what is it?"

"We don't wait for the wedding night," she said, her cheeks blooming with color.

Brenna squealed when he sat up suddenly, lifting her easily against his chest and standing up. He twirled her around, laughing when she scolded him. Going to the door of his room, he kicked it shut before striding to the big bed. Laying her gently upon the mattress, he followed her down, his fingers going to the front buttons of her dress. His lips sought hers, his mouth opening over hers, his tongue laying claim to the soft inner reaches of her mouth.

He kissed her cheeks, tasting the salty tears that had tracked down her face, and his mouth brushed over her eyes, feeling the feathery tingle of her lashes against his lips. His hands spread open her dress, groaning at the sight of her breasts, bound by the red silk chemise she wore and the strictures of her corset.

She helped him with the laces, as eager as he to feel him against her bare skin, their fingers tangling, making him laugh. "My claws would be a good thing right now," he whispered, tasting the line of her neck under her ear.

"I'd rather these hands to your beastly paws," she answered, pressing his palms against her breasts over the pretty silk. She gasped as he found her hardened nipples, rolling the pebbled buds with his long fingers.

She tore open the shirt he wore, her hands moving over the smoothness of his skin, sprinkled with dark hairs. Brenna kneaded the hard muscles with the pads of her fingers, hearing his moan even as he yanked the small straps of her chemise off her shoulders, pulling the fabric down over her breasts. Garren's lips found one taut tip, his mouth opening around the sweet pink flesh and suckling it into heat.

He played with that tip, rolling it on his tongue, sucking upon it then using his teeth to nibble, all the while hearing her breathless pleas that

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drove his passions. His hand found the edge of her skirts, pulling them up so that they bunched around her waist, reaching down and yanking open the ribbon that held her pantalets closed. His palm slid down over soft skin, his fingers slipping into even softer heat, finding her wet and ready for him.

Brenna groaned, her hips arching upward as his finger slid over her clit. "Please, Garren," she pleaded. "Don't stop."

"Never, my love," he moaned. He fumbled with his pants, managing to get out of them without moving his hand from her sleek, wet flesh. His cock was rock hard, the tip slick with his own passions. He groaned as he felt her hand wrap around it, stroking it as she had the night before. He jerked against her palm, wanting nothing more than to oblige her and keep his promise, to never stop loving her, to hold her and keep her with him forever.

Garren's hand, his fingers sensitive to every nuance of her, pleased her woman's flesh with intimate strokes, feeling the proof of her virginity like a hidden veil keeping him from her. His mouth moved from her breasts to her stomach, his hand slipping out of the pantalets to pull them from her soft body, exposing smooth pale skin and light curls to his eyes. He pushed her legs apart, smoothing his palms up the inside of her thighs, holding her open to his eyes and his fingers.

He could smell the scent of her arousal strong in his nostrils and bent his head, wanting to taste of her sweet cleft, his tongue sweeping over her wet channel, lapping at the taut bud of her clit. Her hands were in his hair, holding him to her as if afraid he would stop what he was doing. Tiny cries of pleasure came from between her lips, his name a long sigh as her hips danced under his caresses, pressing against his mouth.

Her soft thighs came up around his ears as her cries grew more shrill, her pleasure beginning to peak, to send her soaring into the dark morass of sexual bliss that seemed just beyond her fingertips.

Garren pulled away, feeling her hands holding onto him, her eyes opening wide in consternation until he rose above her, his fingers sliding through her wetness. Then she felt something bigger, thicker than his fingers probing at her wet flesh, finding the barricade that kept him from her. His eyes met hers. With a single thrust, he pushed through that tiny veil, her nails digging into his arms, a soft hiss of pain coming from between her lips.

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"I am so sorry, love," he whispered huskily, trying to hold his own virginal body still, to give her a chance to get used to the way he felt inside of her. But it was difficult, for the hot, wet flesh held him, clung to him, left him feeling as if he were finally coming home. His hips jerked, and he moaned, her sleek flesh caressing his cock tightly. His lips found hers and he moved against her slowly, his big body shaking. "Is this all right?" he moaned, holding her tightly to him.

Brenna nodded, feeling the pain diminish with every stroke he made inside her. Tiny tingles of pleasure were returning, growing in her depths, her hips moving against his. He lifted his head, his eyes staring down into her face, meeting her own.

Everything he felt was there for her to see, every stroke of his body drew them both closer to the pleasurable completion they'd both dreamed of. He whispered to her of his love, telling her how wonderful she felt, how beautiful she was, how very much he wanted to be with her like this every day for the rest of their lives. He watched her face, seeing the glow in her pleasure-dazed eyes, the way her lips parted, panting for breaths, the flush that graced her slender cheeks. He saw the first wave of bliss flood through her, feeling her sex clamp down upon his cock, the muscles stroking over him.

With a roar, he let it come, pulsing hot seed deep inside of her, hearing her cry out his name, clutching him to her.

His head dropped to the pillow by her ear, his breath a throaty gasp as he fought to calm his heart. His body felt liquid, relaxed on top of hers and he was barely able to hold his weight off of her. With a sigh, he grabbed her waist, pulling her over on top of him, still inside of her.

Her hands stroked his chest, as she spread small kisses against him. He heard her sigh and felt her relax on top of him, her skirt covering them like a blanket.

"I don't know how this happened," she whispered. "But I am so very happy it did."

"You did it, Brenna."

She lifted her head, her once beautifully coiffed hair now mussed by his hands. "I did what?" she asked, confused.

"It was the book you brought to read to me. That book was written by someone on orders by my parents. They wanted me to know how I came to be cursed, and how to get rid of the curse. If you hadn't found the book, Brenna, pet, I would still be a beast and would probably be

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looking for a suitable husband for you." He smiled as she glared at him, stroking gentle fingers over her cheek.

"But how are you the beast? How did you find the cure? How..." she shushed as his fingers pressed against her lips.

"Quiet and I'll tell you," he said, smiling. He told her a quickly condensed version of the tale, stroking her as he did. "My mother drank Jeffrey's brew and it changed her for those few short moments of my conception, and that change along with my father being the beast passed the curse to me. I found the recipe for the cure in the back of the book and drank it before you got home."

"It is forever? You won't have to drink that brew again?"

"No, the curse is gone, your love kept me alive through it." He grinned, his hips moving slowly under hers, his cock growing harder where it was still lodged inside of her. "Now all we have to do is work on our own happily ever after, my pet."

Her eyes glowed as she felt him put his hands on her waist, pushing her so she rode astride him. "It will be, Garren," she purred. "I promise."

WENDY STONE

About the Author

Wendy Stone only recently began her writing career. A small town girl with a Master's degree from the School of Hard Knocks, Wendy started writing as a way to combat boredom and keep from gaining dress sizes after an accident to her back kept her from working. No one was more surprised than she when people actually enjoyed what she wrote.

Writing as Daniellekitten, Wendy has won many awards for her writing, including Most Influential Writer in 2005 through Literotica.com as well as Most Literary—Genre Transcending. She's been nominated for many of the Reader's Choice awards as well as the Monthly awards at the same website.

Wendy Stone resides in a small Michigan town, spending most of her time writing as well as enjoying time spent with her animals and the company of her family.

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