



Vegas Magic: Gone with the Wolf

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Vegas Magic: Gone with the Wind

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Vegas Magic: Gone with the Wind

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Dedication

To my partners in crime, Shelli Stevens and Sara Dennis, without whom this fun little series would not have been written. Y'all are the best!

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Chapter One

Scarlet resisted the urge to rub her hands together in glee as she paused at the entry to the casino with her friends, Ari and Sam. She needed a night of R and R, and a Halloween party was made to order.

"Here's the plan." Sam stopped just inside the doorway. "We're all here to have a good time. We flirt, we drink, and we dance until our feet are numb."

"My feet are *already* numb," Ari muttered and leaned back against the wall.

"Yeah, well you're the dumb witch that wore the cheap shoes with toothpick heels." She thickened her Southern accent on purpose, looking forward to needling Ari. "So don't be asking us for a pity party."

Sam, ever the peacemaker, raised her hands. "Easy ladies, let's not—"

"Cheap? Do you know how many massages I had to give to buy these shoes?" Ari lifted her chin. "They're Jimmy Choos. My Goddess, have you no respect for a good designer?"

Well, bless her little ole heart. Expensive, were they? She repressed the chuckle that bubbled up. There were things to do and drinks to be had.

"No, I have respect for a good margarita." Scarlet winked. "So I'm going to head to the bar and grab one."

Turning to do just that, she paused when Sam spoke.

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“Hey, I’m going to go check us in and get the keys to our room.” Sam opened her purse and took out her wallet. “And don’t look so nervous. This is supposed to be fun, remember? I’ll be right back.”

The last was directed at Ari. The original worrywart. She rolled her eyes and followed the din to the party.

Enchanted, Scarlet slid through the crowd and didn’t even stop to wait when her friends didn’t follow. The cavernous atrium of the casino had been transformed to a scene right out of Carnival or Mardi Gras for the Halloween party. Booths lined the walls like shops, offering wares from clothing to ice cream. Pausing at one specializing in masks, she made a quick choice and dug the few dollars out of her pocket. Taking it from the clerk, she pulled the elastic around her head. Settling the eyeholes in place, she turned the counter mirror and admired the mask. Designed to appear as a wolf, it was creamy white dressed up with glitter around the eyes. Feathers took the place of ears and she grinned at her reflection.

Turning back to the crowd, she wondered if she should look for Ari and Sam in the throng, but shrugged when they were nowhere to be seen. Instead she took in the layout. A raised stage stood in the center courtyard where a live band played. Other performers wandered through the crowd—jugglers, mimes. She even spied a fire breather in the distance. The casino’s restaurants were all open, and she considered heading over to the buffet, but decided to indulge tonight. She found a funnel cake vendor and sighed when the fried dough hit her taste buds. She’d work it off tomorrow. It was Halloween, after all, and a witch deserved some enjoyments.

Her senses flared as she wandered, studying the crowd. One of the biggest casinos in the valley catering to locals, Crypt also had the distinction of being the first choice for the Vegas otherworld. She saw other witches, vampires, werewolves and the occasional fae. The vampires seemed to be taking particular pleasure in arriving as themselves. She snorted. Talk about no costume necessary. Thankfully, the wolves were not so brave. She didn’t think the unsuspecting humans in the crowd were quite ready to “oh and ah” over a wolf pack.

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She grimaced when she caught a hint of one wolf in particular and looked around, hoping to spot him first and run the other direction. The casino's security head and the Las Vegas pack's Alpha, Grant Anderson, was nothing if not persistent, and she wasn't up to resisting tonight. Work had been a bitch all week, and she was too tempted to lean against his strength for a few hours. The problem was you just never knew when a werewolf was going to go all possessive and territorial on you after sex. She was not in the mate market, thank you very much. So no sex with the sexy, almost irresistible Grant. She had enough hassle in her life already.

She sighed. She was here to have fun tonight, damn it, not worry about the gym, or her business partner Tom Bradford's recent absentmindedness, or macho werewolves. So what if she'd spent twenty hours this week going back and fixing a slew of paperwork mistakes and dealing with member complaints. It was done now, and they could discuss it later. She was going to have a good time tonight if it killed her.

Frowning, she caught another lungful of air filled with Grant's unique scent. How someone who lived in the Vegas desert could smell like woods was beyond her. Glimpsing him in the crowd, she stepped into a small alcove and watched him pause to laugh with another were. He started moving again, and she couldn't help but admire the smooth motion as sleek muscles bunched and corded beneath his jeans. Too bad she wasn't going to fuck him. She had the feeling he'd blow her mind.

She shook it off, and when he passed out of view, she stepped back in the flow of pedestrian traffic. Forcing her worries about work and lust for Grant from her mind, she wandered the atrium searching for her lost friends. Catching sight of Sam's distinctive blonde hair heading out of the main room and around the corner, she hurried to catch up, but by the time she got through the crowd, Sam was long gone. Frustrated, she turned back and decided to search for Ari. With no one to hang out with, her fun night was not living up to expectation.

After wandering around another thirty minutes, she gave up on her friends and found a Tiki bar. She sat on an empty stool and waited for the bartender. After a moment, he appeared in front of her, smiling.

"What can I get for you?"

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"She'll have a margarita on the rocks. No salt. And I'll have Coke." The smooth baritone came from behind her, and her stomach knotted in recognition. She swiveled on the stool, pulling off the wolf mask, and met sharp, mossy green eyes.

"Hey, Grant," she drawled.

He leaned toward her, and she instinctively withdrew until her back was pressed against the wood edge of the bar. His hands settled on it, one on each side of her, caging her in. She struggled to control her pulse, and his eyes flared with heat. Damn, werewolf. He could probably smell her arousal. There was no doubt for either of them that she wanted him. *No sex with this guy, Scarlet. Remember?*

"Hello, Scarlet," he whispered in her ear and then lightly nipped it with sharp teeth. Her pussy clenched in response. She shoved at his shoulders and glared at him until he stepped back. *Damn the man, anyway.*

Grant grinned, certain he finally had her. He'd watched her enter the casino on the security cameras, fighting the surge of blood straight to his cock while the shift supervisor snickered at his discomfort. He could think of all sorts of interesting ways to make her pay for that, starting with the handcuffs clipped to the back of his belt. He contented himself with watching while she explored the atrium floor, beating down the urge to find her and claim her *right now*. He recognized his mate even if she was in all kinds of denial. His eyes had narrowed when she stopped at the mask booth and bought the wolf. Maybe she was ready to take that step after all. His cock hardened again at the thought. Once he had her, there would be no going back. Schooled witch that she was, she understood that and kept him at arms length.

The bartender set the glasses down, and Grant slapped a bill on the bar as he slid onto the stool next to her. She stared straight ahead, giving him the perfect opportunity to study her profile. With her high cheekbones, narrow straight nose, and full pouty lips, she had a classic look. Beautiful to him, if not to everyone else, he could imagine her decades down the road just as lovely as tonight. Her hair was pulled up in its usual ponytail. He didn't remember ever seeing it down in the months he'd known her, but he'd get it down eventually. It would cascade to the

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small of her back, a heavy, chocolate colored wave. He watched the pulse jump on the smooth column of her neck and fought the urge to lean over and lick it.

With a jerk, she twisted on the stool to meet his gaze, eyes narrowed.

"Don't look at me like that, Grant." There was a warning in her voice.

He smiled and shrugged. "I can't help it, Scarlet. You bring out all kinds of new things in me."

"Well, put them away," she snapped. Leaning over, she whispered, "I don't play with werewolves, and if I did, you would *not* be my first choice."

She just had to push him, didn't she? Growling low in his throat, he gripped the nape of her neck and held her close, sharp teeth and animal nature demanding he make the bite that would mix his enzymes with hers and tie her to him forever. How had he lost control of this situation so fast?

"I'm the *only* werewolf you'll play with. You're mine. Maybe it's about time we had a demonstration of that fact, hmm?"

He gave her about half a second to protest before his teeth caught her bottom lip. Her breath hitched, but she didn't protest, so he released the bite and dipped his tongue into her mouth. Meeting it gently, almost shyly, she shifted closer to him and groaned. Heat exploded through his body. He needed her closer.

Standing, he pulled her off her stool and flush against his body. His hands slid up to cup her face, the gentle glide of his thumbs over her smooth skin at odds with the lust raging through him. He let one thumb slide down her neck and over her collarbone, pausing at her heart to marvel at the pounding beneath her chest. It continued to drop, his fingers curling so the backs of his knuckles lightly grazed the side of her full breast. The smell of her arousal flared fully into life, and he struggled not to take her to the floor then and there. He was fast approaching the point of no return, so he gently pushed her away. They stared at each other, both panting.

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"Wow," she said, and he laughed. *Wow indeed.*

"What was that?"

"That..." he answered, reaching over to trail a finger down her jaw.

"...was the chemistry between a werewolf and his mate."

She took a deep breath and released it on a long sigh.

"Dangerous," she muttered. *Dangerous to my peace of mind and freedom.*

"Hmm." He took her hand, lacing their fingers together, and started moving away from the bar. "Maybe it's safer if we walk around."

She nodded. "Yeah, probably."

He squeezed her hand. "Always so serious. You never laugh, and I almost never see you smile."

Startled, she glanced over at him, trying not to admire the broad shoulders and hard pecs outlined under his tight black shirt. The cell phone clipped to his belt rang, and he answered it with his free hand, his voice low and controlled. He listened to the other end, muttering an "uh huh" and "yeah" here and there. Then he grunted and tugged her close to his side.

"Other than the most stubborn woman in Vegas you mean? No," he said into the phone.

The conversation continued before she could object.

"Can you handle it alone?"

He laughed at whatever the response was and closed the phone.

"Trouble?"

He arched an eyebrow. "Other than the obstinate woman in my life, you mean?"

Glaring, she pressed her lips together and resisted the urge to throttle him. One kiss and he assumed she was some kind of permanent fixture.

"I had a husband like you once."

The comment hit its mark, but she wasn't rewarded with the release she'd hoped for. His eyes sparked, and the clasp on her hand tightened.

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"What husband?" he asked, his voice low and with a dangerous edge she'd always sensed but never seen in him. Well, he was the Alpha, wasn't he? Not a safe, tame werewolf. He didn't let her recoil away from him. His jaw hardened. "You know I couldn't hurt you."

Instead of resisting it, she tried to absorb the anger and aggression he was feeling. It was the first time she'd ever really opened herself to him psychically, and his fervor took her breath away. Passion for life, for her. His determination to do right by his job and his pack. And her. She was a part of every emotion he felt. Could she accept such a man in her life?

"What husband?" he asked again, still angry, but in better control.

"His name is Jarred Stone." She shrugged. "He didn't like being married to a witch. We got divorced. I came to Vegas. And everyone lived happily ever after."

She felt his gaze on her profile, and after a few seconds, he swore under his breath and spun her around to face him. His anger strummed through the air.

"He made you miserable, didn't he?"

She rolled her shoulders, suddenly tense. "It's over. It was over a long time ago."

"I'm not like him. I'm not like that."

Who did he think he was kidding? Okay, so the witch thing didn't bother him. Hey, he was a werewolf. Supernatural people were everyday for him. But the rest of it?

"He was possessive," she continued. "Controlling. Jealous."

She arched an eyebrow at him in question. When he didn't respond, she pushed.

"Not gonna deny you're those things, huh?"

It was his turn to shrug. "Possessive and jealous maybe. Controlling, no."

She didn't believe him. He'd be just as much an asshole as Jarred, wanting to control her every move and thought, and pissed off when she didn't meet his expectations. She'd already done that song and dance, thanks.

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"Maybe we should change the subject," he offered with a grin. "We can discuss it later. It's Halloween, and there's a great party going on."

"Sure."

She wasn't buying the easy-going demeanor for a minute and was glad to drop it. If she had her way, it would never come up again, because she'd never be alone with him again. Which sucked since to manage that, she'd have to avoid Crypt, and it was the girls' usual hangout.

It wasn't long before he had her relaxed and laughing, sharing stories about some of the more ridiculous things he saw as a security chief. He'd accepted the position running security at Crypt six months ago, leaving one of the big strip outfits, and it was a tossup as to which of his tales were wildest. Crypt because of the supernatural element that tended to call it home, or the Strip with its legions of tourists determined to live it up. Every time she decided one or the other, he told another story even more outlandish.

He'd just finished telling her about a vampire friend who fainted at the sight of blood, when something tickled her senses. She grew still, feeling it out. It was faint, but smelled of black magic, dark and evil. The farther they walked, the stronger it got, until finally she thought she could smell and taste it, like rotten eggs on her tongue. Grant grew quiet, even though she hadn't said anything, as if he instinctively understood her need for silence. The sensation began to fade, and she turned around to backtrack. He fell into step beside her.

"What's wrong?" he asked softly.

"Black magic." The reply was curt, her attention elsewhere. "Can't you smell it?"

"No. I've heard witches say before that black magic has a stench, but we apparently can't smell it."

"Lucky you," she muttered, picking it up again and turning down a service hall. The path twisted down a maze of casino halls. She took a left on a corridor filled with numbered doors. It ran fifty feet and curved sharply to the left. The odor abruptly vanished.

"Damn!"

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“What?” He sounded concerned and looked over his shoulder, obviously watching out for trouble.

“It stops here. Whoever it was probably used a teleportation spell.”

She continued down the hall, but didn’t sense anything else.

Letting out a frustrated snarl, she whirled around to go back the way she came, but landed hard against Grant instead.

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Chapter Two

Tom Bradford was in trouble. Worse trouble, that is. It had all started years ago when he was still playing college ball. Football, of course. Was there any other kind? Problem was, he was not genetically disposed to being big. He had been tough and mean as hell on the gridiron, but he'd needed that extra oomph the other guys had. And he had wanted to play pro. Enter the guy with the steroids. Damned if it didn't work, too. He'd finished his senior season All-American and went pro. He hadn't been the best quarterback, but he'd made a living and had a good run until his knees went out. And the money he had saved let him live the lifestyle he liked and open the gym.

Unfortunately as his career had ebbed, so had the 'roid dealer's. The blackmail had started last month. And hey, that would have been cool if he didn't have a business partner with morals. Who knew? Well, in all fairness he had known when he took her on. That's why he'd partnered with her, wasn't it? He just never knew it would turn around and bite him in the ass.

So he'd taken some monthly membership dues under the table and neglected to pay some bills. Scarlet sure had figured out there was something going on quick. When she'd started snooping around the books, something that was normally his realm, he knew he was in serious trouble. A lot of the gym's success rested squarely on the shoulders of his reputation as a squeaky-clean pro football player. How would it look to all

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the fan-members if they found out his physique originated from artificial means?

That's when he'd gotten the first stupid idea. What better way to distract a witch than with another witch? Really, it was a brilliant plan. Hire a couple young witches to distract Scarlet enough to give him time to figure a way out of this mess. It wasn't until he was lying in bed last night staring at his ceiling that it occurred to him maybe he hadn't been real clear on that part, maybe the potential for mayhem and harm was a little too high. Then he got the second stupid idea. Babysit the young witches. Calling it all off would have been easiest, but Jasmine and Amber were not answering their phone. And calling Scarlet? He wasn't afraid to admit, to himself at least, he was way too embarrassed to do that.

He sighed and turned from the bar to face the party, adjusting the uncomfortable ghoul mask as he did. The thing didn't cover his whole head, thank God, just the top half. Ending at mid-nose, it left his mouth and neck uncovered. What it did cover itched like hell. He'd probably get a rash. A little hard to explain that when you were bald.

Why had he come to Crypt? Had he really thought he'd be able to find the girls or Scarlet in this crowd? And what would he do if he did? He may be human, but he was well aware of Vegas's supernatural world since his brother-in-law was a werewolf, and his business partner was a witch. Kind of hard to ignore it when they made no secret of what they were. Grunting, he picked up his beer and stood. He was here; he might as well look around.

With no direction to follow, he wandered with no aim, trying to get a feel for the layout and attendees. It was only longtime exposure that allowed him to pick out the real vamps and werewolves from the fakes. He was sure he missed some. The place was packed, and he went with the flow of the traffic, gradually edging toward the stage. The band was good, the songs the driving notes of alternative rock. He was paying more attention to their rendition of Local H's Copasetic than to the crowd, when he was jostled from behind. He would have ignored it if a familiar husky voice hadn't whispered close to his ear.

"Hello, sexy."

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Shit. The last thing I need right now is a horny vampire.

He turned around, already trying to concoct another way to put her off.

Smiling he answered, "Hi Rachel."

The real question was why the urge to avoid her, he wondered cynically. By all accounts, sex with a vampire was phenomenal. And she was gorgeous, no doubt. Tall and willowy, long blonde hair, high pert breasts. Okay, he was a guy, he was gonna notice, right? She rubbed up against his chest, her lips licking the spot at the base of his neck. She was hot and horny and wanted *him*. And she left him cold. He took a nervous step back. Where was Scarlet when he needed rescuing?

"Uh, I don't suppose you've seen Scarlet tonight, have you?"

With a disinterested shrug, she looked toward a side hall.

"Saw her with Grant earlier." She sidled back up to him. "You don't want her anyway."

He cleared his throat as she reached for his crotch. He just dodged her hand.

"Um, no. But I need to talk to her. It's important. Business."

He tried to stress the impersonal nature of his urgency. The last thing he needed was a pissed off werewolf coming after him. Scarlet may not be on to it, yet, but she was a marked woman. He'd gone down that road with his sister.

Rachel was reaching for him again when another voice joined the din.

"Having fun, children?"

He whirled around at the amused drawl.

He was hardly a child, but compared to the Native American beauty, he wasn't exactly old either.

"Lianne." He nodded. Now this one didn't leave him cold. Much shorter than him, she might be pushing five two and had a curvy body that made his hum. Her black hair hung straight to her hips, and he tried to ignore the vision of it wrapped around him as he thrust deep inside her. As usual, his cock responded to her presence, and he willed the

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erection down. He didn't have time for this right now. He jumped right to the point.

"Have you seen Scarlet tonight?"

Rachel moved to his side, a petulant look on her face as she clung to his arm.

"We've been through this over and over again, darling. Scarlet doesn't want you. I, on the other hand..." She let the words trail off while one red tipped nail played with the top button of his shirt.

Lianne watched, amused. It irritated the hell out of him. He rarely got the chance to get this close to her. When he did, he had other things to do, and she found his predicament funny. He looked at Rachel and tried to gently remove her hand.

"Business, Rachel. Remember?"

Glancing up, he caught a quickly concealed look on Lianne's face. She was angry and hiding it. Well well well. What did that mean exactly? She didn't like Rachel, or didn't like Rachel hanging all over him? Silence hung between the three of them, and eventually Rachel paled and backed off. Raising an eyebrow, he looked at Lianne. He got the impression he'd just witnessed one of those silent vampire exchanges he'd heard rumors of.

"I'll help you look for her," Lianne offered. "Rachel has other things to do."

Rachel blinked and quickly turned to walk away, muttering a curt goodbye.

"It better really be business you're after."

Startled at the edge in her voice, he met her gaze and grinned. Jealous, was she? He thought about egging her on, but decided it would be best not to piss off a vampire. Especially one he had the hots for.

"Of course. There's nothing more than friendship and work between me and Scarlet."

He felt a little guilty for that statement. Friends didn't sic witches on friends, did they? Never mind, he'd fix this mess somehow.

"Well, come on then. Let's look for her."

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Waving his hand through the air, he asked, "Don't you have some kind of...I don't know, voodoo shit to find her?"

Her laugh danced over his skin, the sound light and airy.

"No. That's Scarlet's area."

Disappointed, he nodded. Of course it wouldn't be easy. She set her hand on his forearm as if sensing his distress.

"I'll be able to sense her if she's close."

He nodded again. It was better than nothing.

"Let's get started then," he said.

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Chapter Three

What were the odds her wild hunt would lead them to his room? Grant wasn't one to throw a gift back in fate's face. He wrapped his arms around her waist and backed her up to the door while fishing his keycard out of his back pocket. She gasped and squirmed against him, firing his blood more.

"Grant, what are you doing?"

"Continuing that demonstration from earlier."

The card slid in the lock, and the door clicked open. *Thank God.* He lifted her through and kicked it closed behind him, letting her go once inside to pull his shirt off. It was suddenly way too restricting. He was reaching for the snap on his jeans when he noticed her backing away.

"I don't think that's such a good idea," she said when their gazes met.

He groaned silently. Not again. He knew she was his mate; *she* knew she was his mate. And six months was a damned long time for a werewolf to go without sex. He had no choice; he'd have to convince her. Stalking her across the room, he watched her eyes heat, and the smell of her arousal floated to him through the air. Her body was certainly willing. Maybe it was some kind of game to her? He'd be happy to play any games she wanted *after* they were safely bonded.

Her retreat was stopped when she backed into the dresser. He gripped her hips and lifted her to sit on the edge. Her skin seemed to sear his fingertips through the denim that clad it. Forcing himself to release

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her, he reached for the bottom of her T-shirt and tugged it up. It caught on her ponytail, and he pulled her forward to work the elastic loose. He caught his breath when the mass tumbled loose in full, rich brown waves down her back. Reaching up, she massaged her scalp where it had been held in place, the position thrusting her lace covered breasts inches from his face. He couldn't resist a light nibble that had her jumping and shoving his shoulders. He didn't release her, but leaned back a little, and she crossed her arms over her chest. Now that was a damned shame. He sighed.

"What's the problem, Scarlet?"

"This is a bad idea," she answered defensively. He ground his erection into the juncture between her thighs, and the smell of her cream filled the air. *Oh yeah. She wants me.*

"Your body says differently," he whispered, gently pulling her arms from their crossed position and eyeing the hard nipples poking through her bra. Reaching a finger out, he flicked one and watched her shiver in response.

"Well, I don't have the same 'big head, little head' problem you do, thank God. My body will just have to get over it."

Is that right? I don't think so, sweetheart. Her reticence just turned him on more. Leaning forward, he suckled one nipple through her bra. It wasn't nearly good enough. He had to taste her, to savor her, to drug her with pleasure so she'd get over whatever her objections to him were. Shoving the material out of the way, his mouth closed over the tip and every thought fled. He was lost in a wave of sensation, her smell, her taste. With a burning desire to possess her, own her. He tasted salt and soap on her skin, smelled fear and lust roll off her. It combined to become a powerful aphrodisiac. The woman had put him off to a point where he was dangerous to both of them.

When she groaned and reached for him, the last of his control slipped. He grabbed her hands and roughly pulled her off the dresser. With one elongated fingernail, he cut the bra off; he'd be damned if the flimsy lace would stand between them. Then he pulled his cuffs off his

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belt and snapped them around her wrists before she could protest. The fog of lust cleared instantly from her eyes, and she glared up at him.

“What the hell are you doing?”

He growled low in his throat and backed her to the edge of the bed, nudging her down when the backs of her knees hit it. She struggled to sit up, but with her hands secured, she had a problem getting her balance. He growled again, this time in a clear warning, and she froze. Seizing her moment of stillness, he opened her jeans and dragged them and her panties down, inhaling her scent deep into his lungs. He sank to his knees on the floor and pulled her forward till her pussy rested right on the bed’s edge.

She tried to sit up, but he held her down with a palm flat on her belly. Then starting at the inside of one knee, he licked one long velvety expanse of skin to her pussy. Her slit wept for him, the musky scent intoxicating, and he lapped at her cream. With a long low groan, she bucked against him. The action drove his tongue into her, where her tight walls then clenched around him. It was heaven and hell. Bliss to taste, agony to not be buried balls deep in her. He couldn’t wait.

Standing, he flipped her over, positioning her on all fours, and held his breath when she dropped to her elbows and pushed her hips back in invitation. He wished he knew what was going on in her head. Stripping the rest of his clothes off, he climbed onto the bed behind her and just looked. So sexy. So female. All his.

He leaned over and licked her neck. “Change your mind?”

“Hmm,” she moaned. “Fuck me now, and I might not kill you later, Grant.”

The part of her that was still sane knew that he was a werewolf in full rut claiming his mate. That his pheromones were swamping her. The rest of her just didn’t care. As long as he didn’t bite her, there wouldn’t be any permanent damage. A small worry niggled in the back of her mind about that possibility. No, he wouldn’t without her invitation. She didn’t think. She sighed. *Crap. What am I? Crazy?*

She felt his cock brush her thigh as he moved closer to her. One long, rough finger slid into her pussy, and all her worries vanished. All

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that was important right now was Grant getting inside her. Pushing back onto him, tiny convulsions started in her womb. He quickly withdrew. She was so close to the best orgasm of her life, and he was pulling away. She wanted to bawl and cry at the heavens. If her hands were free, she'd finish herself off.

"Dammit, Grant, now!"

His cock nudged her opening, but no matter how much she writhed, he held her just out of reach with one hand. The other found and did wicked things to her nipple, pinching and squeezing until it was a hard peak, the pleasure bordering on pain. She groaned and buried her face in the comforter. He leaned over her, brushing her hair to one side to nuzzle her neck, and started the real torture. His cock slid in a bare inch, and she held her breath, waiting for more. Instead of giving it to her, he whispered in her ear.

"Now isn't quite enough, sweetheart. Now, tomorrow, next week...think of the pleasure we could give each other over a lifetime."

She released the pent up breath and clenched her teeth. *Dirty pool.*

"I'm just worried about now."

His cock slid a little farther in her, and she gasped. *Oh yes.*

"I guess I'll just have to convince you then," he teased as he completely withdrew from her sheath and flicked a finger over her clit. Not enough to push her over the edge into orgasm, it only heightened her excitement. Her juices trickled down the inside of her thigh, and small involuntary tremors racked her body. She was so close. Damn him anyway.

"What's the hold up, Grant?" She panted. "You've been after me for months. I'm here. I'm willing. Fuck me already."

His laugh was husky. He bit sharply at her ear and then licked the sting away. It just turned her on more.

"Maybe I'm waiting for you to admit there's more to us than this. Maybe I want you to beg." He was whispering close to her ear again.

"Maybe I'm waiting for an invitation."

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She squeezed her eyes shut. No way in hell. She might beg, but she wouldn't ask him to bite her. She wasn't walking into the loss of her freedom so easily.

"Not gonna happen," she ground out. He nudged his cock into her a few inches and stilled. There was laughter in his voice.

"Which part?"

How was he so controlled? She felt the lust and heat rolling off him. It filled the room, washing over them both and making the air hot and close, but he had a firm grip on the situation. She'd expected him to be wild, and hadn't used her magic to free herself because secretly she wanted to experience a little of that wildness. Opening her mind to him, she was hit with the full strength of his fever for her. Lust, possession, control, respect...so much more there. He managed the control because he thought she had none. She gasped, surprised at the way it melted her heart. When was the last time someone had tried to protect her? He would try to hold out until she agreed, but she felt the power of his wolf moving through him, demanding he take. He could only fight off his own biology so long. She made a split second decision.

"Fine then. Bite me and get it over with."

Shock froze him. He hadn't really expected the demand. He would have happily settled for making her beg. Wanting to do the right thing, not sure he dared go against his wolf nature in this, he finally entered her with one long, firm stroke. Her pussy compressed around him, tight and hot. He growled in appreciation, the instinct of his species riding him hard.

"Are you sure?" he said through gritted teeth. "There's no going back."

She turned her head to look over her shoulder, shaking all her hair to one side, and gave him a look filled with disbelief.

"Do you really think I'd make that offer lightly? And I won't repeat it either. It's now or never, wolfman."

And he wouldn't give her another chance to back out. He left one hand on her hip, holding her still, while the other gently caressed her collarbone. Leaning over, he grazed the sensitive skin between her neck

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and shoulder with his lips. The perfect spot, where everyone could see his mark on her. At the thought of biting her, his mouth salivated and his canines sharpened. He closed his eyes and searched for a center of calm in the storm raging through him. The last thing he wanted was to lose control and hurt her. *Now or never*. He closed his mouth over her skin, suckling it a moment before setting his teeth in. He felt the tender tissue tear, tasted her blood in his mouth, and breathed a sigh of relief that it was accomplished.

Releasing her, he licked the tiny trail of blood away, and her pussy clenched around him, demanding attention. He was more than happy to oblige and started moving in short shallow strokes. She gasped and raised up. Her eyes were closed, and her back was flat against his chest with her hair a soft tease over his sensitized skin. They faced the mirror over his dresser, and he was arrested by the sight of them. He chuckled when the handcuffs opened and fell to the bed, and with a sexy grin, she opened her eyes and met his gaze in the glass.

"You didn't really think you could hold me here if I didn't want you to, did you, Grant?"

He arched an eyebrow in response. Better set his little wanton straight quick. He caught her hands in his and leaned over, repositioning her on hands and knees. She muffled a whine when he withdrew his cock.

"Aren't we done with this game?"

"Oh yeah," he answered, thrusting into her hard enough to buckle her stance. "You just agreed to mate a werewolf, sweetheart."

He stilled and licked the back of her neck. The salty tang was intoxicating. She moaned, arching her back like a cat.

"There's not much *mating* going on now."

He suppressed a chuckle and turned serious. He began moving in short slow thrusts designed to torment them both.

"Oh god," she moaned. He completely agreed, trying to remember some point he wanted to make before he was lost to the wolf's lust.

He whispered in her ear. "You're mine now, Scarlet. Your place is with me."

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He lengthened his strokes and continued. "I'll always *hold* you here, with me."

He moved faster, harder, deeper, pushing them both toward orgasm, and reached for her clit. Pressing his finger to it, he rubbed in the hard circles instinct told him she liked. Her pussy clenched around him, and in the mirror he watched her bite her lip and squeeze her eyes closed. Trying to hold back? If he wasn't so caught up in his own eminent orgasm, he might have shaken his head and laughed. *No way. She is going with me.* Increasing his thrusts to as rapid a speed as he could manage, he pulled the small nub between her thighs in a hard twist. Her pussy flooded his cock in warmth, and small tremors ran through her.

"Now, Scarlet. Come now."

His body draped over hers, and his teeth found the mark he'd left, pinning her in place. She gave up the fight, muscles frozen in contractions. When she would have collapsed against the bed, he grabbed her hips and held them in the air, pounding through the waves racking her body. Her pussy milked him, and he fought against coming. She felt too good, too tight, too hot. *And I can have this all the time.* Wonder pushed him over the edge, and his roar was muffled against her skin. His semen poured into her, and when it was finally over, he felt a new sense of satiation and completion. Falling to his side, he pulled her against him and drifted off to sleep.

* * * * *

How did you dislodge a heavy, sleeping werewolf? A sarcastic voice in her head answered, *very carefully. So not helpful.* Great. Now she was talking to herself. She took a minute to study her situation. If she could move, she'd be shaking her head. She'd done it—tied herself to a werewolf. A man who, behind his easygoing façade, was tough and relentless. So much for her hard won freedom.

She adjusted her legs, felt sore and wet between her thighs, and grinned. *But what a way to go.* Maybe he was trainable. He didn't have a reputation for being unreasonable. She'd made a choice, now she'd learn

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to live with it. A cool trickle rolled over her leg. Right. After she took a shower.

His arms were wrapped around her waist, and one solid leg was thrown over hers. She twisted her lower body to get free of his, but the arms were a problem. Biting her lower lip, she tried to pry one up. He had great arms. Well muscled, but not beefcake, with dark hair sprinkling the outside. The chest at her back wasn't bad either, defined and firm. Broad shoulders, flat stomach. He was quite a package. *Shit. Focus here, Scarlet.* Frustrated at her reaction, she pulled harder at his arm than she intended. She was free for a split second. Then 200 pounds of angry werewolf was on top of her, growling low in his throat. His erection pressed against her belly, and against her better judgment, she was turned on.

"Where do you think you're going?"

She raised both eyebrows. "The shower?"

He stared at her a moment, then rose and held out his hand. "Good idea."

The change from predator to gentleman was instant. Suspicious but charmed, she stood and let him lead her into the room's small bathroom. She frowned at the space. It looked lived in.

"Whose room is this?"

He opened the shower curtain and turned on the water.

"Mine. I'm in and out so much, the casino provides me a permanent room. All the rooms on this hall are for employees. Department heads mostly."

He smiled and stepped into the tub.

"Coming?" he teased.

Something in his tone made her quip back, "Not yet."

His eyes lit with promise.

She entered the small stall and stepped under the water, letting it sluice over her body. The water was steaming, and it immediately set to work on kinks and sore spots. Turning her back to Grant, she faced the showerhead and tipped her head, hoping to keep her hair somewhat dry. She watched with lowered eyes as he reached for the bar of soap and a

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washrag. He was reaching for her, a sexy gleam in his eye, when someone started banging on the hall door.

“Shit!”

He stepped out and wrapped a towel around his hips.

“Don’t go anywhere. I’ll get rid of whoever it is.”

Leaving the bathroom door ajar, he stomped to the other room and opened the outer door. After a few seconds of murmuring, he stepped back in, quickly dressed, and walked out, closing the door behind him. She wasn’t sure if she should be pissed or treat it as a temporary reprieve. On one hand, repeating that orgasm was high on her list of “must do again soon”. On the other hand, she still didn’t have a clue how she was going to deal with the whole mated thing. Sighing, she reached for the soap. If she hurried, maybe she could clear out before he returned. She wasn’t stupid enough to think he’d let her run far, but at least maybe she could track down Ari or Sam and have a good hissy fit.

Toweling off, she exited the bathroom and looked around for her clothes. As she found them, she dropped items on the bed, glaring at her bra when she found it. Lingerie was one of her few indulgences, and it was ruined. She tossed it in the trash and dressed, taking her first good look around the room. Standard hotel issue. A king size bed sat in the middle of the space facing a long mirrored dresser. A small fridge sat in the corner next to it. Behind the ugly drapes, she was surprised to find sliding glass doors leading to a tiny deck railed on three sides, and figured it was the perfect escape route. From the looks of it, she was on the back side of the casino and would have to walk around. She shrugged, stepping out and closing the door behind her. *Walk it is.*

The night was black, the fall air crisp and cool. The full moon hung low in the sky, clouds partially covering it, and she startled. How had she managed to forget it was tonight? And on Halloween of all nights. No wonder Grant was so determined. And what did it say about her own desires that she’d forgotten and come here? Did she actually want this?

Shaking off the reverie, she hurried around the building and back through the front doors. She wanted to get some distance between them before Grant realized she’d left. If she had any sense, she’d get in her car

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and go...where? He'd follow her home or to the gym. They weren't safe havens. And then there was the matter of the thing that got her in this position in the first place...the trail of black magic she'd followed through the casino. She'd deal with it first, then Grant. Somehow the evil seemed the safer and easier threat.

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Chapter Four

She was gone. *Dammit!* Leave the woman alone for a few minutes, and already she was pushing her luck. He'd just stepped out ten minutes to take a report from one of his undercover officers. There was a situation brewing with some local vampires, but he hired good people. Jake could handle it.

Scarlet, on the other hand... Unfortunately for her, they were now fully bonded. Even if he couldn't use his sense of smell to find her, the psychic connection between them would lead him right to her. He hoped she enjoyed the run; it would be the last one. And when he caught up with her, he fully intended to turn her over his knee. The brat deserved it.

He walked through the sliding back door and took a deep breath. Clouds were trying to obscure the moon, but he didn't recall the forecast actually calling for rain. A full moon and rain on Halloween night in Las Vegas. He snorted. What were the odds of that? Shaking his head, he followed her scent around the building and back through the front doors until it dissipated amid a host of other smells and fragrances. She had to know she couldn't hide from him on his own turf, so what was she up to? He stopped at the check in desk before an available clerk.

"I need you to page Scarlet Nelson to a courtesy phone."

"Yes, sir," she answered, jumping to fulfill his orders.

Now why couldn't Scarlet do that? While he waited, he concentrated on ignoring the small voice telling him he didn't want Scarlet jumping to follow orders, not even his. He liked her feisty and

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independent and self-assured. She was stubborn, but her fleeing wasn't working for him. The ex-husband must have done a real job on her. His hands clenched. There was a middle ground for them somewhere; he just had to find it. The clerk nodded at him, and he picked up the phone, turning his back for privacy.

"Scarlet."

"Grant," she answered, her tone huffy.

"You don't get to run off, Scarlet. You made a choice."

He grinned, glad she couldn't see him. He'd take great pleasure in reminding her of it in every argument in the coming years. Her sigh was heavy enough to transfer over the phone wires.

"I just need a little space. And remember that black magic I was following earlier? I have to deal with that. I don't have time for you to distract me right now. Just...give me space, Grant. I'm not running, I swear."

"Where are you, Scarlet? Let me help you. I'm going to find you anyway."

"Maybe I need to do this on my own," she said angrily.

He ground his back teeth, hearing distrust underline her anger. A quick trip to Alabama was definitely in order.

"I am not Jarred Stone."

There was a long pause, and he was afraid she'd just left the phone dangling.

"I know. I know that." He heard her take a deep breath. "I *do* know that, Grant."

"Good. So where are you?"

"Fuck," she muttered.

He covered the mouthpiece, hoping she wouldn't hear his laugh. Soon, if he had anything to do with it.

"I'll meet you back at the bar."

Scarlet pushed the button that would disconnect them and stared at the phone in her hand. This mate thing would take some getting used to. His voice, even through a phone, had been a gentle caress, the rough sound somehow turned smooth as velvet sliding over her skin. Her pussy

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had dampened in response, and her nipples had pebbled, waiting for his touch. *Well, he can't call me at work.*

She glanced down. Especially with a dead bra. She eyed one of the shops lining the corridor she was in and reached for the credit card in her back pocket. This was going to hurt. She was quick, emerging in ten minutes wearing the skimpiest bra ever made and leaving a smirking, knowing clerk behind her. The woman had even had the gall to tell her Grant's preferred colors. She fumed, imagining a nice big boil on the tip of the clerk's nose. Grant certainly had a question or two to answer. Maybe she'd give him a boil or two on his ass. He was waiting at the Tiki bar when she arrived.

"What took you so long?" he asked.

"Why does the clerk in the lingerie store know what color of bras you like?" she answered snidely, aware she gave away her jealousy, but too pissed off to care.

"What color did you get?"

He raised an eyebrow and leaned forward, snagging the collar of her shirt with one finger and trying to peak down. She slapped his hand away and glowered. He smiled slightly.

"A few months ago, the manager of the shop thought one of her employees was stealing merchandise, so I did some snooping around."

He held her hand in his and placed it over his heart.

"I swear, Scarlet. That's it. I give you my word."

If she wasn't reading him, she didn't think she'd buy that story. But she was, and some of the possessive rage she felt began to subside. He continued with a grin, lifting her knuckles to his mouth and nibbling. Her pussy clenched in response.

"And everyone in Crypt knows I'm all about you."

She blinked. Fighting werewolf lust while trying to think at the same time was hard work. She tugged on her hand, but he wouldn't let her go. Leaning over, he whispered in her ear between licks and bites on her neck.

"You know, security has long standing orders to notify me when you come in, day or night, whether I'm on or off. If you're on the

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premises, I know it. Word spreads. The pack has been waiting forever to hear we're mated."

She wasn't really surprised to hear that. It was an open secret that Grant planned to have her, and she evaded him. Or he let her. Whatever. She didn't have time to dwell on it because that feeling was back that someone using dark magic was near, and a group of young girls started squealing not far away. They both turned to check it out. Squinting, she stood and cocked her head to the side.

"Cool costumes," Grant said, spying the zombies when she did. He didn't have her extra senses. She started moving in their direction, scanning the crowd as she went, and aware of him at her side.

"Um. Those aren't costumes. We might have a problem."

Stopping, he pulled her up under his shoulder and looked across the space to where the zombies were wandering.

"Excuse me?"

"Zombies. Real. Black magic."

He'd take exception to her speaking to him like a three year old, but he didn't think it was on purpose. Her gaze never left the group, and her brow was creased in concentration. He sighed.

"Okay. What do we do?"

She finally looked at him. "I need to find the witch that raised them. I can't reverse the spell until I know which one they used."

Surprised, he gripped her hand when she would have walked off. This witch thing would take some getting used to.

"There's more than one way to raise a zombie?"

She looked down at their joined hands, then up at him with an amused expression. He was sure he didn't want to know what she found funny about the current situation.

"Spells are pretty individual. Their effectiveness relies on the strength of the witch."

He nodded as they resumed walking.

"And what can you tell about this one?"

They got closer, and she took another look. There were three zombies standing near a wall as if waiting for instructions.

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"They aren't attacking anyone, so the witch who brought them either has very good control, or raised them for a specific target."

He fought back a flinch as they got close enough for a good look. They were dressed in ragged clothes, and their skin hung from their bones. Their eyes were dead, expressions blank. It was damned eerie to see. As he and Scarlet approached, the PA rang with another page request for her, this time from her partner Tom. Grant's hand tightened around hers. He knew Tom was harmless, but he was still a little jealous of the man. They were passing a phone, so she stopped to snatch it up, keeping an eye on the zombies.

"Yeah?"

As she listened, her eyes narrowed in anger. After a few moments, she interrupted.

"Yeah, Tom. Zombies."

She listened again and shook her head, muttering "idiot" under her breath.

"Meet us over here," she cut in and hung up.

Grant raised an eyebrow expectantly, waiting for an answer. She gritted her teeth.

"Apparently Tom's in some kind of trouble, so he hired a couple of people to distract me." She nodded to where the zombies were turning down a corridor. "I expect that's it."

"I'll kill him," he said under his breath. Rage boiled through him. Had he said Tom was harmless?

"Oh, no you won't. I get that pleasure," she ground out.

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Chapter Five

Tom hung up the phone and glanced up to see Lianne giving him the evil eye. *Shit*. Rubbing a hand over the back of his neck, he wondered if there was a way to explain. At least Scarlet was warned now. But if he had any chance with Lianne, he'd just blown it.

"All this time I wasn't sure if you were really an asshole or just pretending to be. Guess now I know," she said.

"Yeah, I'm an asshole 'cause I made a stupid choice and at least tried to fix it."

She almost smiled. "I didn't say you were a complete asshole. You might be redeemable."

Did he want to be redeemed? Well, if it meant a night or two between her thighs, hell yeah. His cock twitched at the thought, and he leaned closer.

"Think you can save me from myself?" he whispered.

Stepping back, she laughed. "Well, I don't think I'd go that far."

She held his gaze a moment before looking away.

"Right now, why don't we concentrate on saving Scarlet?"

He snorted. "Scarlet doesn't need or want me to save her right now, I promise you. But yeah, I should go see if I can help her."

He turned and started for the area where Scarlet was waiting, surprised when Lianne dropped in beside him.

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"You don't have to tag along. Scarlet's pissed at me, but she won't kill me. She might turn me into a toad," he joked. "Not a long stretch as far as you're concerned, remember?"

"Scarlet might not. Grant's a different story."

Fear skittered up his spine, and he was sure he paled under his tan.

"She didn't say anything about him being with her."

Lianne shrugged and tapped the side of her head.

"I hear on the grapevine they're together tonight. The general consensus is it's about time. He's been a little testy lately."

He stared at her, not sure what to make of that.

"The telepathy myths are true then," he mumbled.

She laughed. "Don't worry, Tom. I wouldn't eavesdrop without your permission."

"Thanks," he grumbled. The thought of this elegant fragile looking woman knowing some of things he imagined doing to her was a little disconcerting.

"Is that like a vampire rule? Everyone has to act the same way?"

The laughter in her eyes dimmed. "Most of us do. There's a bad element in every group, I suppose."

Frowning, he didn't pursue that line of thought. Something told him he didn't want to know what constituted a bad element in the vampire world.

They rounded a corner, and he saw Scarlet leaning against a wall while Grant paced, radiating angry predator. *Shit*. There was no sign of zombies or Jasmine and Amber. He approached cautiously, not in a big hurry to get his throat ripped out by a werewolf. Scarlet looked up when his steps neared, but Grant only paused and growled.

"Good. You're here," she said. "Hey Lianne."

Uh oh. It can't be good that she actually sounds glad to see me.

"I need you to find Amber and Jasmine while I watch them." She nodded in the zombies' direction. "I have to have the spell they used."

Lianne answered before he could try to explain that he hadn't been able to find the girls.

"I'll help," she said, tugging on his arm. "Over here, I think."

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Grant paused and nodded at her. "Thanks, Lianne."

When they walked away, Scarlet straightened from her position against the wall. Grant had impressed her. He was very angry with Tom, but he hadn't ripped his throat out. Nice restraint there. She'd barely resisted the urge herself. Movement caught the corner of her eye, and she turned to look back at the zombies. They were standing just inside a small corridor off the main atrium that led outside, and they were beginning to shift around in agitation. *Uh oh*. The spell used to control them was weakening. She nudged Grant and nodded at them.

"We need to get them out of here. That hall does go out to the east side parking lot, right?"

"Yeah. What do you have in mind?"

"Get that back door open, and we herd them out."

He crossed his arms over his chest. "And how exactly do you propose we do that?"

She grinned and held up her hands, fingers splayed. Flames shot from their tips. Choking down a laugh, he held himself in place. Okay, she was a little impressed. That modest display would have had Jarred ducking for cover.

"If you can do that, why not incinerate them now?"

"Well, for one, I can't incinerate them. I can set them on fire, but do you know how hot flame needs to be to destroy a human body? You really want to do that in here? Plus, how do you feel about three flaming zombies flailing around the casino?"

He winced, and she nodded.

"Yup. Me, too."

"Okay, okay," he muttered. "Give me a minute."

The casino operator paged him to the courtesy phone before he could pick one up and he took a report from his second uncover officer of the night. It was definitely Halloween—crazed vampires, zombies, and now a banished werewolf, Duff, issuing pack challenges. Duff would just have to get in line. He could only handle one crisis at a time.

Zombies first. Making sure someone would open the door from the outside, he hung up and looked at her a long moment before grabbing

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her wrist. Pulling her close, he tilted her chin up and dropped a light kiss on her lips. Despite its Disney rating, heat unfurled throughout her at his touch, and her breath quickened. He released her slowly.

"Show's yours," he said, but she heard something different under the soft tone. *Be careful*. Her heart twisted, and a chink in her armor fell away.

She approached the creatures in a slow, measured stride, trying not to spook them. Grant hovered at her back, shielding her from any bystander's view and available to help if she called. How to do this? She'd prefer a torch to wave around, but didn't want to waste the time or energy tracking down wood or creating it. There were limits to magic. She settled on conjuring a ball of fire. Imagining a big ball of flame resting over her palm, she closed her eyes and whispered a quick spell. She felt the power gather in her and rest over her hand. Her eyes opened to nothingness, and she finished it. "So mote it be."

She registered Grant's gasp of surprise behind her, but was too busy concentrating on controlling the flame and directing its heat toward the zombies to comment. It was a difficult task. Fireballs were meant to be thrown, not held. Gritting her teeth, she watched with satisfaction as they ambled backwards. It was a slow walk. When they finally backed through the open door, she was panting from exertion. With a mental push, she sent the fireball at them. It wasn't enough to destroy them, but hopefully it would give her time to catch her breath. It landed on the middle one, sparks shooting out and catching on the clothes of the other two. They spun around in circles, swatting at it with burning hands.

Leaning over, she rested her palms on her knees and took a deep breath, feeling the psychic drain. A line of sweat trickled down her jaw, and Grant reached over to still its progress. Turning her head sideways, she offered him a weak smile and saw Tom pushing Jasmine and Amber through the door. She straightened, her strength suddenly bolstered, and glared at the group. Lianne hung back behind them, and they exchanged a nod of understanding. She barred everyone's escape route.

Scarlet set her hands on her hips and took a deep breath. While she was tempted to tear into the younger girls about irresponsibly using

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magic—black arts, of all things—it wouldn't solve her immediate problem.

"The spell?" she asked, ignoring the irritation that surged through her when they shared a long look instead of answering. Finally Jasmine, the older of the two, answered.

"We didn't use one."

"What?" She couldn't believe this. Of all the irresponsible...

Jasmine rushed to continue. "We just connected and imagined what we wanted to do and pushed at the image with our will. Isn't that what you do?"

She ground her back molars. If she survived this night, her dentist was going to freak.

"I'm a master. You're a novice. There's a reason we make you do the spells."

Amber bit her lip and shuffled her feet. "So we'll know how to undo it?"

"Among other things."

Exasperated, she turned it over in her head. If they'd willed the zombies into existence with no other stipulations, she should be able to will them gone. It was worth a shot at least. Waving everyone back, she fixed a scene in her mind of the fire lit zombies burning to ash. She gathered her power and considered the best method of delivery. She grinned. With the young witches needing some discouragement, and Grant standing by needing to know exactly what he was in for, she decided to go with dramatic.

Holding her hand out palm up, she placed her own spell in a small opaque ball hovering above it. She gathered her will and blew at it, unleashing the power locked within. A brisk wind blew up off her hand and rushed over the zombies, who crumbled to dust that was carried off on the remaining breeze. It was quite a show, if she did say so herself. She grinned as the exhaustion from using so much magic overcame her. She felt her knees give and darkness gather on the edges of her vision. Grant rushed forward to catch her. She had one last coherent thought before the blackness took over. *Oh damn. He'll never let me live this down.*

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Chapter Six

The sound of rain hitting glass woke her up. She experienced a flash of panic at the unfamiliar surroundings before the night rushed back to her. Grant's room. He had an arm and leg thrown over her, but she was able to wiggle out without waking him. Good thing. There wasn't a place on her body that didn't ache. The only consolation was that Jasmine and Amber were no doubt feeling ten times worse. Magic was useful, but it exacted a high price.

She found Grant's T-shirt discarded on the dresser and pulled it over her head, moving to the sliding doors. Pulling it open, she stepped out and held her arms wide, head tilted back to catch the rain on her face. It was one of the few things she missed about Alabama, the only thing maybe. There was something comforting about a good downpour. This was more a heavy drizzle, but it would do.

She jumped when his arms came around her middle.

"It's raining out here, you know."

She smiled at the amusement in his voice and relaxed against him, enjoying the feel of his chin dropping to rest on the top of her head.

"It's the only thing I miss," she whispered.

"You don't ever think about going home?"

Turning in his arms, she leaned back, knowing he wouldn't let her fall, and spread her arms. She hurt. She was exhausted. But the sense of peace was inescapable. She straightened and looked in his eyes.

"Nope. Nothing there to go back to," she answered.

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The corners of his mouth tugged up. "But you have something to stay here for?"

He started rubbing small circles on her back, and she hummed through the question. Her skin tingled under his fingers, lust beginning to stir. Leaning forward, he nibbled the area just under her jaw and ear, a place he'd discovered some time during the night that drove her crazy. She shivered in his arms.

"Staying here?" he reminded.

"Hmm. My business. My friends."

His hands slid under the shirt and brushed the sides of her breasts. The touch was gentle, a feather-like caress that made her burn. She groaned when he returned to the light bites on her neck, this time lingering over the one that joined them.

"My business, my friends." His voice was teasing. "No mention of 'my mate' in that list."

Lifting her, he set her on the narrow rail that surrounded three sides of the small deck. Light pooled out the open door, and she sucked in a breath when she caught sight of him silhouetted by the glow with the rain streaming over him. He hadn't bothered to dress when he came out, and he was magnificent. Tall, broad, muscled. Her shirt was sodden, and he pulled it off, dropping it to the ground at his feet.

"You were incredible tonight," he whispered. "That thing with the wind. Very cool."

She hadn't recovered from the shock of that statement when he lowered his head and closed his mouth over her nipple. Her hands speared into his hair, at first more in effort to keep her equilibrium, but quickly morphing into refusal to give up the pleasure. He bit down on the hard peak, and she moaned, wrapping her legs around his waist. Releasing her grip on his hair, she took his erection in her hand.

"Now, wolfman," she said softly.

The moment seemed to call for reverence. He was moon called; she was rain called. To come together at such a time had to be a sign. She sighed her satisfaction as he entered her in a long slow thrust. Tilting her head back, she reveled in the water running over her body and the cock

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stroking her higher and higher. There was no holding back for either of them this time as they raced for completion.

Lowering her defenses, letting her magic well up and flow through her, she saw the threads that tied them soul-to-soul. In awe, she reached out to touch the fragile looking gossamer lines and laughed when she felt a zing rush through her for her trouble, as if the bond itself was warning her against interfering.

Grant shifted the angle of his thrusts, and she gasped, losing the vision. With each deep movement, he now hit her directly on her G spot. When he reached for her clit, she didn't even try to hold off the orgasm. Her pussy contracted around him, hating every outward slide, and she tightened her legs around his ass, trying to hold him still while she rode out the sensation.

She wasn't even aware he'd joined her in climax until her labored breaths slowed, and he lifted her. Carrying her inside, he left her next to the bed, then disappeared into the bathroom. Wet and chilled, she shivered and nodded gratefully when he came back and wrapped her in a large towel. He hurried to towel off and pulled on a plush hotel robe, then turned to her. Starting at her feet, he made short work of drying her off and twisted another towel around her soaked hair. He carried her to the bed and got in with her, pulling the comforter up to her chin. Amused, she turned her head on the pillow to look at him.

"I think I could have managed the trip to bed by myself."

"You've had a long night," he grunted. "I'm wondering if I need to tie you to the bed actually."

She laughed before she realized he was serious.

"I don't think that will be necessary," she answered dryly.

"Really?" He sounded more irritated than angry. "You took off earlier tonight, and how far would you have gone just now if I hadn't come out there?"

She rolled to her side, propping her head on one hand to look at him.

"I was just going out to see the rain. I wasn't leaving."

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She kept her voice calm, serious. He wanted her to give him something she didn't even understand herself yet. He reached for her hand.

"You belong here with me."

She smiled. "Yeah. I get that."

And she was starting to. It had snuck up on her. He'd tried his best the last few months to get to know her, to make sure she got to know him. She'd fought him every step of the way, but she liked him despite her best efforts not to. If he weren't a werewolf, she would have gone out with him ages ago.

"Do you?"

She couldn't give him words, didn't have it in her yet, but she knew she would soon. There was something though. Rolling to her back, she closed her eyes and felt her magic gather through her. She'd heard of this trick from another witch mated to a wolf and hoped it worked. Picking up his hand, she let the power flow to him and opened her eyes when he gasped. Smiling, she turned her head, reaching out to catch his hand before he tried to touch the rainbow of silk that seemed to stretch between them.

"What am I looking at?" he asked reverently.

"Our bond." She smiled at the wonder on his face. "Isn't it beautiful?"

His fingers convulsed around hers, and she felt the movement shiver across the threads.

"Do you feel it?" she asked.

"Yes," he murmured.

She felt a flash of lust and knew he was thinking about taking her again. First things first. She opened her heart to the connection, letting him experience the emotion swirling there—respect, friendship, lust, and what she knew was the beginning of a lifelong love.

He caught his breath, held it, and she felt his gaze on her profile. Watching the filaments between them contort and grow, colors shifting until his own love raced back to her embrace, she finally turned again to face him. She reached out to cup his jaw in her palm.

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"I could never destroy anything so beautiful."

"Happily ever after, huh?"

His smile was teasing, yet understanding. Rolling over to straddle him, she took his cock in one hand and sank onto him to the base. The spell exploded around them in a flash of colors.

"Oh, yes," she said, getting a start on that right now.

The End

Loribelle Hunt

Author's Bio

As a native of the South, is it any wonder Loribelle has a love for story telling? She started writing seriously as a teenager and finished her first manuscript, a mystery, when she was 19. After a few bumps along the way and stints as an Army MP, a waitress, a student, and a wedding photographer, she turned to writing full time.

Currently she divides her time between a husband, three kids, writing, and a part time photography gig. She's also a staff reviewer for Romance Divas, a member of RWA, and Passionate Ink.

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Invasion Earth by Loribelle Hunt

Chapter One

Sergeant Major Laney Bradford stood on a ledge cut into the cliff side watching over the battlefield through binoculars. The valley spread out before her, dust swirling around troops and sending columns into the air. Hazy heat obstructed her field of vision. At least from this lofty position the smells of battle did not assault her: the too old latrines and lingering blood from the night before. The cordite from discharged weapons drifting on the breezy updraft provided a harsh reminder of the carnage.

Things weren't going well. Her army had called for a temporary cease-fire and the enemy, in an odd show of kindness, had granted a small reprieve. Laney snorted. The Delroi were winning and they knew it. The Alliance had managed to hold back the invaders from the mainland for a year, sacrificing outlying territories here and there, but it was a losing battle and everyone knew it.

She studied the enemy's array on the valley floor below. The Alliance's superior numbers mattered little because the Delroi had superior technology. Laney's spies stole it when they could but there was no way to put anything in production in time to save the Alliance.

A truck lumbered to the front of the enemy's lines and she watched

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with interest. *This is new.* She heard the excited murmurs of the others around her. The vehicle's driver and team exited and quickly went to work removing its sides. They removed a tarp from the top to reveal the vehicle's contents. Laney felt more than heard the collective gasp of the crowd around her. Lowering the glasses, she reached for her radio and turned to the man beside her.

While she admired the enemy's ingenuity and wished she could counteract it, dismay was uppermost in her mind. She couldn't even find the energy to be angry. She'd fought too long and too hard to see the Alliance destroyed by their own weapon. Fear added an unaccustomed tremble to her voice.

"General, that's one of ours. We should order a retreat and clear as much of the surrounding area as we can," she said.

He nodded. "They'll want to discuss terms for surrender, not retreat."

She shrugged, the wishes of the Delroi not her immediate concern; she then keyed the mike and sent the order to move out down the chain of command. The Delroi had uncovered an experimental bomb. Called the *Doomsayer*, it gave new vision to the old Roman practice of salting the earth. If detonated, it would poison the land for hundreds of miles, killing everything in its path. A truly horrifying weapon and one that never should have been created. She would do whatever was necessary to dismantle it.

Laney trained the field glasses on the enemy command center on the opposite cliff. While she watched, commotion erupted in their ranks after someone pointed out the Alliance's retreat. A newly arrived general lifted his field glasses, studied the valley floor, and turned them on her.

She bit back a gasp. She had seen this one before, and he was quite the specimen. Tall, at least 6'4 with a broad chest she knew was chiseled under his tunic, he had long golden hair and a hard jaw. A shiver worked down her spine and she shifted under the weight of his gaze across the distance.

Snap out of it, Laney. He's the enemy. He was also gorgeous. What could lusting from afar hurt? Her radio crackled to life and interrupted

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her thoughts. Handing it to the general standing beside her, she continued watching the Delroi general. Like a game of chicken, she refused to look away first.

"Sergeant Major," a low voice called behind her. She slowly lowered the binoculars and turned.

"Yes?" She sized up the circle of generals, noting her old friend, General Bob Darren, at the center.

"They sent a message and a radio frequency. You're on," Bob said, his face solemn.

She reached for the radio and turned back to face the enemy command center, glasses zeroing in on the blond. *He's still watching.* As she stared, he lifted a corresponding radio to his lips. Hers now had the proper frequency and a gravelly voice came over it. *His voice.*

"Are you ready to discuss terms?"

Laney took a deep breath. "Yes. First, we want to disburse these armies and secure that weapon."

"It will take several days to clear this area."

His tone was low and commanding. There was something indefinable in it, something that made her heart thump and her knees a little weak. With a mental nudge, she shook it off.

"Yes," she answered. "Days which will give us time to find a neutral location for talks and our leaders to join us." She thought he would refuse, but after several minutes, he nodded.

"We will secure your weapon and make arrangements for talks on one of our ships in three days time."

The generals around her murmured their agreement. "Fine." She finally lowered the binoculars, handed the radio to one of the junior aides to make the arrangements, and escaped the area. The enemy general's rough voice still seemed to slide over her skin, electrifying nerve endings that had held no life since her husband's death years ago. She felt an unaccustomed wetness between her legs and hurried to her quarters. Of all the damned luck, her libido came back to life for one of *them*. The enemy.

Once inside the small space, she headed through the cramped

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living area and into the tiny shower enclosure. A small, vain privilege of rank perhaps, but she had never felt gladder of it. Hurriedly, she stripped her uniform and boots off, reaching in to turn on the spray. She let the hot water wash the grime from her body while her hands traveled its length. She felt desperate for an orgasm, a longing she hadn't felt in years.

Eyes closed, she reached for her nipples, imagining the enemy general's big hands pinching the distended flesh, providing just enough pain to make it pleasurable. She squeezed and flicked at the hard tips, her breath coming in gasps. It wasn't nearly enough stimulation. One hand snuck between her legs. Her pussy creamed and she imagined him licking at it, eating her until she came, and then plunging his cock into her. She wanted him fast and hard and stroked her clit as the fantasy gained momentum. She came with a cry; thankful the pounding water muffled the sound, she sagged against the wall.

Several minutes later, Laney reached for the soap and washed with brisk strokes. Her body burned with lingering pleasure and embarrassment. Fantasizing about the enemy had never been a problem for her before, and she had faced plenty of enemies in her 35 years. She sighed. With any luck at least, she would never have to face him.

* * * * *

General Alrik Torfa couldn't believe his good luck. When the aide brought news that the enemy, Sergeant Major Laney Bradford, was in the Alliance war party, he had rushed up to the observation ledge. These battles were pointless. The Earth soldiers could not prevail. They had managed to drag things out this long because his people had no interest in destroying this world.

The Sergeant Major was the reason for the Earthlings success. Their most talented strategist, she obviously had the soldiers' admiration. They never quit and never surrendered. The soldier in him admired such leadership. The Delroi were horrified the Earth soldiers risked their women in war, women who represented the Delroi's future.

He had seized one of their most powerful weapons, a world

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destroyer, and drawn the battle to this almost empty desert. If it had to be used, his scientists assured him they could clean up the mess. Surely, the Earth contingent would surrender rather than test his determination.

However, everything changed when he stepped on the observation platform and got his first glimpse of Laney Bradford. She *would* surrender. First her armies, and then her body. His blood stirred at the thought, imagining her writhing in ecstasy beneath him.

When she first spotted him from across the valley, he felt her gaze like a punch in the gut. His people said he would know his heartmate by the avalanche of awareness and lust that hit at first glance. Who knew that old tale would be so accurate? Better yet, he felt her response to him and hardened his resolve. He would have her complete surrender.

The communications officer got her on the radio and her voice dribbled like honey across Alrik's skin, smooth and warm. Panic edged her voice, unusual for someone so cool under fire, and she escaped from the ledge in haste.

Deciding his brother needing apprising about this newest development, he passed the chore of planning the surrender talks to a junior general. Half-way down the winding steps, he felt her again and ducked into an armory carved into the mountain side. The vision in her mind was so vivid he felt grateful for the privacy.

He stood with his back against the wall, breathing hard, while his mind joined her in pleasuring herself. Cock hard and throbbing, he knew it would be hours yet before he could seek his own release. He vowed to find a creative way to make her pay for his discomfort. He smiled at the thought, imaging her on her knees, mouth wrapped around him. Or maybe he would spank her. She so clearly deserved it for putting him through this unfulfilled torture. But first, he would bury himself so deeply in her she wouldn't be able to say where she began and he ended; and then he would say the words needed to bind them together forever.