

How much do you love your friends?

Gone Baby, Gone

Three years ago Luke Stronghold was involved in a robbery that might have claimed his life if not for his best friend Slater. Slater's heroic actions did not come without a cost. Saving Luke forced Slater to reveal his darkest secret. One he unintentionally passed on to his best friend—lycanthropy.

Luke fled in fear a few days after his brush with death and Slater has been looking for him ever since. There might be only one chance for Slater to see his friend again. He is sure that Luke will keep his promise to see his little brother graduate from high school. And Slater has vowed to make amends for secrets kept and time lost. He's about to reveal all his secrets, including the one he's harbored in his heart. His love for Luke.

Warning, this title contains: Explicit sex, graphic language.

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Gone Baby, Gone by Sage Whistler

Dedication

In the words of Perry Moore—"This story is dedicated to EVERYONE"...uh...eighteen years or older that is. . .

Acknowledgements

Yes. I *borrowed* this title from the movie. Hey, what can I say? ALL my stories begin with a character name or a title. When I first heard of it, the old rusty wheels got to turning in my head and a story was born. Since I love this title I just had to keep it. *grin*

The sun was setting, painting the sky in shades of burnished orange and red, making Luke's light blond hair shine like spun gold. Luke jogged down the beach, his feet kicking up sand, the muscles of his calves flexing, and his board shorts resting so dangerously low on his narrow hips that they threatened to reveal the muscular swell of his ass.

Slater groaned, reaching down to adjust himself in his black board shorts. He willed his erection to go down. It just wasn't fair that the sexiest man he'd ever seen just happened to be his best friend since fourth grade. If not for that, Slater might have made a move by now. Ha! Who was he kidding? He *would* have put it all on the line in the desperate hope that Luke was into him. But he couldn't do that with his best friend-couldn't risk losing him for life.

Just the thought of Luke's rejection made something dark and painful spread through his chest.

Luke bent down, the muscles in his back and shoulders working as he picked up the football and spun around to jog back. His handsome face split in a blinding smile, which never failed to make Slater's heart quicken. That was one thing he loved about Luke: his friend always seemed to be smiling. Luke was rarely, if ever, in a bad mood and those times were as fleeting as the waves pounding the beach a few feet away from where they were tossing a football.

"I still say you could make it pro," Luke said, pausing a few feet away to launch the ball back at him. "You've got one wicked arm man."

Slater blushed; he hadn't meant to toss the ball that far out. It was just that his Lycan strength wasn't so easy to control this close to the full moon. Being so near to

Luke wasn't helping either. Even though the wind was blowing in the opposite direction, Slater's sensitive nose could detect the clean sweat, body wash, and another smell that was all Luke. The scent went straight to his head, threatening to bring his dwindling erection back to life.

Plucking the ball out of midair, Slater returned the serve. This time he was careful to temper his strength. "My dad's not going to pay for state college. He wants me to stay home and help run the auto shop." He couldn't risk being around nonlycans twenty-four seven. Someone might discover what he really was. His father was grudgingly allowing him to go to a local college. He would just have to be content with the four years he'd played ball in high school.

The corner of Luke's generous mouth turned down at the corners. "No offense, man, but your dad needs to be brought up to modern times."

Slater nodded. His father's heavy hand had always been a touchy subject with his best friend. The two of them didn't exactly get along. Deciding to change the subject, and appease his curiosity about his friend's future he asked, "So did you decide where you are going yet?" Summer was wheedling down and Slater knew that soon he'd lose his best friend for at least four months—longer, if Luke decided not to return home for winter break.

Luke shook his head. "I've narrowed it down to UCONN or UNC. I like UNCONN but it's just so fucking cold up there."

Laughing, Slater caught the ball and sent it back, trying not to focus on the rippling effect tossing the ball had on his friend's abs. "UCONN's pretty far away."

"Yeah, I'm leaning toward UNC." His friend's expression suddenly grew serious. He palmed the ball and didn't return it. "I won't lie to you Slater I wish you were coming with me. It's going to be weird...you know...not having you around." Luke's gaze suddenly darted away to look out at the ocean, as if he couldn't stand to look at Slater any longer. He kicked at the sand at his feet—definitely a sign that he was feeling unsure of himself. "I'm going to miss you."

Slater tried to convince himself that he hadn't heard more in that statement then what he'd *thought* he heard. It was probably just his imagination that Luke's voice had wavered on the end. Even if Luke was feeling sad about leaving him behind, his feelings were just the normal feelings between good friends. He voice certainly hadn't wavered because of secret longing. Had it?

Walking across the distance that separated them, Slater lightly placed his hand on his friends shoulder. Slater was only about two inches taller then him, so when Luke turned his head they were eye to eye. He held Luke's gray eyed stare with his own, praying that his pupil hadn't expanded until the hazel of his eyes appeared black. "I'm going to miss you too." *More then you know.* And then just because the moment seemed to call for it and because he might not have the opportunity to do so again, Slater embraced his friend.

For a moment Luke's entire body was stiff, but then he relaxed and Slater felt those long arms wrap around his back. He hoped his friend didn't feel the shiver that traveled through his body.

His hand splayed against the smooth skin of Luke's back. His senses attuned to the sun-warmed skin, to the spicy cinnamon aroma and the heady musk that was pure Luke was wreaking havoc on his body. His hands itched to move, to explore the satiny warmth of Luke's back. To move upward, over the strong neck, and into the short blond strands he knew were as soft as they looked.

But he didn't do any of those things. He started to push away instead, knowing he'd probably clung to his friend a few moments too long.

Slater tried to step back, only to find that Luke's arms were still locked around him. This time it was his chance to go completely still. Luke turned his head, buried his face in the side of his neck and breathed deeply.

He shuddered, feeling the warm heat of his friends lips pressed against him. Then Luke wrenched away like he'd been burned. His eyes were wide, shocked at what he had done.

"Oh, shit, Slater, man I-I..." He shook his head.

Slater didn't give him time to think up some lie he didn't want to hear. He stepped forward until his chest collided with Luke's, not bothering to hide the evidence of his arousal

Carding his fingers through Luke's hair, he cupped his friend's head and leaned forward to capture his mouth. He'd meant to be gentle, to take his time and savor their first kiss. But that was not to be, the beast within him was too strong, and had hungered so long for a taste of Luke and it would no longer be denied.

Their kiss was a mating of mouths, a delicious battle of sparring tongues and panted breaths. Luke's fingernails dug into his shoulders clinging to him as if were an anchor. The soft moan that poured from his friend's throat and the hard length pressing against his belly made Slater growl. He'd never been this close to losing complete control

before, never felt like he needed to claim a person, to make a mark for the entire world to see.

Mine.

The word whispered through his mind, rumbled inside his chest. His mind was in such turmoil that he could hear a faint ringing in his ears—wait...

Luke pulled away, breathing heavily, and fumbled inside his pocket for his ringing phone. His hands were shaking when he flipped open his cell phone and pressed it to his ear.

The interruption was like a cold dash of water on Slater's libido. The reality of what he had just done—what *they* had just done—hammered home as listened to Luke assure his mother that he would be home shortly.

Raking a hand through his black hair, Slater tried to think of something to say to his friend after he hung up. God! Why had he kissed Luke? He'd always been so careful to hide his attraction, not wanting his friend to feel uncomfortable around him. Hiding his interest in men hadn't been a problem. There had never been anyone he wanted as much as Luke. *This was going to change everything!*

"Slater? Are you okay, man? Are you mad?"

Slater looked up. His friend was nervously biting his swollen bottom lip. Slater's cock gave an answering twitch in his shorts. He shook his head, "No, I'm not mad. Are you okay? With this?" God, he was clumsy with crap like this.

A small smile spread across Luke's lips. "Yeah, man. I-I've never felt anything like that before. Been wanting to kiss you for ages."

Slater's heart skipped a bit as heat pooled low in his belly. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. Luke had wanted to kiss him? For ages? Apparently he wasn't the only Oscar-worthy actor around. He couldn't stop the goofy grin from splitting his own face. "Fuck, Luke, I thought you would freak if I ever let you know how I felt about you."

"Yeah, me too."

Slater ignored the voice in the back of his head that reminded him of the secret that would definitely make Luke 'freak'. He wasn't sure how and when or even if he was going to tell Luke, but right now he was going to bask in the knowledge that one of his dreams was within reach. The question was: where did they go from here?

As if reading his mind Luke asked, "So what do we do now?"

Hmmm... he could think of plenty of things he wanted to do. None of them Luke was ready for, he was sure. "Now we go home or your mom's going to have a conniption. I'll call you and we'll talk about us." And he was going home to take care of his raging hard on before he lost control of his beast and cause irrevocable damage to their relationship. The smell of Luke's arousal burned him down to his soul.

"Hell yeah, she'll have a conniption." Luke chuckled. He bent down and scooped up the ball he'd dropped when they embraced. Cocking his head to the side, he said, "You coming?"

Slater fell into step alongside his friend as they headed for the parking lot. He had to bite the inside of his cheek to keep from laughing. *You coming?*

Not yet.

Sometimes it seemed for every two steps ahead, Slater was dealt three blows that sent him scurrying back. Nothing had hit him quite as hard as the phone call he received not three hours after he'd managed to get his overworked brain to doze off.

Hello, is this Slater? This is Marianne, Luke's mother. He wanted me to get in contact with you. He's been injured in a robbery. They have him in the ER right ...

He'd ceased to listen after Marianne told him the name of the hospital. Fifteen minutes later and Slater was still trying not to trip over his shoe strings as he crashed through the doors of St. Magdalena's Hospital.

Marianne was pacing the waiting room area. Her youngest son, Colin, was huddled in his chair, crying into the palms of his hands. When she saw Slater she latched onto him, surprising him with the strength she clutched at his arms. "You were with him Slater! At the beach! What happened? Why did you leave him?!"

Slater shook his head, not understanding. Luke had parked in Lot A and he'd parked in Lot C. They'd had to split to go to their cars. He'd told Luke he would call him in about an hour, after they got home and settled. When Luke didn't answer his cell Slater had assumed his friend was having second thoughts about what they had done. He'd agonized for two more hours before falling into an exhausted sleep. Then he got the call...

"Wait...Luke was hurt in the parking lot of the beach?!"

"Yes. Someone stabbed him and took his wallet!"

"Ms. Stronghold, we're going to have to ask you to calm down, please." A petite nurse with a concerned frown on her pretty face came from behind the help desk.

Marianne ignored her, "Where were you?" She shook him again.

Slater shook his head, "I didn't know. I-I..."

"Mom!" Colin was suddenly there, wrapping his arms around Marianne's waist.

Colin was an inch or two taller then Ms. Stronghold. He was certainly bigger then she was. He was going to be bigger than Luke, Slater noted with an almost languid sort of wonder, brought on by mind-numbing terror for his friend.

Colin lifted his mom and ushered her toward one of the chairs. "It's not his fault, Mom."

"Sir, may I ask you to step outside for a moment? At least until she calms down..." The nurse asked politely of him.

She was still speaking but Slater couldn't hear a word coming from her mouth.

"Where were you?" Miss Stronghold's accusing voice pounded in his head.

"Where were you?"

"Where were you?"

Not there.

"Where were you between seven and eight p.m. on Friday, August seventh?" The policeman stood over his chair, looking down at him with black eyes, pen poised over his little flip notebook.

"Driving home," he said, almost reflexively. The officer acted as if he expected him to say, "Stabbing my best friend." He wanted to rip his throat out. No, not really, but

the moon was getting full. The *beast* wanted to rip his throat out for daring to insinuate such a thing.

"And where exactly is home Mr. Malone?"

Sighing, Slater rubbed his eyelids with thumb and forefinger. He winced. It felt kind of like rubbing sandpaper into raw nerves. Fuck, he was tired! He'd refused to leave the hospital. So, it was here that the police questioned him. He was sitting in a hard, stiff-backed chair. Four empty containers of coffee and a half eaten baloney sandwich his little sister had made sat on the small table to his right. He was still in the lobby. Although Luke had been wheeled from the OR hours ago, Ms. Stronghold refused to let him in the room. Luke was still in critical condition. Nobody was talking to Slater about his condition, but he at least knew that.

He asked for you in the ambulance. That much he knew from Colin, his last words before Ms. Stronghold dragged him off.

"Home is 45 Pine Street."

"In this city?"

Fuck it, bite him. "Yes."

Two nurses and a doctor came jogging down the hallway. Another nurse came on their heels with a cart full of medical supplies. Her hand rested on a defibrillator.

The four of them disappeared down the hall. The same hall where Luke was bedded.

Slater leapt up to follow them.

"Sir?" The police officer looked confused.

"He can't go back there!" a nurse shouted, "Stop him."

Slater heard the patter of feet behind him but didn't stop. He found Luke's room easily. It was the one crowded with the most people. Marianne was sobbing loudly. Slater stood at the door.

A hand fell on his shoulder. He shrugged it off.

"Mr. Malone. Come with me."

His wrist was grabbed this time. Slater reversed the hold, used the shock of surprise to yank the owner off balance. The officer went skidding across the floor. Slater eyes never lost sight of Luke. Pale and helpless, they tore open his shirt to reveal a chest with glaring bruises surrounding hideous cuts.

Someone growled. The sound was distant. Couldn't be him, could it?

Several hands this time—grabbed onto his shirt and yanked him roughly away.

Slater's eyes flitted to wolf and his vision went monochrome. He bared his teeth.

"This fucker is strong."

"Clear!" The defibrillator charged like a laser about to go off.

Save him!

"Come on kid," This from one of the nurses.

"Clear."

"We don't want to hurt you, Mr. Malone. Come away nicely."

Zap! "Check for a pulse, Amanda."

"None detected."

Someone kicked out his knee, sent him crashing to the ground. He didn't feel the pain blaze up his leg.

"Clear!"

"Come on, Luke."

Zap!

They tried to pull him away but Slater leaned forward, strained, made them work for it.

"I've got a pulse."

"Someone get the door!" the doctor barked.

Slam!

Slater sagged with relief. His wrists were forced behind his back. Cold metal clamped roughly around his flesh. "See, Mr. Malone. You made this harder then it had to be."

Slater didn't care. Luke was alive. For now.

The beast calmed, settled.

Waited.

There were advantages to being a Lycan. One of which was the ability to scale the side of a building in the dead of night. It was a risky move, even though he'd chosen a relatively inactive side of the building, away from the view of the main road. Hospitals were in operation twenty-four seven. People hardly ever looked up. That was one of the golden rules he was counting on keeping him undiscovered.

If his father knew about this, the risk he was taking to save Luke, he had no doubt he'd be skinned alive. At the moment, he didn't give a damn. Anything he had to do to save the man he loved, he'd do it.

Once you got into the hospital's main corridor, people tended to stop asking questions. If you had gotten past security and the front desk, they figured you belonged. Luckily there was no one on duty that he had seen him earlier. His early detainment had been brief. After a lecture from the officer and a verbal warning, he'd been thrown out of the hospital and ordered not to return unless he had an emergency for at least thirty days.

Well, he had an emergency. It just wasn't his own.

His palms were sweating, and his heart was going a mile a minute. He wasn't in the hospital just to see Luke. He was here to save his life. What kind of life he'd have after Slater finished with him, was just one of the dozens of questions swirling through his head.

If he didn't act now, Luke was going to die. He knew this with every fiber in his being. One thing a Lycan was experienced at was detecting prey. The weak and feeble, the ones easiest to take down could swiftly be weeded out of a herd. Luke smelled like prey. That was unacceptable to him.

Ms. Stronghold was gone. She had another son to look after. Colin needed food, a change of clothes, and his own bed. She needed those things too. Luke had no doubt that she would be back though, probably before the sun crept over the horizon.

Slipping into the room he closed the door and leaned against it, trying to prepare himself for what he was about to do. Not turning humans was high on the list of rules that governed his kind. So was revealing that they existed. He was batting two out of three if he went through with this.

One of the reasons humans were forbidden to be changed was because they had such a high potential to die during the changing process. It was extremely risky, and

those who survived the transition lacked the skills and teachings of a Lycan that had come of age. Slater had been a Lycan all his life. He'd grown up hunting and learning from the older members of the pack. He'd learned patience and control. Even at eighteen, he was struggling with both near a full moon. Luke would have to learn what he had in years, in just a few days. The full moon was in two days. If he changed Luke, the moon would force his transformation two nights from now.

It was a lot to take in, but the decision was really not one at all. He had no choice. He'd rather lose Luke knowing that he'd tried his best to save him than do nothing at all. If Luke made it through the transition and became Lycan and hated him for it—well, that was better then having him dead. He knew Luke well enough to know he had a zest for life. He was far from finished living it. Slater wasn't about to let some knife wielding asshole finish it for him.

Crossing the room, he grabbed the privacy curtain and shut them in. Knowing he had to work quickly he rolled up his sleeve and pulled the sheet off Luke's chest. There were tubes and wires running everywhere, and the heart monitor seemed ten times louder to his acute hearing. Almost instantly his heart picked up the same rhythm.

Slater refused to look at Luke's face; for fear that he'd release the flood of tears welling up behind his eyes. He couldn't lose his resolve. *I'm sorry*. Luke extended one nail into a deadly claw and slashed an X over Luke's heart. The heart monitor sung a warning.

Quickly Slater sliced his own wrist, turning his arm so that the dark liquid spilled over the wound on Luke's chest. The cut began to seal almost immediately and Slater opened it twice more so that he could transfer enough blood. The blood on Luke's chest

was being sopped up like a sponge, running in streamers toward the wound. Luke's flesh instantly healed, sealing it inside.

The heart monitor went ballistic. Luke shuddered and bucked, his face twisted in pain.

Tears streaming down his cheeks, Slater leaned over and kissed his friend's cheek.

"I love you."

He heard the frantic patter of feet toward Luke's room.

Wrenching the curtain aside, Slater ran across the room. With a burst of inhuman speed he snatched the window open and jumped out.

When the nurses came dashing into the room, all that remained to mark his passing were the rattle of blinds caught in the wind.

Three years later...

Slater held the newspaper up to eye level with one hand, and in the other he lifted his mug to finish off the rest of his hazelnut coffee. Skimming the page for suspicious headlines, he set the mug down and flipped the newspaper pages from back to front.

So far, so good. There were no signs of a feral Lycan. No signs that Luke was killing anyone. It had been three years since he'd last laid eyes on his friend. For three years, he'd kept tabs on every newspaper and news broadcast in the area. Luke was still in hiding, but gut instinct told Slater that his best friend hadn't gone far. His mother, Marianne, received mail from her oldest son like clockwork. Every month, at the last day of the month, a neat little cream envelope without a return address ended up in her mailbox.

Slater figured his friend must be close, had to be using the same post office or mailbox to know when it would get to his mother's house. In his letters he told his mother that he was fine, that he had found work and a stable place to stay. Annie had started giving Slater her letters after he assured her that he intended to find Luke. But none of the investigators he'd hired in the last few years had been able to get close. When Slater pushed, the letters stopped coming. He'd stopped pushing months ago. He realized that the only way his friend was coming home was under his own power.

As the days passed Slater's longing for the briefest glimpse of his friend grew stronger. And so did his admiration. It took incredible discipline and willpower to contain

your beast without training. As far as he knew, Luke hadn't made any killings. During full moon, a Lycan needed to hunt and feed, but they didn't eat humans. He could have easily killed though; sometimes the beast couldn't distinguish between harming animals and humans, especially when the moon was full. Like it was going to be tomorrow night.

The moon was particularly hard on Lycans. Her pull tapped into the most primal sense of a Lycan's wild nature. There was no ignoring its call. It was the only time a Lycan *had* to shift. He could feel the effects of it now, like an incessant itch at the back of his neck. He'd had plenty of time to grow used to denying his beast. But how had Luke learned such restraint? It was miraculous.

Of course Luke wouldn't have agreed. The very thing he had become was why he was in hiding. After waking up in the hospital, healed, with acute hearing, smell, and sight, Luke must have been panicked. He'd sought out the familiar comfort of home. In beast form he broke into the house and in his panicked confusion ended up in his little brother's room. Slater still remembered the frantic call from Colin. No one would believe that he'd seen a werewolf. Slater had had a time of it, convincing Colin that not only did he believe him, but he was a *Lycan*. It only seemed right to tell Colin. He was closer to his brother than anyone and after what he had seen he had the right to know.

Colin never repeated what he had seen to anyone. He'd never divulged the secret Slater had confided in him either.

Three years had gone by.

Things had changed, but not by much. Slater had finished community college, and was now the manager at his father's auto repair shop. There was no one in his life. He'd never tried to date anyone else. He didn't want anyone else. He wanted Luke.

And he just might get his chance very soon.

He was counting on Luke's love and loyalty to his little brother to bring him back home.

The crowd had swelled to such masses that it was nearly impossible to catch a whiff of Luke, let alone spot him. Slater was willing to bet his friend was clinging to the edges to of the crowd, waiting for the ceremony to end so that he could slip out unnoticed.

He was here.

Slater knew it as certainly as the moon would shine in its full glory tomorrow night. Luke wouldn't miss the opportunity to see his little brother graduate. He'd already missed so much in Colin's life, and Slater knew how much his little brother meant to him. Enough to run away from home, to give up his college dreams, to protect his family from the monster he'd feared he become.

Stomach rolling with uneasiness, Slater wished for the thousandth time that he'd been there for Luke when he went through the change. He'd planned to return the next day, early—but the change had happened faster with Luke then any of the few cases Slater had ever heard tales about. There just weren't enough *turned* Lycans to know what would happen for sure. The consequences of that night haunted him everyday. There wasn't a moment that went by when he wasn't thinking about Luke. Where was he? What was he doing? Was he in trouble?

His attention was drawn back to the stage as the school principal stood before the podium and began calling the names of graduates. As each row of graduates stood and

began the march to the stage to receive their diploma and handshake, Slater cast a surreptitious look around, paying special attention to the dark corners of the auditorium. His keen vision caught a flash of gold and he stilled. At closer examination the man had Luke's shoulders, but his head was obscured by a guest seated in front of him.

It took every shred of patience he possessed to keep his gaze forward. To wait for Colin's name to be called. He would have to make his move before they got to the last name on the list. No doubt Luke would want to make an exit before the ceremony ended.

"Colin Stronghold."

Slater joined the crowd in cheering for Colin. Seated two rows in front of him, Ms. Stronghold snapped pictures, and Slater added a shrill whistle so the noise.

Glowing with pride, Colin strolled across the stage to shake the hand of the vice principal and receive his diploma. He hesitated at the principal's side, and Slater could see his eyes searching the crowd. Eyes the exact shade of silver as Luke's were looking for their twin.

He could tell when Colin found him. He looked like a kid that had gotten his entire wish list for Christmas.

That was Slater's cue. Luke had lingered long enough for his brother to learn of his presence. He was now free to go.

But not if Slater had anything to say about it.

Catching his best friend's arm, Slater spun him around. "Where in the hell have you been?!" He couldn't help shouting. Three years of stress and worry were pouring out, whether he wanted it to or not.

Luke's eyes widened in surprise and he stumbled back, shaking his head. "I have to go."

"Like hell." Slater lunged for Luke and caught his arm again. Luke was going to run otherwise.

To his surprise, Luke fought his hold. His friend had never fought him before, but Slater knew if not for his Lycan strength, he would have had his arm pulled out of socket trying to contain him. Luke twisted and turned, yanked at his arm, and tried to pry Slater's fingers off of him. His panic only mounted as he failed to get lose. Slater could smell the sour taint of fear pouring off of him.

"Stop it before you hurt yourself." To put an end to Luke's struggling, Slater wrapped his arm around Luke's waist and hauled him up to his side. "Quit struggling, you're not getting away that easily."

"Let me go. You don't know what---wait...how are you strong enough t-to...?

Slater refrained from answering him until he was able to set him on his feet in

front of the passenger door. "Get in and we'll talk."

Surprisingly, Luke listened to him. His curiosity must have outweighed his fear.

Slater opened the door and Luke slid into the passenger seat. The look he shot Slater was uncertain, but he allowed Slater to shut the door.

"Where are we going?" Luke's eyes darted across the landscape as if he'd never seen it before, as if he'd never walked down these very streets. They passed by Regan, the elementary school where they had first met.

"My house," Slater said, gripping the wheel. Now that he had Luke in his car, he wasn't sure how to start the conversation they should have had three years ago. How did you tell someone that you had changed them into a Lycan without their permission, without their knowledge? Luke's disappearance was just as much his fault as his own, probably more so. Luke was bound to hate him for what he'd done, never mind he'd done it to save his life.

"Why are we going to your house?"

Slater cast a glance at his friend from the corner of his eye. Luke was wearing a neat pair of black dress pants and a crisp white shirt with a tie. At least he'd been telling the truth in his letters. He'd found a job. He wasn't a bum on the street. "Should we go to your house then?" The minute he snapped, he regretted it. He was mad at himself, not Luke.

"Look, I don't want to go to your house, okay. I've got things to do."

Yeah, I bet. Like getting furry tomorrow night. "Where do you go when the moon is full Luke; how do you control your beast?" Slater turned in time to watch all the color drain from his friend's face. His heart gave a painful lurch to see the fear and pain flicker in those pale eyes. Damn, he was so clumsy with words. He never knew what to say and how to say it.

"H-How do you know? Did Colin tell you? I swear to God, I would never hurt him. I stayed away so I wouldn't hurt him. Hurt mom." Luke's voice was thick with unshed tears.

He would have pulled over and parked the car, gathered Luke into his arms, but his house was just ahead. A neat two floor cottage he'd purchased only seven months ago. "No, Colin didn't have to tell me. I know you'd never hurt him either. You'd never hurt anyone if you could help it."

"I could hurt you," Luke wiped at his eyes with the heel of his hand, "I could hurt you if you don't let me go. I wouldn't want to but I..." Luke drifted off, clearly miserable. He looked out at the grass lawn as Slater pulled into the driveway.

Slater shook his head, "You can't hurt me, Luke. Come inside."

Luke didn't budge as Slater got out and came around to his side. He wouldn't look up at Slater when he opened his door.

He reached in and pulled Luke out, his friend once again stunned at the strength he harbored inside him.

Silver-gray eyes stared at him, wide and shocked. Luke had finally figured it out, and if he wasn't sure, he at least suspected. He didn't have to tug him inside when he stepped through the front door. Luke followed him.

"What are you?!"

"Lycan," there was so much more he wanted to say, but the word fell flat, echoing in his ears. The silence was damning. He couldn't get his mouth to work, to form the words. He wanted to do a dozen things at once, beg for forgiveness—not for saving Luke's life, but for not being there when he with through the change. He wanted to

apologize for not contacting Luke sooner that night when he hadn't answered his phone. Realistically, he knew there was nothing he could have done to save his friend from the brutal stabbing. He could have walked Luke to his car—gave him one last kiss before heading to his own vehicle.

Where were you?

Slater clenched his fist, letting his rapidly extending nails dig painfully in his palms. He ignored the pain—even relished in it a little—after all, it was nothing compared to the pain inside his heart. "You don't remember your time in the hospital, but your heart stopped beating once. I got kicked out trying to go to your room," he swallowed, searching for the courage to continue, "I came back later that night. You didn't know I was there. I made an X here." He lifted his hand to trace the healed flesh over Luke's heart. "I cut my own arm and poured my blood into it." His eyes climbed up to Luke's face until they rested on eyes gone molten silver with an emotion he couldn't name. "I gave you a part of me. I made you what you are. I-I didn't want you to die."

Luke's mouth curled in distaste. "You made me this monster!"

"No," He grabbed Luke's arm before he could turn away. "You're not a monster, Luke. You're a Lycan. If you hadn't run away I would have taught you. Showed you what you are. The beast is only a small part of you. You're still Luke." He reached up and cupped his friend's cheek.

Luke turned into his hand, unconsciously nuzzling his palm. Hot tears slipped from his closed lids and spilled over Slater's hand. "I almost hurt Colin," he sobbed, "I wanted to. I could feel it inside me. I had to run away. I had to protect the people I loved."

Luke shook his head, stroking the slight bristles on his friend's cheek. "No, you felt the hunger of your beast. You were hungry and needed to feed. You were still yourself. You *didn't* hurt Colin."

"Yeah, I've been feeding my beast all right. The first night I fed on a stray cat."

He snorted in self disgust. "I've eaten road kill until I could afford to rent out a cabin near the woods. I wanted to be as far away from people as possible. When the moon's full I usually handcuff myself to the radiator." He opened his eyes, the look he gave Slater both hopeful and a little doubting. "You're really a Lycan too?"

Slater let his beast roll to the surface, let his pupil expand until the black swallowed the hazel of his eyes. A low rumble sounded from his chest, and he took a step closer. "I was born Lycan." He mapped his friends face with his eyes, getting reacquainted with its beautiful planes. "You don't hate me?"

Shaking his head Luke said, "How could I hate you? I love you. Always have."

Groaning, Slater allowed his hand to slide from cheek to the back of Luke's neck and up to grasp a handful of his hair. It was longer then he remembered, curling at the ends. He tested its springy softness by twisting a curl around his finger. "Damn, Luke, I've missed you. I was so scared that you were hurt, or hungry, or—or dead." Luke had no inkling of how dangerous being a lone wolf was. If he had run into pack territory, anyone could have killed him for hunting on private lands. As it stood, Slater was going to have to break the news to his dad. Luke was going to need initiating into his pack. But all of that could wait until later.

Right now all he wanted was to reassure himself that all he had lost had been found. *Luke didn't hate him. He loved him instead*. The wonders of this man would never ceased to amaze him.

The last straw of his patience broke when Luke tilted his head and swayed forward. The vulnerable column of his throat was now exposed—an unconscious gesture of submission to an alpha. Almost as stunning was his tongue darting out to wet parted lips. With a groan, Slater leaned forward to claim the gift so freely offered.

He licked Luke's bottom lip, sucking and nipping until it grew swollen. Then licking the sensitive inner seal to his friend's mouth he delved inside to find Luke's tongue with his own.

Luke met him tit for tat, returning his hungry kiss with the same sense of urgency. Slater explored every corner of his friend's mouth, tasting a hint of mint from gum he'd chewed earlier. The light berry wine taste puzzled him, until he realized Luke was secreting the addictive fluid that only came when a Lycan was highly aroused, when he was completely comfortable enough to submit. When he had found his mate. Alphas didn't secrete such pheromone laced 'honey', only betas or omegas.

The knowledge that Luke was doing it for him fanned the fire to blazing low in his belly. Made his cock strain against his zipper and throb painfully. Fuck! Slater dropped his hands to Luke's shoulders, grabbed twin handfuls of shirt and yanked down, ripping the shirt off his friend. His hands made quick work of Luke's tie, allowing it to slither from his fingers to the floor.

Luke shuddered, but kept on kissing him. Slater was glad. He didn't have the control he needed to slow down, to convey what he wanted—no, needed. His hands

quickly mapped the smooth chest. His right palm rested briefly over Luke's wildly beating heart before sliding away to find a nipple--tug it into a hard, sensitive point.

Moaning, Luke pushed into his hand.

Meanwhile, Slater's other hand slid down to find the flat sculpted muscles of Luke's abs. His fingers skimmed over the smooth skin, stretched over muscle. There was a light trail of hair beneath Luke's concave navel.

Slake followed the happy trail to the metal button of his jeans. He plucked at it, and Luke sucked in his flat belly, reading what he wanted through the motion of his hand.

Making short work of button and zipper he wasted no time diving in to claim his prize. Boldly he encircled Luke's cock, claiming it for his own. The hard column of hot flesh jumped lightly in his hand. The beat of Luke's heart throbbed frantically against the thumb he pressed to the long vein running just under the mushroom shaped hood.

Luke's mouth slid away as he panted for breath, mewled in his Lycan voice, and pushed into Slater's hand. Begging.

Kissing his temple, his cheek, the side of his jaw and down to his neck Slater licked over his lover's pulse. "You're so damn beautiful," he whispered, feeling an ache in the back of his throat that rivaled the one in his cock.

His friend's head tilted even more, accommodating his exploration of his neck. Slater licked one slow line down to his collarbone and back up. All the while, he read his friend's reaction through his cock. Pre-cum soaked his fingers, and Luke was helpless to stop the motion of his hips. His entire body was shaking, belly clenching as Slater reached down to stroke it.

Luke's fingers dug into his shoulders, searching for support. His anchor.

Slater tightened his grip on Luke's cock and stroked from root to tip, letting his fist close around the head and squeeze lightly. He drew his fist back down and rubbed his thumb over the weeping slit.

Luke cried out, and his legs buckled. Slater followed him down. He couldn't let go long enough to make it upstairs to his room anyway. The living room had a thick navy blue rug—not the softest surface in the world, but better then the wooden floors in the kitchen.

Pushing Luke down, he slid to his side, bent his head to capture a nipple and suckle it. Luke reacted as if he'd been struck by lightning. His back arched, eyes rolling up, before shuttering close. "Oh, God!"

While he lashed Luke's nipple with his tongue, he continued to stroke the cock in his hand, pausing every now and then when he felt Luke at the threshold. Luke was trying his best not to move, but the movements of his hips were almost reflexive.

"Please," he finally begged, his breaths coming in labored pants.

Lifting his head, Slater placed one final kiss to the glistening wet nub he'd been torturing. "No." He knew what he wanted. It wasn't completely fair, but then his nature wasn't exactly in a reasoning mood right now. "Not until you tell me that you're mine."

The body beneath his stiffened, Luke's eyes shone like polished onyx as he turned his head to look at him. The pupil had bled out like his. A little pink tongue darted out to nervously wet his lips, and Slater had to rein in the instinct to lean forward and capture it.

"I'm yours." Damn, Luke had said the words without any reservations. Slater could feel burning tears gather in the back of his eyes, but he blinked them back. So

selfless. He was reminded just why in the hell he had fallen in love with Luke in he first place.

Since words escaped him, he figured the best way to communicate his own feelings on the matter were through his actions. He moved swiftly down Luke's body, pushing his legs wider he settled his broad shoulder between his friends's spread thighs. The view point was stunning. He could look down the long column of his friend's body, at the shuttered eyes and panting mouth as he first nuzzled Luke's balls then slowly lapped at them.

Sucking in air through clenched teeth, Luke at once tried to shift away from the exquisite touch to his sensitive genitals, but his body was torn, and rocked back into the pleasurable stroke.

Slater splayed on hand on that trembling belly, holding him still, making him take the pleasure as he rolled his sac with his tongue. Luke moaned and shuttered, the strong whine of his inner beast buzzing through his chest.

Taking pity on him at last, Slater moved up, licking the base of Luke's cock to the tip, tasting the salty, bittersweet nectar at the helmeted end. Luke pushed up with his hips and Slater took in the tip, letting Luke slide deeper by increments he preceded each inch with a liquid swipe of his tongue and a gentle suck.

"Ahhhh God, you're trying to kill me," Luke accused.

Chuckling caused the back of his throat to vibrate and Slater slid the final few inches of his best friend's cock into his mouth. Lycans didn't have gag reflex because necessity called for large portions to be eaten at a time, so Luke's length didn't bother him at all.

He contracted his throat, using his mouth like a sheath; he backed off, only to plunge back down again.

Luke shouted for him and hot ropes of cum spurted into his mouth. He gulped them down greedily, not losing a single drop. He suckled the flaccid organ a few moments longer before reluctantly lifting his head to crawl back up Luke's body.

They kissed, sharing the taste of Luke's spend between them.

Slater stroked his friend's thigh, urging him to turn on his side as he slid a hand over the curve of his ass. "Want me to make love to you?" He whispered, into the kiss.

Luke nodded, "Yes, fuck, Slater. I want to feel you in me."

Groaning Slater sat up and helped Luke turn onto his back. A shiver of need traveled through his body, as the golden perfection of Luke's body was evident even here, in the broad back and shoulders, muscled arms and legs, and firm round globes of his ass.

He had just enough presence of mind to gather lube from the side table next to the couch. The half empty tube had come in handy during his many jerk-off sessions thinking about Luke. He kept one in every room of the house—one of the perks of being a bachelor. When he turned back around, he discovered Luke stuffing a pillow beneath his groin—helping to raise his ass in the air, and make his hole more accessible.

When he caught Slater staring, he flushed. "Thought it would help."

Slater stroked his ass. "The only thing that's going to help is getting inside you."

He let his hand drift down, test the velvety soft skin of the tract between Luke's ass cheeks.

Despite his insistence that they fuck, Luke could not help but stiffen as Slater's finger brushed over his hole. Slater stroked his back, giving him another sensation to concentrate on. "We don't have to do this tonight, baby." Despite the fact that he was barely hanging onto his control, he was going to stop if Luke said no, even if it killed him.

"No, no. I-I want you."

"Yeah? Let's see how much."

"Uh. Ah." The shock of Slater's tongue teasing at his hole made Luke surge forward, driving his rapidly filling cock into the soft pillow cradling it. He arched back, whining-groaning as the semi-rough tongue breached his ring. His hips writhed as Slater begin to tongue fuck him. Slater's hands reached down to cradle his balls, squeezing and stroking gently.

Luke humped the pillow beneath him which simultaneously drove the tongue into his ass over and over again. His orgasm approached like a whirlwind. His body quaked as he spilled into the pillow.

A finger pushing into his sphincter prolonged the sweet torture. Slater lightly bit his cheek as he finger fucked his hole. Soon one finger became two, and finally three, pushing into him, coated in lube.

Then Slater hit something inside him that made him sob with pleasure as his spent cock hardened to half mast.

Pulling his hand away, Slater covered Luke's back. Somehow he'd gotten out of his clothes without making a sound. When he covered Luke, every hot inch of naked flesh touched against him, made him groan with pleasure.

Slater lined his cock up with Luke's hole and slowly pushed in. His eyes closed as the tight, delicious heat of Luke's body clasped him like a silken glove. Making himself be still long enough for Luke to adjust was nearly the hardest thing he'd ever done. But he didn't move, not until Luke pushed back at him. A silent signal to continue.

Both men groaned as Slater sank deeper, his cock stretching Luke's hole to its limit. The brunet finally rested when his balls came in contact with Slater's ass. But it didn't last long. Soon the need to move overtook him and he began to thrust.

Slowly he built up speed, making sure his hips were tilted to hit the pleasure spot inside his mate for maximum pleasure. Luke met him with hungry thrusts of his own, until Slater could no longer take the gentle rhythm. His beast wanted out, wanted to claim Luke rough and fast.

He couldn't deny the appeal of pounding away in his partner's ass. Soon he was doing just that. He held Luke's hips as he thrust in and out; watching his cock slide in and out of Luke's hot little hole was more erotic for him then anything he'd ever seen.

He wasn't going to last much longer, and from the thrashing and moaning of the blond beneath him, Luke wasn't going to either.

With a growl that wrenched him down to his soul Slater came in a series of spurts, so pleasurable they boarded on pain. With a growl he dropped over Luke's back, and acting on instinct nuzzled aside his mate's hair and bit him.

Luke howled as if he'd been shot, but the sound wasn't one of pain. As if to attest to that his mate's body convulsed as his seed sprayed onto the pillow beneath him.

The following night found Luke and Slater standing at the edge of the wood, on land that belonged to Slater's pack—and Luke's soon-to-be pack. After hours of debate and reprimand, Slater's pack had decided that Luke was a welcome addition. Slater was sure they hadn't heard the last of it from his father though. He couldn't worry about that just now. What was important was that barring a ceremony, Luke was a part of his pack. The others had gone ahead into the woods, lured by the moon on a hunt that could last hours. Most of the hunt consisted of running off excess energy and chasing other Lycans. The hunt and kill didn't come until the very end.

Slater could feel the nervousness pouring off Luke in waves, he could also smell the acrid stench of his fear, and the far more pleasing scent that smelled of both their scents mingled together.

Mate.

"This is the first full moon that I haven't locked myself to a radiator." Luke said.

Slater reached over and stroked his naked back. "Relax, baby. You're with me. I will help you learn control. Even without being chained, on the full moon you have shown more strength of will then any Lycan I know."

Blushing at the praise, Luke dipped his head. "I trust you Slater."

"Good." He leaned over to still a quick kiss. Anything else and he was afraid they'd never get into the woods. His skin was itching like crazy. It must have been ten times worse for Luke. Only fear was keeping his beast leashed. "Let go now." He led by example; releasing his control, he began to change.

The transformation happened so quickly that only another Lycan could have seen it happening. Suddenly Slater was five inches taller, now standing on his front paws. He was hairy, large, and every inch the alpha.

Waiting patiently for his mate to shift, Slater saw the golden form turn into a handsome Lycan with thick reddish-brown fur, sharp eyes, and sharper teeth.

He extended one clawed hand in invitation.

Luke didn't hesitate to lay his rough palm in his offered hand.

Carefully the sharp nailed fingers curled over his palm. The dark wolf's eyes glittered with mischief. He tossed back his head to howl at the moon.

Luke stared in amazement. He didn't feel the need to rend or tear. All he felt was the solid presence of his mate. The scent of Slater calmed his inner beast, automatically his body, knew instinctively to submit to the Alpha, knew to wait until Slater made the first move

When Slater offered his hand, Luke readily gave his.

And when Slater tilted his head back and howled at the moon Luke did the same. His heart swelled with love and pride. The future was looking better already. He could get through anything with Slater at his side, and he was never going to run again.

The night sky filled with the sound of a howling pack, but above all the dozens of voices, louder then all the others, was one happy Lycan sharing the night with his mate.

About the Author

She now makes her home between the two traveling from college and back to visit her mother. At an early age Sage Whistler had a love for fairytales. Even before she knew how to write she was making up stories, reading to her grandparents from a magazine, using words that weren't actually printed in the book.

In her later years she began reading and writing romance, but her evolution to erotica happened virtually over night. One day she was reading a sedate romance and then she stumbled upon an erotica book and it was all she wrote. Pleading guilty to a flirty mind Sage hopped from the mainstream to swim up creek with the bad boys and started writing homoerotic fiction only a year ago. She's been hooked ever since.

Sage readily admits to being a bit quirky, prone to doing things like blurting out random lines from one of her favorite movies. She has only one sister who she swears is the complete opposite of her, and her greatest love right now is her books. Other then writing one of her immediate goals after graduating college is getting a Dachshund she plans to name Zombie.

Look for these titles by Sage Whistler ...

All I Want for Christmas Torn It Takes a Thief

All I Want for Christmas

© 2007 by Sage Whistler

Daniel has been in love with his boss, Jacy DeSalvo, for nine long years. Back then he was little more then a boy, but even as a man grown Daniel hasn't been able to move on.

Jacy's wife Marissa is a cheating harridan who trapped her husband with claims of a false pregnancy. Jacy has always been a pushover until proof hits him square in the face. He walks in on his wife having sex with a stranger in, of all places, a bar.

Things only get more complicated when Daniel is injured in a scuffle outside the very same bar, and has to come live with Jacy. Tensions are high and lust is rampant. And it seems inevitable that with this much testosterone in one place that something is bound to happen.

The only question is how Jacy will handle his new found interest in a man he's always seen but never noticed. And now that Marissa's gone Daniel is going to have to take his heart in hand if he's ever going to get what he's been hankering after, for Christmas.

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