

To Catch a Wolf



Elizabeth
L'Inconnu

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by Elizabeth L'Inconnu

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They called him “The Chameleon,” but the man moved more like a cat. No, Victoria Powers amended, more like a wolf, the werewolf that he was rumored to be in the tabloids and scandal sheets. So far she had not gotten close enough to tell if he really was, or was not, a werewolf.

Although the actor laughed off such ridiculous rumors, Adam “The Chameleon” Gentry was light on his feet and moved with the fluid grace and speed of that particular animal, and he often had a little spring in his step just like a playful wolf. He’d earned the moniker of the camouflage changing lizard, not just due to his ability to totally transform himself for every role he took, but his ability to look totally different at whim. His look constantly changed, perhaps to keep the paparazzi and his fans guessing so that he was not so readily recognized and relentlessly pursued everywhere he went.

His hair was his natural color at the moment, a rich dark brown with a hint of red when the light caught in it, but it had undergone various transformations over the years. It had been long, short, shoulder-length, and had ranged in color from black, to red, blond and even silver once, as well as

his natural color with a few different colored streaks in it for variety. The tabloids joked that it changed more often than the phases of the moon.

An over exaggeration but it was their tie-in to the werewolf tales. Victoria had read some of those stories and had snickered at them. No wonder Adam was not worried. They were ridiculous even if they might contain a grain of truth. And the pictures? Obviously altered in a graphics program, some so badly you did not have to strain the eye to tell, and it was easy enough to do these days and render a professional looking picture with the free software that was accessible to all, let alone the professional programs that were more than likely available to the tabloids staff for their knowing exploitation.

Adam ignored them for a response on his part would be wasted, but that still did not answer the question: was he or wasn't he the werewolf that they claimed him to be?

Victoria watched him as he prowled with pent-up energy inside his lushly appointed forty-foot trailer, back and forth between the efficient kitchen/dining area and the living room with its reclining chairs, flat panel TV and plump couch. Although the slide-outs added a lot of space to the trailer, making it roomy and comfortable to move about in, it still seemed too contained for Adam Gentry. Even after a long day filming on a busy set for the movie, *Target of Deceit*, in the middle of Flagstaff's downtown historic area, he did not seem tired, although he had to be, Victoria thought, tucking a stray lock of her long light brown hair behind her ear. It was as if he wanted to throw off his professional persona and run wild and free, yet knew he had to resist the urge because there were too many eyes about to witness such things. He didn't need to add to the rumors himself. They abounded without his assistance.

It was coming up on seven in the evening and he'd been on the set since around five that morning. His work day was not over yet, however. In twenty minutes, they would all be moving, relocating to a rural set in the wilds of the Sierra Nevada Mountains for the next two weeks, and tonight he had a meet and greet dinner with some of the local dignitaries in the tourist town of Monahan's Peak where they would be based.

Adam was still in his period costume, a 1940's wartime businessman's suit and he still wore the makeup, so why did his hair appear longer now than it had earlier when he was filming? A trick of his clever hairdresser or was he manipulating his wolf genes? He wasn't that vain, was he? Victoria hadn't thought so. Although that would explain his ability to transform himself at will. Either way, he had to make another change before heading off to the airport – his clothes.

Victoria hated to interrupt him, as he was busy going over scene revisions for the next day's shoot and he wasn't quite happy with some of the changes in the dialogue or the scene. He'd been scrawling notes on the pages, while talking to his second assistant, Pete, who sat on the couch, hunched over a laptop on the coffee table. Pete's long brown hair was a mess, having come loose from its ponytail at the nape of his neck. He'd rubbed at it in frustration a few times while speaking into the mic attached to his earpiece. There were two upcoming movies on the slate for Adam, and his harried assistant was trying to get the start dates rearranged so they did not conflict, otherwise Adam was going to have to pull out of one of them, and Adam was not happy about that prospect. They were both projects that he wanted to be involved with and were close to his heart, and the directors of both desperately wanted him in their respective movies, so they were trying to compromise. If they each rearranged their shooting schedules enough, he could still do both.

Frankie, Adam's third assistant, grabbed a grape soda from the fridge. Her long blonde hair swung in a wide arc across her back as she shut the door with her hip, juggling the soda, a cell phone and her glass with both hands. Her pale blue eyes looked worried as she spoke into her cell. "Okay, well keep us posted. You know Adam will do anything to help. All you have to do is ask."

Victoria realized that Frankie was talking to Adam's chief personal assistant, Rachel, who had been called away on a family emergency. Since Victoria was the newest assistant on Adam's team, appointed by the studio no less, she was pretty much persona non grata and had been given little to do so far. Furthermore, she had only just made it into the 'inner

sanctum,' not due to her abilities but rather the emergency that had pulled Rachel away from the set yesterday. Everyone had been bumped up one as a result of that and Victoria had finally gotten a foot in the trailer door, otherwise she would still be twiddling her thumbs and relegated to making nothing but coffee runs when needed. It hadn't been the best way to get close enough to Adam Gentry to discover the truth. Now she had the opportunity to at least observe him up close and interact with him, and maybe do what she'd been hired to do.

Not that he had interacted with her or noticed her much. Frankie had just told her to take notes and watch the phones, so it startled her when Adam actually spoke to her before she could remind him of the time.

"You," Adam said, pointing at her. "What's your name again?"

"Victoria, sir."

"Oh God, don't call me 'sir.' I'm not that old, Victoria. You know my name. It's Adam. Use it. Call Gavin and make sure the cars are ready to roll."

Victoria nodded. No, he was in his late thirties and only looked twenty-five if that, she thought, as she looked at the three cell phones on the dining table in front of her, one green, one blue and one dark chocolate, a shade similar to Adam's beautiful dark eyes.

"It's the green one," he added absently for her benefit, continuing swiftly on, "Frankie, double check that reservation for dinner this evening; I think we're up to thirty-five people now. Make sure they have enough resources if the number unexpectedly grows. And check to make sure that they received the wine."

"Will do. Rachel called. Her dad's undergoing a double bypass."

"Damn. Send another speedy recovery arrangement and tell her whatever she needs, okay? I mean it."

"I did."

"Thanks."

Victoria concluded her own conversation with Gavin and reported, "Adam, we're good to go. Gavin has the vehicles lined up on the other end as well. They will meet you at the plane, but you're getting short on time if you want to shower and change before you leave."

"Right. Come with me." He headed for the bedroom at the other end of the trailer.

Victoria followed, surprised but willing to continue taking notes if that was what he wanted while he removed his makeup. She hoped she hadn't done anything out of line. He didn't seem annoyed, just in a hurry now, as she stepped up into the bedroom. Again, the slide-outs made the room more comfortable and spacious, allowing room for a king-sized bed, two closets, one with full-length mirrors. A wash basin attended the vanity to assist in the removal of makeup. Between the vanity and the toilet, a compact washer and dryer were stacked. On the other side of the bedroom doorway, opposite the toilet, there was a shower with a partially frosted door.

Adam took off his jacket and gave it to her to hang up, slid off his suspenders, removed his shirt and undershirt and handed them to her as well. She hung them quickly as he moved to the vanity and began removing the screen makeup while he continued, "I need a new laptop; mine's screwed. Check with Mike Burton on that; he'll know what I need. His number's in the blue cell."

Victoria watched him as she scribbled down the information and made the call; Mike Burton cheerfully assured her that he'd have one out first thing in the morning. Adam paused in what he was doing and met her gaze in the mirror as she closed the cell, ending the call. "You're not going to go fan-girl on me, are you?" he asked, looking a bit wary.

That surprised and amused her. She smiled. "No."

"Good." He sounded a little too relieved. "Just been a while since you've seen a man without his shirt, is that it?" he teased.

"Ha ha. No. Just admiring the view. That is one of the perks of the job, isn't it?" No way was she going to admit just how long it had been.

"Oh, okay. If you say so. I've got to hit the shower. Will you layout outfit number seven for me please?" He indicated the mirrored closet as he headed for the shower, removing the rest of his costume as he went, apparently not at all self-conscious. Victoria tried not to look, but couldn't help it. He was a gorgeous looking man all over, from his long

elegant toes to the tips of his ever-changing dark lustrous locks. Worse, he possessed the three S's at the top of her Most Required list: sleek, supple, and oh so sexy. Okay, enough of that. Focus. Outfit number seven. Right...

She could see him through the shower door, for it was only frosted where the pattern swirled over the lower half, and she tried not to peek when she found her gaze sliding that way. Stop it and behave. Closet. Outfit. Check. She found the section numbered seven and pulled out the grouped hangers, laying the clothes out on the bed. Jeans, white T-shirt, a blue plaid shirt, a dark brown leather jacket, worn boots and a brown fedora hat; no socks and no underwear, she noted. Oh God, he went commando? She had always wondered if he wore boxers or briefs. Surely he wouldn't go without? Maybe his underwear was kept in a separate drawer? Or did he really go bare under his jeans? What an intriguing thought.

Keep your mind on the job, she chided herself sternly, hearing the water turn off and the shower door open.

"Victoria," he said, as he came out, still dripping, wearing one towel around his lean waist while rubbing at his gorgeous lush hair with another. "It's Frankie's birthday on Friday. I want you to arrange a little party, after shooting wraps that evening. Book at a local restaurant. Private room, cake, the favorite beverages of choice, the whole works; there should be a list. You can check with Pete. He'll know. Party of probably around twenty; again Pete will have the names of whom to invite. Aim for around eight; we should be wrapped for the day by then and it will give me an hour or so to enjoy the party before I head out."

"You're leaving the set on Friday night?"

"Yeah. Just for the weekend. Need a little time to unwind. Don't worry; it's in my contract."

"Oh. I wasn't worried. Just a little surprised, is all."

"I just need a little down time. It's no big deal and saves frayed tempers, I have found, if I have that built into the schedule from the beginning."

"I bet most can't do that."

"Probably not, but I guess that's one of the perks, isn't it?" He gave her a little smirk. "Have some flowers and a gift delivered on the set early on Friday morning," he continued

as if they had not gotten temporarily sidetracked by his weekend plans.

He was rubbing his chest dry and Victoria concentrated on not watching him do that as she scribbled down the instructions. "Gift?" she asked. "Any preferences?"

When he did not reply, she looked up and found his amused gaze locked on hers through the dark tangle of hair that hung in his eyes. She wanted to reach out and sweep it back from those beautiful eyes, for he was hiding mischievously behind it, concealing the little devil glinting there. "Oh, I have plenty of ideas," he grinned. "None appropriate. You're a girl, you think of something."

"But I don't know her."

"Well, here's your chance to bond for life with her."

"Oh. Thanks."

Adam was totally unabashed at the awkward situation he was putting her in. How was she supposed to pick out a gift for someone she'd only just met? She had no clue what Frankie liked and disliked. Maybe a gift basket would be the best thing, wine, chocolates and an assortment of fun things? She sighed and quickly turned away to add a couple of notes to her pad when he whipped off his towel. He smirked and she heard him pull on his jeans and zip up. "Need to get this costume back to wardrobe," he said, moving to the vanity where he splashed on a little cologne and ruffled his damp hair with some gel. "Have Pete do it."

Victoria finished collecting up the discarded costume, while he finished dressing. Damn, didn't he know what he did to women with that gorgeous face and body of his?

Note pad and pen clamped in her mouth, she was struggling tensely with the collection of costume hangers, when Adam leaned close, put his arm around her, and advised, "Loosen up, baby. I don't bite..."

Surprised, she turned her head to look up at him and was hit by his closeness and the sudden comprehension of what she was that dawned in his eyes. Feeling stunned for a moment, her note pad and pen fell from her mouth and hit the carpeted floor while they stared at each other.

Oh God, he smelled so good. She knew her nostrils flared as she breathed him in. His scent, hidden under the expensive

sexy cologne, still hit her heightened senses with a jolt and stirred an ages old reaction even though she had braced for it. She felt it deep inside, like responding to like, recognition on the deepest level, a call primal and base from one of her own kind. She leaned closer, unable to resist the lure, drawing his scent deeply into her being. Irresistible, sensual, profoundly carnal, it called to her inner animal and filled her with an insatiable need.

Did he know? Could he sense it? Smell it?

Of course he could. Just like he could detect what she was, he could scent her response to his closeness.

His dark eyes dilated and his focus intensified on her, and he was suddenly wary. "Who are you, Victoria Powers?" he demanded very quietly.

Busted. She was so busted.

Yes, he could smell her. He knew what she was. And he was exactly what the rumors said he was. She would only react that way to one of her own kind. Clearly he too had recognized her own carefully masked scent once he'd invaded her personal space.

Victoria licked her lips, unable to stop the little moan of pleasure that caressed the vocal chords deep in her throat. His gaze had locked on to that small movement of tongue along lip with interest for just a moment, then he was back, locked in her amber eyes, searching, demanding very quietly, "Answer the question. Who are you?"

"I..."

She tried to back away but he leaned even closer this time, catching her in the corner formed by the shower and closet, inhaling her scent in return, his nose cruising just millimeters from her flesh, from her shoulder, up the length of her neck to her ear, making her shiver and whimper softly. "Why are you here?" he demanded in an accusatory whisper.

"To assist you," she murmured back.

"Really? Good. I find I have a sudden need. You can assist me with that," he rumbled softly in her ear, rubbing his cheek and jaw lightly against hers, transferring his scent to her, and hers to himself. He would be with her all night now, and she with him, and that would drive her mad with lust, she knew. She had never smelled anyone so physically sexy before in

her entire life. His scent engaged every feminine instinct she possessed. One whiff of him and she was hot, wet and ready to fall on the bed and writhe shamelessly with him. She wished he'd rub his 'sudden need' against her but strangely he did not. If they were in wolf form, there was not a doubt in her mind that she would flag her tail at him in invitation to mate.

He stepped back, giving her an angry glare, demanding, "Who sent you?"

"The studio."

"Why?"

"To prove once and for all that you are not a werewolf," she admitted quietly, aware of how silly it sounded, especially in light of the fact that he was indeed a werewolf.

He gave a low ironic laugh. "If you were not one yourself that might even be funny."

"Adam, it's better to have me than someone else," she assured him.

He gave her a sour smile. "I'll have you all right."

"I didn't mean it that way."

"Didn't you?" he asked softly, leaning closer again, toying with her now, his lips dangerously close to hers. "Too bad." He knew the effect he was having on her. He could smell her response, the sexual anticipation that made her shift slightly, as if she couldn't contain her need. The devil knew what he was doing to her, knew that at any moment she would cave and throw herself at him, wanting, needing. Deep inside her body clenched and pulsed with the desire to have him ease that vital urge. He smiled at the knowledge. "Why don't you take your clothes off and get down on your knees?" he suggested with artful seduction. "I'll take care of that little itch for you. It'd do us both good. A good hard..."

"We don't have time."

"So you wouldn't be averse? Good to know."

"Adam, you know any woman that you wanted would gladly submit to your desires."

"But not you? Is that the name of this game?" He considered that and the implications of having a female werewolf put on his tail. "A little family trick, is it? Did my mother hire you to seduce me? To flag your pretty little tail

under my nose to see how far I will go? Maybe you'll even get lucky and trap me inside you?"

His direct reference to mating wolf style unnerved her. "No. I told you. I'm here to prove, or rather disprove, the rumor that you could be a were..."

"I'm not buying it. If my mother saw you and hired you, she would know what you are." His eyes glittered dangerously. He was angry and clearly would not put what he had suggested beyond his mother's doing, although he seemed hurt that she might go to that extreme, all in an effort to get him to do his duty for the good of the Pack.

"The man who hired me did not know," she emphasized. "He couldn't have."

"Right."

"He hired me over the phone, sight unseen, with no scent to give me away, Adam."

"Did he now?" He bumped his nose against hers, inhaling her lust-inspiring scent. "You're so hot and ready for it. Slip off your panties and let me have you. We'll both feel better for it. If I promise not to go wolf on you?"

"No, Adam, we can't."

"Sure we can. Ease our frustrations."

"No. It's too dangerous."

"And you don't like playing with fire?"

"I can't. I'm not like you."

"Why, did your Pack raise a chicken instead of a wolf?" he taunted softly. "Pity." He pulled back then, irritated. "Pete!" he called loudly, his disdain dousing the lust he felt, probably saving him from acting on instinct for the time being. "Costume to wardrobe." He turned away from her as Pete hurried in to collect the costume. Pete relieved Victoria of her burden, giving them both a wary look before he hurried out again, not wanting to linger in the agitated vibes he detected between them.

Adam was tucking away his personal effects while she stood there feeling like a fool, trying to extract the painful little dart that he had unwittingly fired into her heart. It didn't matter. He couldn't know it. She shook herself from her quiet pain and said instead as she picked up her fallen note pad and pen, "Adam, it's time to go."

"You are flying with me instead of driving with Pete and Frankie," he said, although he did not sound happy about it.

"Are you sure that's wise?"

"No. But I can keep my eye on you that way. So they don't know just what they sent to spy on me?" He gave an ironic little chuckle.

"No."

"I wish I could believe that."

"I'm certain they don't know."

"So why did they send you then?"

"To dispel the rumors once and for all."

"How did they get lucky enough to choose you?"

"I'm a Paranormal Investigator as well as a Private Investigator. Myths and Legends, we're in the book."

"A double PI? And what's your ad say, huh? With a whiff and a sniff, all your problems solved?"

"No." Her face was tinged with embarrassment as she admitted, "Taking a bite out of crime."

He laughed even though he was not amused. "Funny. And what will you tell your well-paying clients about me?"

"Nothing."

"Then they are wasting their money."

"Are you going to fire me?"

"I didn't hire you." He brushed passed her, pulling on his jacket as he grabbed his carry-on bag. He'd forgotten his hat on the bed.

"Adam, your hat..."

He didn't stop and so she picked it up off the bed then hurried after him, collecting up her jacket along the way, throwing it over her arm, while struggling to tuck the cell phones into her purse and grabbing her own suitcase from by the door. Outside, Adam took his hat from her and pointed her to the car, silently ordering her to get in the back. Gavin took her suitcase and she scrambled up into the big car, Adam right behind her; he tossed his hat in the back on top of the cases, and although they were seated next to each other, he kept his distance and she kept hers. Even so, she could smell him the whole time, because he was on her, and all she could think about was rolling on the sheets with him, locked in an intensive and repetitive mating session. Oh yes, she wanted

to play with his fire. She just knew that if she did, she would be burned badly. It was going to be a long night.

Over there, he was smoldering with lust too, for her scent was upon him, and it had stirred the wolf within.

"Everything all right back there?" Gavin asked from up front, picking up on the tension.

"Just peachy," Adam replied, forcing a smile. "What's our ETA?"

"About eight thirty," Gavin replied.

"Then we'll go straight to the restaurant?" Adam surmised.

"Yeah, we'll get you secured there, then Terry will go get us registered at the hotel and check everything out."

"Good. I want Victoria here in my suite. We have some things to go over later and I don't want to be running back and forth."

Gavin raised an eyebrow. "Are you sure that's wise? You know how people will talk."

"I don't want to cause trouble," Victoria inserted quickly. That was just what she needed – to be locked up in close quarters overnight with him. How would she keep her paws off him?

Adam gave her a smug look, as if he'd read her thoughts, then to Gavin and Terry, who was driving, he said simply, "I don't give a damn about people or their stupid talk. Just do it."

"Okay," said Terry. He was not going to argue with the boss, even though Gavin was not happy about it.

"I don't mind going back and forth," Victoria told Adam. "Gavin's right. Tongues will wag."

"Let them wag, their tails too if they have them."

Victoria bit her lip. That was a definite stab at her. He was furious. The way he was looking at her, let her know that she could not look away. Their gazes remained locked together until they arrived at the airport, where they were cleared through a security gate checkpoint onto the airfield with a special pass. Terry looked up into the rearview mirror once they were cleared through and asked, "You two having a pissing contest back there?"

Adam smiled but it wasn't a pleasant smile. "Something like that. I mark my territory, she marks hers."

Victoria knew that Adam would not look away first. He was an Alpha male. That had to be acknowledged or they wouldn't be going anywhere any time soon, and so she lowered her gaze at last and bowed her head slightly, then looked up at him from under her lashes, tilting her head in a sign of submission that pleased him on that purely male level, and perhaps amused him as well, yet his smile still held disdain, even as he leaned toward her and nuzzled her upturned cheek, acknowledging her submission while establishing his dominance over her.

If either bodyguard noticed, they kept their silence.

When Gavin opened his door, Adam turned away at last and got out of the car. They were met by a security team on the tarmac beside the jet, where their bags and cases were screened, and they were cleared; a special arrangement that Gavin had no doubt set up. Victoria hurried to follow Adam up the private jet's stairs, a little awed by the lush interior when she stepped aboard. This was no commercial flight with cramped seats. It was spacious and comfortable, had a bar and a lounge area as well as big cozy seats that faced each other over dark polished cherry wood coffee tables. There were only a dozen or so passengers on board, Adam and herself, the director and executive producer, Gavin and Terry and two other bodyguards, plus a sprinkling of Adam's co-stars, amongst them the handsome heartthrob Bill Webster and a dainty redheaded upcoming starlet who made a bee-line for Adam as soon as she saw him board.

Adam quickly took a spacious seat next to a window and tugged Victoria down into the aisle seat next to him. Gavin and Terry neatly took the two seats facing them, effectively giving Adam a shield. The hazel-eyed, redheaded starlet did not take the hint however and gushed, "Adam, darling, I was going to ask you to sit with me so that we can discuss tomorrow's scenes. I understand that you requested some changes?"

"Oh, sorry, Gloriana. Yes, I did, but..." Adam yawned hugely. "I'm planning on a little *cat* nap. It's been a long day and it's not over yet, you know?"

"You can nap after," she purred, running her finger over a tiny vial of fluid that hung from a gold chain and nestled

enticingly in her ample cleavage. "I'll even loan you my shoulder."

"No, that's okay. My assistant here comes with a provision for professional pillow service, fully tested and certified, I hear," he smiled pleasantly, ignoring Terry's smirk and Gavin's wince, as well as Victoria's little huff of indignation and Gloriana's startled intake of breath with equal and amused disregard. "We'll discuss tomorrow's scenes at dinner, okay?"

Although Gloriana backed off, she was not happy about it. Her hazel eyes sparkled with anger behind her brittle smile and she gave Victoria a look of contempt before she flounced off.

"Cat nap?" Victoria queried quietly, slanting Adam a look of disbelief and knowing better than to touch the pillow service comment. He responded with a small saucy grin.

"She's going to be a problem," Gavin observed, watching Gloriana move away while busily thumbing his way through a magazine. He wasn't going to comment on the pillow service either.

"Yeah, she already is," agreed Adam, snuggling down in his seat and taking advantage of his professional pillow service plan, resting his head on Victoria's shoulder. He closed his eyes with a contented sigh, settling his right arm over her lap.

Victoria knew that he was not intent on napping as he had stated he wanted to do. Seeing that he appeared to be however, a flight attendant brought a warm cozy blanket and draped it over the pair of them. Victoria thanked her on his behalf and knew he was amused. Adam's breath was warm on her neck and he burrowed closer when the jet took off, taunting her with a slow languid lick along her neck. She shivered and heard his amused response close to her ear. He chuckled softly and whispered, "I want you, little Chicken-wolf."

Gavin was watching them closely, a wary look in his eyes. Victoria knew he was looking out for Adam and feeling troubled by Adam's sudden closeness to her, and it felt weird for her, being on the receiving end of that suspicious gaze. Terry was oblivious and was already making the most of the time to rest. He was sound asleep. Finally Gavin turned his

attention to his magazine and read. Yet Victoria could not relax, for Adam was stroking his fingers in tiny circles along her inner thigh. Slowly they ventured upward, little by little. She squeezed her thighs together to try and stop him, but only succeeded in trapping his hand there, and he smirked softly, then ordered in a tone that she could not disobey, "Open for me."

Oh God, her thighs opened for him and he moved higher, his fingertips brushing lightly against her panties.

Another soft order, "Go take them off."

She wanted to obey him and yet knew she should not. A fine sheen of sweat broke out on her brow as she tried to resist the command, and while she shivered, he was making her so hot, she feared she would leave a wet spot on the seat.

"Better yet, let's go to the bathroom together." He lightly nipped at her ear. "Join the mile high club. I can smell that you want to."

"You're making my panties wet," she whispered, trying to sound unaffected.

"So, go take them off. Problem solved."

"No."

"I want you."

"Stop it. Please, Adam. I can't think when you do that."

"I don't want you to think, Victoria. I want you to get down on your knees and..."

A little whimper that only he could hear, thank God, escaped her, and it must have made him realize just how close to the edge he had pushed her, for he sighed and withdrew his hand to a safer zone just above her knee.

"I will have you, little Chicken-wolf."

The soft threat only made her hotter.

It was a good thing that the captain soon announced their imminent landing, else she was afraid that she would drag him off to the bathroom and make him follow through on that threat.

Gavin walked them into the restaurant where they were greeted by both the local dignitaries and a variety of animals that had fallen victim to hunters and the taxidermist's art over the years. The poor unfortunate animals stood rigidly captured in action poses, watched over by the mounted heads of some of their brethren. Victoria shuddered at the sight and hated the fact that they were set off with gaudy party lights to brighten the dark gloom amid the overhead beams. It seemed obscene somehow. Those heads staring sightlessly down at them, standing guard over the dark polished wooden tables and cushioned benches that were stained dark red, as if their blood had spilled out right there.

There was no transition. One moment she was standing in the restaurant, the next she was cowering in the bushes, struck dumb with terror as the shouts of the hunters filled the night and her mother's screams ended abruptly—

She jumped when Adam slipped his arm loosely around her waist, bringing her back to the present with a jolt. Had he scented her inner distress? Of course he had, she decided,

as others in their party followed them in and mingled for a moment, going through the introductions. Although Adam was smiling and joking with everyone, and mostly ignoring her, she sensed his unease also at the array of slaughtered animals on display, while that violent scrap of memory from her past still disturbed her equilibrium and left her trembling.

Troubled and confused, she stayed where Adam wanted her to, by his side. Submission still to the Alpha male's desires, she wondered, trying to distract her focus from that ghastly surreal memory fragment that had ensnared her? No. Simply easier than causing a scene, she assured herself, ignoring that small but telling surrender on the jet earlier. She was still hot and wet from that little skirmish with his insistent fingers. If he hadn't stopped when he had...

Adam's hand caressed her hip and he tugged her closer against his side as he spoke with Mayor Grainger. All she had to do was stand there and smile, be attentive to Adam's desires. As if she could think of anything else just then with his fingers stroking her hip, trailing along the narrow band of her panties? She looked heavenward for help and froze, going cold all over. Oh God, they even had a wolf's head up there! She shuddered, a whimper backing up in her throat as that horrific scene came flashing back into her mind a second time: cowering in the bushes, the victory shouts of the hunters, her mother's screams, her father's growl of rage... the red river of blood that spilled from his throat as the hunters took their grisly trophy...

"Easy. Put them out of your mind," Adam whispered in her ear as he absently nuzzled in her hair, speaking of the animals in general, and pulling her back to the here and now once more. "I want these off." His fingers plucked at the little elastic edge of her panties that lay hidden under her skirt. Was he really trying to distract her from the taxidermy or just annoy both her and Gloriana? Unwillingly, her gaze was drawn back to the wolf's head. Wasn't there something familiar about that particular wolf?

Adam lowered his mouth and pressed a kiss to her lips, startling her from her observations and collectively shocking everyone else for a moment, giving them all the big clue-in

that he and Victoria were a couple. It was a sweet lingering kiss, not the quick brush of lips that friends sometimes shared. It was intimate and he rubbed his nose against hers with deep affection as he pulled back. Victoria felt her face heat with a blush and while the conversation around them continued without much of a pause, the faces had changed and all were slanting her curious looks. The mayor in particular was focused on her and Adam, sizing them both up. It was unnerving to be so thoroughly appraised. She gave him a smile and looked away, then was brought up short when her gaze collided with Gloriana's.

The Scarlet Harlot, as she was beginning to think of Gloriana, was giving her the evil eye. Was Adam even aware that his co-star wanted him in the worst way? Of course he was. Wasn't that why he'd initially hauled Victoria down next to him on the jet? He was using her as a buffer and a shield. It would be stupid of her to forget that.

Moments later they were guided back to the private room that had been booked for them, passing through the main dining room, which was half full of gawking diners. Several of them recognized Adam, including a few girls, who excitedly gasped and squealed, hoping to get his attention. One even called out his name, despite her family trying to shush her. He grinned and waved, told Victoria, "Wait here," then went over to their table, shook hands, signed autographs and posed for pictures with all of the smitten teens in the restaurant, any and all who wanted to, even their parents and other patrons, and thanked them kindly for their gracious comments, while the others in his party waited for him. The exception was Gavin, who shadowed him, eyes scanning the diners to make sure they didn't get any weird ideas, smiling, but keeping watch until all had been satisfied.

Victoria saw that Gloriana was itching to horn in on the action but Jim Doyle, the director, kept her engaged in conversation and stood blocking her from most of it. Victoria might have giggled to herself if she had not been so troubled about other matters concerning the handsome actor who was graciously autographing all sorts of personal items for his adoring fans.

With another wave to the restaurant in general, Adam returned to her side, Gavin tailing him still. Adam took

her hand this time and tugged her along, into the private dining room, finding a place in the middle of the table and seating her beside him. Gavin sat on his other side, thwarting Gloriana once again. Annoyed, Gloriana dashed to the other side of the table and secured a seat opposite Adam.

"That was sweet of you," Victoria said to Adam, hoping to ease the tension between them.

"Your claws were showing," he explained softly, his smile tinged with mockery.

"I meant going over to see those girls and sign autographs, etc."

"Oh. Well, I meant the taxidermy."

"Why, do you want to stuff something?" she fired back, annoyed now.

"Yeah," he grinned, giving her a meaningful and insolent going over.

"Pig."

He leaned closer and breathed in her ear, "Wrong animal, baby. I'm a wolf. I bet I could make you howl and remember your ancestry."

Victoria bit her lips to stop the wayward and inappropriate giggle that threatened to erupt. Yeah, she just bet he could too. "Stop being a naughty boy," she murmured behind her water glass, taking a sip.

Adam seemed to relax after that and appeared in good spirits, at least while he laughed and joked with his friends and co-stars, and chatted at length with the mayor and his cronies. The director, producers, and all the bigwigs from the production were there, the lead actors and actresses. Adam pretty much ignored Victoria, except to fill her wine glass himself. He had special ordered the wine in advance she knew and it was delicious. The wolf had great taste. He made sure her glass stayed topped up with the red stuff and foolishly, she lost track of just how much she had consumed while she sat there quietly, listening to the myriad conversations about her.

No one really engaged her in conversation. The woman on her right was too busy fawning over Bill Webster, one of the other lead actors, to even notice anyone else.

Victoria was the only one of Adam's assistants present, and since she didn't really know anyone else in the high

caliber crowd, she felt it best to keep quiet and listen while they all ate dinner; both she and Adam selected rare steaks, although her appetite had been thrown off by the taxidermy.

When the steaks arrived, Victoria made a little sound of distress, for her stomach heaved.

Adam's hand covered hers on the table, giving her a gentle squeeze. "You will tell me later what frightened you so earlier," he said. "Eat."

"I don't think I can."

Adam was not quite sure whether she meant eat the steak or tell him about it later. In the end, he commanded softly, "Victoria, stop thinking about it and eat."

She looked into his dark eyes and calmed, taking a breath. With a small nod, she silently promised that she would. He patted her hand and tucked into his own steak, and she obeyed him, finding the meal was excellent, although she had to work hard at blotting out the sight of the blood on her plate, for it had this disgusting habit of morphing into that other scene. Every time it did, Adam's hand was silently there to refocus her mind in the present. And that was not all his hand was doing, she realized belatedly. He was doing something else under the table from time to time. What was he doing? It gave her something else to focus on and she realized that Adam was having his own problems.

Gloriana was still trying to monopolize his attention. She was openly flirting with him and if Victoria was not mistaken, currently rubbing a foot up Adam's thigh, and he was trying to ward it off without drawing undue attention to the fact.

A peek of red-painted toes confirmed it and this time when Adam slid his hand under the table, he grabbed the errant tootsies. Then to Victoria's surprise, he shifted the daring red-painted marauder to her thigh, startling both her and the mortified actress.

"Victoria, darling, have you officially met Gloriana Striker yet? Perhaps you'd like a nibble of her toes, since she seems to want to share them?"

"No. Thank you."

"Are you sure, darling? They're such pretty succulent little toes."

"I'll pass, thanks. Saving room for dessert," Victoria assured him, giving the actress a brief smile as Adam let go of

the poor thing's wandering foot. Gloriana snatched her foot back and Adam's hand remained on Victoria's thigh after that, clasping gently, his fingers making small erotic circles once more that muddled her thinking worse than the wine, especially when they moved upward from the tops of her stockings to her bare flesh. She emptied her wineglass.

"Easy, sweetheart," Adam smirked. "You'll get wasted."

"Already am, thanks."

"Good. Then I can take advantage of you."

"Yeah, right." Just because she had felt it, didn't mean he had. Sure, he wanted sex with her, but that was all. What she was wanting herself was far worse. He would run like the very devil was chasing him if he knew. "Like I could get that lucky," she huffed with irony, for he was using her as a buffer to get Gloriana to back off too. Maybe that was all this was? He was just toying with her.

He just smirked, topped up her wine, and went back to his conversation with the director, Jim Doyle, and the mayor, two down and across, which surprised her. She had been expecting a witty and dangerous come on. That they could both get lucky if she'd just drop her panties and let him have his way with her.

Gloriana excused herself and hurried off to the restroom, still humiliated and if Victoria was not mistaken, furious. Victoria tensed and thought about going after her. Adam's grip on her thigh tightened, warning her to stay where she was. Gloriana was gone too long however and Adam asked Gavin quietly to go check on her a short time later. The only reason Victoria knew that was because of her exceptional hearing. Adam had to have known that but he didn't share with her his concern for the younger woman.

Gavin returned a short time later and told Adam quietly, "She's not feeling very well. I've called for the car. I'll take her to the hotel and make sure she's okay."

"Just embarrassed, right?" he asked, concerned.

"That, pissed off, and um, a little too much nose candy."

"Ah, damn it."

"Don't worry, I'll take care of her. Call me when you're close to being ready for pick up."

"As long as you're sure that she doesn't need medical attention?"

"Nah. She didn't do that much."

"Okay, then," Adam said and Gavin left again.

Adam's right hand was still resting on her thigh although he'd ceased making the distracting little circles and retreated somewhat. Troubled over Gloriana, she wondered, gently giving his hand a squeeze while she took another gulp of her wine, letting him know that she had heard every word. It would probably piss him off, but surely he would read the quiet support there in her grip? It wasn't his fault that his co-star had come on so strong. He'd just been defending his own private space and body parts.

"I'll talk to her," she offered.

"No. My mess. I'll take care of it."

"No it isn't. It's hers. Let me do my job."

"Which is, by the way?"

"Your assistant. Let me smooth this over, woman to woman. It'll be less embarrassing for her."

"We'll see."

"You should have sent me to check on her."

"Why? I don't know you or trust you, do I?"

"Then why did you bring me?"

"What's that old adage? Hold your friends close, your enemies closer."

That stung worse than the not trusting her comment. She couldn't help it. Her eyes narrowed in anger and she glared at him as only a she bitch could do. She went to scoot her chair back, intent on catching up with Gavin; if she hurried she could get a ride to the hotel with him. Adam's grip on her thigh tightened.

"You're not going anywhere," he warned her softly.

"Oh yes I am. I'm leaving."

"No. You're not. I'm not done with you yet."

"Whatever. I still have to pee; unless you'd like me to squat under your chair and mark my territory?"

He grinned. "Go ahead. It'll be interesting to watch."

"Pervert."

"Oh you didn't mean in wolf form?"

"Adam, let me go or I'll bite you."

He let her go, not because of her threat though. That simply amused him. "Hurry back, Sweet Pea, and maybe I'll find a nice juicy bone for you."

"And maybe I'll gnaw it off."

"Ouch," chuckled Jim as Victoria went looking for the restroom, having overheard the last of their exchange. "That sounds potentially fraught with trouble." He scratched at his wiry salt and pepper hair, amused at Adam's expense.

"Nah, she's wildly in love with me, Jim. She really doesn't bite that hard." He'd already publicly laid claim to her affections anyway. Not that it mattered, as the rumors had been flying from the moment he'd arrived with her on his arm. Of course, the kiss he had given her in front of all and sundry had only added fuel to the already smoldering fire. He had enjoyed that kiss and he wanted more. Damn, he wanted to build a full blaze.

There was a problem though and he had already sensed it. Her reaction to the stuffed animals that adorned the place had not been normal. She had been more than appalled, he knew; he had been able to tell by the sudden subtle change in her scent, and he'd even felt her shudder of revulsion a couple of times. Worst of all, he'd seen the wolf's head too and knew that one was the one that had distressed her the most. He had been disturbed also, yet hoped he had not let that show.

Victoria's response however had contained fear and he wondered at that. Why would she be afraid? It was a question he wanted an answer to. Perhaps if he got her drunk enough, she'd loosen up sufficiently to tell him?

By the time Victoria returned to the table, the after dinner drinks were being served and she looked startled to see a large glass of single malt 30-year-old scotch waiting for her. Adam lifted his own glass in a little toast to her, encouraging her to drink hers. She picked it up, clinked her glass to his, asking, "What are we toasting?"

"Our first mating," he murmured softly as she took a sip, letting the lust he felt burn darkly in the depths of his eyes.

She almost choked on it. Not because of the strong peat flavor of the smooth double-cask scotch but in response to his words. He grinned, happy that he'd shocked her.

"It's four days until the full moon," he whispered seductively, knowing that they would both be put to the test then. As dangerous as that was, he felt a thrill in his being. This was different than anything else he'd ever experienced.

While he would not admit it, it excited him on a purely base level.

"Oh God." Victoria took a deep gulp of the scotch then, her thoughts too easily read: how the hell was she going to be able to control herself during full moon? Her horror at the thought only made him laugh.

"I'm looking forward to the chase," he promised her, knowing she would comprehend what he meant by that: that he wanted to run wild and free, and literally chase her down and when he caught her, precisely what he would do to her. She bit her lip and moaned softly, her body reacting with pleasure at the thought. She almost had an orgasm just thinking about it. It wasn't just in the darkening of her eyes as her pupils dilated with desire. He could smell her excitement at the thought of it. Damn her, he thought. It wasn't fair. This wasn't supposed to happen. Why did she have to smell so temptingly good? It made him think about things he'd avoided all of his life. It made him think about mating, not just sex.

Sex was one thing. Mating another.

"Mating is for life," she reminded him as if she'd been privy to his thoughts.

"Then I guess I'll have to kill you when I'm done with you," he shrugged casually, joking, yet knowing as soon as he'd said it that it was in poor taste.

She stared at him stunned, for one awful moment, taking him seriously. She actually paled and he felt instant guilt for the reckless comment. Reaching out, he stroked her pale cheek with the backs of his fingers, then curled his hand around her neck, drawing her closer. "I was only joking, baby," he assured her softly, looking a little contrite and sheepish. The image of the wolf's head flashed through his mind just then, making him feel worse. "I'm sorry."

"That was not very funny."

He bumped his nose against hers. "No. It wasn't. Forgive me?"

Victoria couldn't think when he did that. "Mnnn," she murmured, and licked at his lips.

Oh damn, he wanted to grab her and kiss her fiercely. Too aware of their public display and his own lustful mood, he forced himself to draw back. "Later," he promised. "Drink up, baby. It's too good to waste."

Dear God, Adam thought, he was just going to have to stay away from her on the night of the full moon. The animal inside him wanted to chase her and catch her, and take her like the beast that he was, and they both knew what that entailed: mind blowing sex for starters. And not just in human form. The act of mating in wolf form was exquisite too. That wasn't just sex – it was mating to produce offspring. The bitch locked her mate deep inside her until copulation was complete. The male was in those moments at her mercy as she milked orgasm after orgasm from him, and sometimes they stayed joined together for hours. The dog would come repeatedly in that time, ensuring that his bitch's pups would be his.

Adam had always avoided coupling with his own kind for that very reason, because he did not want to get tied into mating, but just the thought of being locked into Victoria like that excited him and gave him a deep secret craving for it.

He was a werewolf and yet he was also a man and he had for many years been able to overcome that beast's basest cravings. He might be a werewolf, but he didn't have to like it and he didn't have to act like one.

Although he remained in close touch with his family, he pretty much ran alone. The Lone Wolf, they teased him. One day, he'd come back to the Pack, they foretold, and take his rightful place. Not for as long as he could help it, he had decided a long time ago. There were too many rules and he had been tempted to break them all. It wasn't really that he was a rebel. He just didn't like restrictions. Therefore, he had left his Pack and ventured out into the big wide world alone.

Despite dire predictions that he would find the world a cold hard place and return with his tail between his legs, he had embraced his freedom. To be sure, he had learned some hard lessons along the way, but he had also made his fame and fortune, and then his family had eagerly embraced his career and even invested in it by buying a studio and producing some of the best dramas and action movies of the past decade and were even starting to produce a few kids movies now as well. His parents, his mother in particular, as well as his uncle, had really been working hard at making the studio a success, although he sometimes winced at their name: Howling Wolf Productions.

Adam did not star in all of their movies however. It was rare he accepted a role in any of their productions. The script really had to move him otherwise he would not accept the part. It didn't matter what studio was producing it. If it didn't touch something in his core, he turned away from it.

Of course, it hadn't all been a bed of roses. Along with fame and fortune had come a few pests, namely the Paparazzi, who hounded him and followed him wherever they could. There had also been the usual paternity suit against him along the way, a false claim by a gold digger looking for a free ride. Of course, that was what had fueled some of the wilder rumors that he was a werewolf. Uncouth comments that he himself had made, such as, "Oh, does it go all hairy once a month and howl at the full moon? No? Well then, sadly it isn't mine," had not helped any, nor had getting drunk at a big Hollywood party, where he'd tried a little cocaine.

That had been a close call and clearly someone had seen something and joked he'd turned into a werewolf. He'd been very lucky that the place had overlooked a canyon and he had been able to escape before he'd turned completely. Everyone

thought the eyewitness had been totally drunk and coked out, thank goodness, although it had made the tabloids with lurid altered photographs that looked nothing like him when he shifted. That had been the beginning of the werewolf rumors. As a result of that little incident, he had stayed well away from drugs and now only drank enough alcohol to touch the happy zone. Then he backed off and sobered up.

Of course, he wasn't above getting Victoria a little drunk to see what would happen. Playing with fire, he warned himself. It would serve him right if she took a bite out of his flesh. He really had to stop toying with her. He'd been at it all evening and she was not very pleased with him at the moment. His comment about killing her when he was done with her had been way over the top.

Although he had not meant it, the look on her face said she had taken it seriously for a moment. He felt bad about that. Still, best to let sleeping she wolves well alone when they were pissed off, he decided. They would talk later, when they were alone, if she would listen to him. As he finished his scotch, he supposed that he wouldn't blame her if she told him to go screw himself, particularly after what he'd done to her on the flight. Damn, she was hot and wet still. He could smell her and he wanted to taste her as well.

Seeing her glass was empty, he reached for the bottle of scotch and poured her another good dose. Maybe if he got her tipsy enough?

"Thanks," she murmured quietly.

"We can't have you lagging behind now, can we?"

"God forbid. If I get wasted and have a hangover in the morning, it's your fault."

"I won't tell your boss if you don't."

"Ha ha. You're too funny."

"I try. Look, let's call a truce," he suggested, hoping that he could put her back at ease now that he was feeling a bit more mellow himself. "You try and forget that I'm a jerk, and I'll try and forget that you are hunting my ass."

Victoria froze for a moment, offended and filled with irrational fear, even as she realized that he was teasing her.

Seeing where she went, he wanted to bite his tongue. He'd done it again. "Well, you are hunting me, aren't you?" he added. "Trying to discover what I am?"

"Oh, now see, you almost had me going there. I thought for one second that you might actually be sincere."

"I am. Always. Ask my fans. No seriously, I mean it. I'll try and forget that Howling Wolf put you on my tail, and you try and forget that I am what I am, okay?"

"Whatever. Sounds like a plan."

"So, they really don't know that you're... um... like me?" he asked.

"How could they?"

"I don't know. Just seems too incredible I guess. I mean, for a start, why the hell would they send a beautiful young woman to investigate me? What if I was, I mean, just supposing for one really wild moment that I really were a werewolf? Why would they send a woman to prove it?"

"Mnnnn, I see your point. You're saying a little woman couldn't do the job properly."

"Oh no, no, no; not what I said at all. What I said was, why put a woman in that dangerous of a position, if they really thought I was a werewolf? That's what I said. I mean, don't you find that odd?"

She frowned then. "Oh. Well. When you put it like that, I guess I see your point. Do we have to discuss this now?"

"No, not now, but definitely later; it's just something to be thinking about. Be thinking also, who really hired you and why."

"I told you why... Oh." She sat there for a moment, looking stunned, finally grasping what he really was saying. "Oh, I guess I need to think about this when I have a clear head."

"You and me both." He looked around and noted that things were starting to break up, and knew that he would have to have a little chat with his mother or his uncle to see just what was going on here — did they have something to do with sending Victoria on this wild wolf chase or were they in the blind about it too? Not tonight though. He was too tired to think about all that right now. People were starting to leave. One of the producers had already slipped away.

Deciding it was a good time, he requested the green cell and Victoria fished it out of her purse. Hitting the speed dial for Gavin, he said, "Hey, yeah, we're ready. Okay. See you in about ten." He rung off and handed the phone back to her,

then told one of the waitresses to bring him the bill. She looked a little startled and hesitant, her gaze drifting over to the mayor. "Seriously, honey, just slide it right on over here when he's not looking, okay?" Adam winked at her, handing her a credit card to run, saving her one less trip.

"Okay. I'll just be a minute." She hurried off to run the tab.

"You're not seriously going to pick up this whole tab?" Victoria asked.

"Sure. Why not? We're all having a good time, aren't we?"

"But, wow. I thought the local deep pockets were footing it."

"They probably intend to. I'm just doing my goodwill bit and all that. Drink up. Gavin will be here soon."

The waitress returned with the bill and handed him his credit card back. He didn't even really look at the bill, just eyeballed the total and rounded it up for the tip, added it together and signed it, then slipped it back to the waitress as she went by. She was back a minute later looking suitably shocked. "Um, Mr. Gentry, sir, are you sure you didn't make a mistake here?" she asked gently, thinking perhaps he'd had a little too much to drink and messed up. The tip outdid the entire bill by a significant amount.

Used to the second guessing, he simply grinned at her. "Nope. That's correct. You all did a great job tonight. Please give my compliments to the chef and the rest of the staff. I really appreciate it. Thank you."

"Oh wow. You're welcome. And thank you!"

"You're welcome, honey. Ah, my ride is here. Just in time to get me back to my hotel before I turn into a pumpkin."

The young woman giggled as she hurried away.

Gavin was making his way back through the main restaurant, speaking with the manager as he came. That was enough to make Adam frown. What was going on, he wondered? Standing, he helped Victoria on with her jacket, then tugged on his own, by which time, Gavin was upon them. "What's up?"

Gavin leant close. "A bit of a crowd gathering out front and looking antsy. We're taking you out the back way."

"Is that really necessary?"

"Don't start, Adam. This is what you pay me for, remember? Come on. There'll be plenty of other opportunities to meet and greet the locals when we have more security on hand."

Adam sighed. Gavin had a point. "Okay. Lead on then." He took Victoria's arm and followed Gavin out the back, giving a quick wave to the others as they went. "See you all in the morning."

"Steve's driving," Gavin added just before he opened the door.

Then they were outside in the cool evening air, Adam helping Victoria up into the big vehicle. He did not enquire about the change of driver.

Gavin shut them in then hopped up front and Steve took off, followed by the other car, passing the crowd that had gathered around the entrance of the restaurant. As the crowd realized that they had missed him, they sighed their collective disappointment until Adam lowered the window and waved at them as they drove by. Some screamed his name, others cheered and whistled, cameras flashed and he smiled for them, even leaned out the window so a few more could get his picture before they were out of range, then reluctantly he drew back in and closed the window.

"You like that, don't you?" Victoria said, amused.

"Sure," he said, not defending his actions. Let her think what she wanted. He did it because he thought his fans deserved to at least get a glimpse of him, since they had gone to the trouble of coming out to see him on a chilly evening. "Are you warm enough?" he asked, changing the subject.

"Yes, thank you."

He fell quiet then because he didn't know what else to say for the moment, not while he had a too attentive audience anyway. He was aware of Gavin's cautionary interest. Plus he could still smell Gloriana, presumably from when Gavin had taken her back to the hotel – her aroma was heavy and cloying, overwhelming Victoria's fragrance upon him even as it invaded his peace of mind worse than Victoria's did. Though it was only a few minutes drive from the restaurant to the hotel, they took a more cautious and circuitous route

to make sure they hadn't picked up any tails. Sometimes the fans were persistent and had to be shaken off before returning to hotels and such. Tonight that did not seem to be a problem thankfully, but Adam found he wanted to open the window again to breathe fresh air, although he supposed if he leaned closer to Victoria, he could no doubt dispel the eau de Gloriana from his mind as well as his olfactory senses.

Unable to resist, he leaned over and put his nose in the curve of her neck and shoulder, breathing in her scent. She gave a start and he smiled to himself as he whispered, "Just clearing the air."

She gave a little smirk, for she knew what he meant. She too could smell Gloriana's nauseating perfume and personal odor even over Adam's sexy scent. "Baking soda," she whispered.

"Take too long. Besides, I'd rather smell you." He caressed her knee and slid his hand up her thigh, teasing her again and making her release more of the intoxicating aroma of her own lust. "Mmmnn, that's much better." He inhaled her deeply then.

Gavin cleared his throat up front, a little reminder that they were not alone. Adam sighed and pulled away, leaving Victoria squirming for more.

"Here we are," Steve announced a few minutes later as he turned into the hotel and drove around the back.

Gavin ushered them into the hotel's rear entrance and into an elevator up to the penthouse suites, while Steve went to park the vehicle.

When they first entered the suite, Adam caught a whiff of pot and another more disturbing odor: Gloriana again. He dismissed both. Her smell was probably on Gavin, and perhaps the marijuana was lingering from the previous occupants? Paying it no mind, he looked about the affluent suite and Gavin pointed out that he had taken the room closest to the door while Adam had been assigned the larger one that was most distant from it. Victoria's room was next to Adam's with a connecting door as he learned a few minutes later when he checked his room out. Gloriana's scent was there as well, much to Adam's dismay.

He wrinkled his nose and wondered if Gavin had just gotten too close to her and had had to fend her off with both hands — it was the only thing he could think of that would explain her potent presence. Worst thing was it struck a sour note with him now and he wasn't sure why. Was it the cocaine Gloriana had used, or the fact that he couldn't get enough of Victoria's luscious scent?

Adam rapped on the connecting door lightly a few moments after Victoria had disappeared into her room, needing to escape the persistent smell in his room and get his fill of Victoria's. When she opened the door, she looked both curious and wary, and he grinned, trying to set her at ease. "Surprise. Fancy meeting you here?"

"Yes. Fancy that."

"Why don't you come out for a nightcap once you've settled in?"

"Not much to settle. My things aren't here yet."

"Oh," he said with a frown. "I'll check with Terry or Gavin. Come on. We need to talk anyway. Gavin will typically go out for a quick recon of the area, make sure we're all secure and that we don't want for anything, then he'll probably turn in for the night, so we will have some privacy."

"And do you typically want for anything?" she asked.

"Not usually, no." Although at that moment he wanted to back her up to her bed and fall upon her with wild and abundant lust, he did not mention it. Then again, he didn't need to; she would know what he wanted. That was the thing with werewolves. They had a superior sense of smell. She would detect his semi-aroused state easily. He had no need to rub it against her to clue her in.

By the same token, he could detect her aroused state as well. And that only made him harder right now, since he was in human form. Did she know any of that, he wondered?

"We have to stop thinking about it," she said, taking a step backward.

Maybe she meant it to be defensive and was trying to get a little space between them, but it focused his attention on his hot little fantasy of backing her up to her bed and falling upon her. He took a step forward, following her into her room. "Do we?"

"Yes."

"Damn. That's a shame."

"It's just..."

"What?" Softly. Maybe she would cave if he approached softly; gently slipping passed her guard?

"Full moon is coming, is all."

"Four days," he agreed. She was really worried about that now. He gave her a tender reassuring smile. "Think we can stand it?"

"We'd better."

"Why? Are you promised to some other Alpha somewhere?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I was not raised in a Pack," she admitted rather warily.

That pulled him up short. "Why not?" he asked.

She hesitated, not wishing to go into detail. He remained silent, waiting.

"My parents were killed when I was young and I was raised by another kind."

"You mean, human?"

"No. Look, do we have to talk about this now?"

She seemed nervous about her background and now that she had mentioned it, he was curious as hell. "Who? If not a human, who or what raised you?"

"I don't know you well enough to discuss that."

Ah, so, the lack of trust comment was coming back to haunt him? "You can't just tell me 'not human' and expect me to accept that. Tell me."

"You said something about a nightcap."

She was not going to discuss it just yet. He sighed. It served him right, he supposed. He should never have made that crack about enemies either, much less the comment about killing her when he was done with her; he winced inwardly at the memory of that. "Okay. Come on. Then you'll tell me, right?"

"I don't know. Maybe."

Shady lady, he thought. He would get it out of her, one way or another, sooner or later. For now, he'd leave it be. Leading the way, he cut through her room, sensing that she

would object to passing through his. "What's your poison?" he grinned, opening her door and stepping out into the decadent living room to the fully stocked bar.

He came to an abrupt halt. Oh damn, Gloriana. There she sat on one of the cozy cream-colored couches that surrounded a large square coffee table in the middle of the room, waiting for him no doubt. That accounted for her scent lingering and he had been too distracted by Victoria to pick up on her physical presence. Her hazel eyes narrowed dangerously when she realized that he was not alone. What the hell was she doing here anyway? Who had let her in? And where the hell was Gavin? He wasn't back yet. He would not have just let her in and left her alone like this, not without warning Adam first.

"Ah, Gloriana, feeling any better?" he asked, trying to be nice.

"Significantly." She smiled, although it was a cold brittle curve of bright red-painted lips that gave Adam pause. A shark's smile was friendlier.

Sensing the woman's jealous rage seething under the false smile, Victoria slipped toward the bar and asked, "Adam, what did you want to drink?"

Cutting Victoria off at the pass, he steered her toward one of the stools in front of the bar and perched her upon it, putting her back to Gloriana. "Allow me, darling. After all, it was my suggestion. What's your pleasure, my love?"

Victoria stared at him, aware that his words would infuriate his unexpected guest even more. "What are you doing?" she whispered.

"Saving my hide," he whispered back, knowing she would hear even with his back to her as he reached up for a couple of glasses. "Play along."

"Merlot, if there is any, please, honey buns," she said aloud.

"Sincerely, Victoria. Sincerely," he cautioned, then added aloud, "We do, sugar muffin. We do." She glared at him for that as he reached under the bar and pulled up a bottle of merlot. As he opened it, he asked Gloriana, "I assume you'll pass?"

"I could handle one."

"Are you sure that's wise? I mean, Gavin mentioned you were not feeling so great earlier. I don't want to make you feel worse."

"I'm fine now."

She wasn't, but he didn't argue with her. "Wine, then?"

"I'd rather have a martini."

"Okay, one martini coming up." He poured wine for himself and Victoria, then made Gloriana's martini. "Why don't you come and join us at the bar?" he suggested, not wanting to get entangled in the cozy couches with the red-clawed demon.

Gloriana huffed, then sauntered over on her high-heeled red sandals, parking on a stool three away from Victoria. It didn't matter as Adam was definitely keeping the bar between them. He slid her martini across the bar and took a sip of his wine.

"Thanks," she said, then added rather cattily, "So, Adam, like a Victorian gentleman, you're slumming with the help? I see National Enquirer headlines in your not too distant future. You really ought to know better, darling."

"It's really none of your business who he's sleeping with," Victoria inserted calmly. "I just hope you didn't bring any of your drug cache in here."

Gloriana gasped as if Victoria had slapped her. "How dare you! Adam, you're not going to let her talk to me that way, are you?"

"Um," he said, glad Victoria had beaten him to the punch, but wincing inwardly that now he had damage control to perform. "Well, you didn't, did you? I hope you left it in your room. And I want to talk to you about that. That's bad shit. You don't need that stuff, Gloriana."

"It helps me stay focused."

"No, it doesn't. It gives you a high to begin with, but then you hit the lows, and it takes more and more of it to get the high."

"Everybody's doing it," she defended.

"No. They're not."

"Oh come on. Don't tell me you've never indulged in it?"

"Only once, when I was young and dumb, and that was enough for me. I don't do that stuff. It's bad news. Get off it. I don't even want it on the set, Gloriana, do you hear me?"

She tossed her mane of red hair in defiance and gave him a sneer. "You have no right to tell me what to do."

"He's telling you that it's screwing up your judgment and that if you get busted on the set, it will shut the whole production down. Do you really want to be responsible for ruining this movie?" Victoria pointed out.

"Just because you are fucking him, it doesn't give you the right to speak to me that way."

Victoria growled softly under her breath, a definite sign that she'd had enough of the starlet's antics and personal attacks.

"Gloriana," Adam implored her gently, "listen to what I am saying. Flush your stash and stay off it. Please. I don't want to see you have to go into rehab. Doing that stuff is going to ruin your career, not to mention your health, trust me on this. It has ruined many big names. I've seen it happen up close and personal with a friend of mine. He was in and out of rehab for a while, seemed to be doing better, and then he OD'd on a bad mix." The memory was not a happy one, but he hoped bringing it up would make Gloriana see some sense. "I just don't want you to become one of the tragic front page casualties like he did."

"All right then," she mumbled, sulking in her martini. "I have it under control, you know. I'm not an addict."

"Yeah, that's what he said too. I hope you are right, Gloriana. Make sure you get off it before you do become one, okay?"

"Okay." She sighed and then gave him a naughty look from under her lashes. "Perhaps you'd like to frisk me, just to make sure I'm not carrying any more on me?"

Adam, even with his keen sense of hearing, almost did not catch what Victoria breathed in disgust. "Where's the bathroom? I think I'm going to throw up." He hid his responding smirk behind his wine glass as he took a sip and then whispered, "Behave."

She gave him a sarcastic smile.

"I'd better not," he said aloud to Gloriana. "Illegal search and seizure, and all that. Anyway, how did you get in here?"

"I told Terry you'd invited me. He helped me move in my things."

Victoria sputtered on a sip of wine while Adam chuckled darkly at her audacity. "Did he now? Well, I guess I am just going to have to fire his ass." Just where had she stashed her things, he wondered, thinking that he had a wretchedly good idea. He was more than annoyed at her crafty manipulation.

"Oh no. He was most helpful," Gloriana smiled happily. "Even helped me put my things away." Looking over at Victoria, she added with a nasty tone of disdain, "Sorry, honey, but when I want a man, I don't let a little thing like a lover, or the help, keep me from him."

"I don't blame you. You know what? You can just have him," Victoria said, her tone cool, but her smile was dangerous and her teeth were showing. "He's all yours. How's that?"

Adam worried she might fly at his annoying co-star, so he drew her focus back to him with his own little intervention. "Whoa! Ladies, please, that is enough. I am not a piece of meat to be squabbled over. We are not Vultures R Us, are we? Time out here."

"Sorry," Victoria said, unrepentant, giving him such a slick smile that he wanted to kiss it off her mouth quite thoroughly.

Enough. It was time to set Gloriana straight. Pointing at her, he warned, "I am not going to be manipulated into an affair with you. I am in a relationship with a woman whom I love very much and I am not going to screw that up."

"Liar," Victoria said so softly that Gloriana would never have heard it.

"Full moon," he threatened back without missing a beat, but his hackles were up now, a warning to all that he was dangerously annoyed as well as aroused. He tried to tamp both down as he continued talking to Gloriana, "Furthermore, Terry should never have let you in. You've probably cost him his job. I will be speaking to him about that in the morning. Meanwhile, I'll have your things moved back to your own room."

Gloriana gave him a smug smile. "You can't, darling. I checked out. The place is full. You are stuck with me, sugar."

Adam couldn't help it. A low growl of frustration escaped him. He felt an honest desire to sink his teeth into that pretty little throat and tear it out.

Gloriana was unaware to the sudden danger she had placed herself in. Victoria, however, knew Adam was fast reaching his limit, so she laid her hand gently over his fist on the bar. It gave him a start. He looked at her and she gave him a slow smile meant to set him at ease. What it did was turn him on. Rage was instantly channeled into lust. She knew it too, for she let go and looked down, peeping back up at him from under her lashes; undeniable submission to the Alpha male. If she had been in wolf form, he didn't doubt that she would roll onto her back, offering him a submissive nuzzle.

Dear God, if they were running in the wild, Adam thought, she would likely flag her tail at him, and he'd be lost; he'd take her right then and there. As it was, it took all the self-restraint he possessed not to vault the bar and fuck her brains out on her barstool right in front of Gloriana.

The heat of her own passion aroused, drifted up and surrounded him like a velvet caress, a musky scent that enticed and inflamed, calling to the wolf within.

"Run," he dared her softly.

Victoria shook her head, warning, "Full moon."

"I will have you," he assured her.

"For life?" she challenged.

Adam swallowed hard. That gave him pause. He just wanted sex with her. He didn't want a lifetime mate. "Tease," he finally muttered.

Victoria fired back, "Look who's talking."

They were both oblivious to Gloriana, who sat watching them, wide eyed and shocked. "I'm not usually one to share," she said into the now silent challenge between them. "But maybe a threesome would be really hot?"

That gained Adam's attention swiftly and made them both realize the last of their exchange had been aloud. His gaze locked on Gloriana's and he sized her up like she was a morsel to be devoured. "Careful what you wish for, little girl," he growled softly. "For this big bad wolf will eat you up and spit you out when he's done."

"Oh," she purred, "that sounds heavenly..."

Thank God Gavin returned at that moment. He stepped into the living room and instantly sensed the level of tension was set to critical mass. "What's up, boss?" he asked, eying all

three of them as he stood there on the other side of the huge room, his hands in his trouser pockets, jingling his change; it was clear that he had been out performing surveillance around the hotel grounds.

"It seems Gloriana here is out of a room," Adam said carefully. "I understand Terry allowed her to move her things in here?"

"Did he now? Well, I shall just have to verify that and see what rooms are still available."

"None," Gloriana smiled smugly.

"There's mine," Victoria muttered.

Gavin however had already pulled his cell from his pocket and was calling Terry, telling him he was to report immediately. Then he called the front desk to see if Gloriana's room was still available. It was not. "What about Victoria Powers' room? No? So you have nothing else available? What about the overflow hotel or the resort? Can you tell me if they have anything?"

It wasn't looking good, Adam thought, both resenting Gloriana's interruption and her sly incorporation into his personal life, and relieved that Gavin had arrived when he had. It had given him the chance to step back from a big mistake. Gloriana had infuriated him while Victoria turned him on, confusing his head and his senses; Victoria called to him on a level that undermined rational thought and he still had to fight the urge to just take her right there in front of Gavin and his irritating co-star.

Perhaps detecting that vital change in his scent and recognizing how close he was to giving in to the urge, Victoria warned him softly, "Stop thinking about it."

"Easier said than done — one sniff of you and it's all I can think about. Just flag your pretty tail at me once," he dared her. "I'll tie into you so fast you won't even have time to squeak."

She gulped hard, knowing he meant it.

Terry arrived a few moments later, looking sheepish and worried, as well he should, just as Gavin hung up, muttering, "The overflow hotel and the resort are both full too. A lot of fans have flocked in apparently; they are saying everything is full. God damned internet — everywhere you go, there they are!"

Gavin's irritation strangely soothed Adam's. "Gavin, that's enough."

"Just makes my job harder, damn it."

"I know and I'm sorry, but that's the name of the game." Adam's glance cut to Gloriana.

She had the nerve to smirk at him. "I told you, sugar, you're stuck with me."

"What's up boss?" Terry asked, approaching warily.

"I understand you let Gloriana move in here?"

"Um, not exactly," Terry hedged. "She said that you insisted that she was to stay here. I tried to call you to verify it, but I couldn't get through, so I let her in, just to be on the safe side."

"Where are her things?"

"I think she put them in your room."

"Well, I think you can go and get them out of there. Where are Victoria's belongings?"

"I didn't know what to do with them once things changed, so I put her case back in the car. I didn't want there to be an embarrassing mix up. You know, two ladies in your room at the same time?"

"Did I not tell you myself that Victoria was to be in here?"

"Yeah, but I got conflicting information. I couldn't verify it and she was here, you know?" He indicated Gloriana. "And she seemed quite sure. I couldn't just throw her out, especially if something had changed at dinner." He shrugged uncomfortably.

"Look, I know how to solve this," Victoria said, slipping off her stool and ignoring Adam's desires. "I'll just leave. I think my job here is done anyway."

"The hell you will," Adam growled. "You were assigned to me and I need you. You're not going anywhere. Terry, go get Gloriana's stuff and move her to your room. You can move in here." He pointed to Gloriana immediately. "Don't say a word."

She didn't, but she was furious. Her hazel eyes narrowed to slits for a moment and her lip curled up like a roller blind.

"Gavin, if you could please have someone fetch Victoria's things from the car, I would appreciate it," Adam said.

Gavin nodded and was on his way out the door instantly. Terry was already in Adam's room, trying to collect up Gloriana's belongings. Angry, she followed him and hindered

his efforts. Adam found himself glaring at Victoria. "You will not leave me until I say you can."

"You didn't hire me," she shot back.

Towering over her, he assured her, "I don't give a fuck who hired you. You're mine now."

"No."

His nose bumped against hers. "Yes. Besides, we have to figure out exactly why you were hired in the first place."

"If I leave, the whole thing is moot."

"No it isn't. They'll send someone else." Although that prospect did not really bother him, there was no need to tell her that – if it kept her by his side. That reminded him that tomorrow, he really needed to talk to his mother or Warrick and find out what all this was about. It made him wonder what they were up to. Maybe he should talk with his father? He hated to trouble him with this though and knew his father was currently in the United Kingdom. No, he did not want to do that, and the more he thought about it, the less likely it seemed that his mother or his uncle had anything to do with this. It was more probable that some junior executive from the PR department that was behind it. That made the most sense.

Victoria sighed, knowing he had a valid point. "Okay. All right. I understand that. We'll work together to try and figure out who is behind this. Just because I do not like mysteries," she reassured herself. It was after all why she was a PI in the first place. She had an innate need to solve things.

A sense of relief washed over him then. She would stay. That was good. Now to convince her to move into his room and his bed — that was going to take a little more finesse, he knew. He was just going to do it. Full moon or not, he'd take the risk. Besides, they were both Lone Wolves. What could go wrong? Neither of them wanted a lifetime commitment. They could fuck like minxes and walk away when they were done, right? At least, he thought so. Convincing her of that was going to be the trick. He'd find a way, pretty quick here. He topped up her glass with wine, gave her a crafty smile, and warned softly, "Hang on to your hat. This could get rough."

"She's not going to take this lying down," Victoria sighed, reclaiming her seat at the bar.

"I know. But I am not going to be manipulated into an affair with her."

"You have several love scenes with her, don't you? How's that going to work out?"

"That's professional. You don't take it to the bedroom just because you get close physically on the set."

"She doesn't see it that way."

"I know. I'll ask if we can cut some of those scenes. I don't think I'll have much luck though; most of them are integral to character development, not to mention the plot."

"Worse, we'd better check for drugs. We don't need any additional trouble."

"Crap. Good point. That scares me more than her come on act."

"Maybe you should recast the part?"

"Oh wow, Jim will love that idea."

"It might be for the best. You have weeks of this. You can't keep running into this every night."

"I know," he sighed. She was right. They should just recast. "I'm afraid that doing that will finish her, professionally, and emotionally. I don't want to be responsible for hurting her like that."

"Adam, you are not responsible. She is."

He frowned. He knew how this went. "She'll still blame me."

"Do not let her and do not blame yourself."

Frustrated, he dug at his temple with his index finger and scratched for a moment. "How can I not? To some degree?"

"Easy. She's made her own choices and now she is trying to force you into a corner. Don't let her."

"When two wolves skirmish, you always leave a little blood on the other."

"She's not a wolf."

"You are," he pointed out.

"Are we skirmishing?"

"Yes," he smiled. "I do believe we are. I kind of like it."

"You would."

"Don't you?"

"It is challenging, I'll grant you that."

"I want more than a skirmish," he told her honestly. "Much more."

"We can't. You know that. It's too... volatile right now. For both of us."

"Why?"

"Because... well, because we've both denied it too long, I suppose. Most of our kind have mated by now, by our age, I mean. Even I know that. You know what I am saying."

Perfectly. He did indeed. She was right, of course. And the longer they held out, the more explosive it would be when they finally succumbed. He knew that too. Did she? If she wasn't Pack raised, he wasn't certain what she knew. "I'm a lone wolf, so are you. We don't have to mate for life to have a good time together."

"Sex?" she surmised.

"Why not? We're obviously attracted to each other. Why shouldn't we indulge our instincts?"

"You like playing with fire, don't you?"

"So do you." He leaned over the bar and brushed his lips against hers. "Fire," he whispered against her lips. "Incineration, baby. Come run with me. We'll be good together. You know it. You can scent it as well as I. We both need this."

"We can keep running from what we are, but in the end it will take us both down, Adam. Is that what you really want? If it isn't, then we should stay far away from each other."

"Why shouldn't we skirt the edges and enjoy each other for a while? We can do that. We don't have to commit."

She looked at him, her eyes big and dark with desire. She wanted to. "Full moon," she whispered, troubled by that. She knew that much, knew that full moon intensified everything and offered an easy bridge to baser instincts. It was when werewolves instinctually sought to sire their progeny.

"Myth," he lied. "This is animal attraction. Nothing more, nothing less. Even humans submit to it. Why shouldn't we?"

"Because if we mate, it's for life, Adam. And you don't want that."

"You think I have not had lovers before? I have. Many. Am I mated? No. I am not. We can do this. We can have each other and enjoy it, then walk away when we're done. Why are you letting the full moon scare you so much?"

"Neither of us wants to be trapped," she whispered.

"We won't be."

Before he could say more, Terry was hobbling out of the bedroom with three large suitcases and Gloriana followed with another two smaller bags. Adam pulled away, not wanting their intimate moments to be so exposed to the vicious viper who was stamping her heels angrily as she followed the dogged Terry. She threw them both a dirty look on her way out and Adam wondered just where the hell she had hidden that much luggage? She must have stacked her cases in the closet.

As they left, Gavin returned with one suitcase for Victoria. Adam smiled to himself. A one case woman was more his style. "My room," he said simply, and Gavin took it there without question. Adam met Victoria's startled gaze and let her know without words that he fully intended to have her in his bed.

"We shouldn't," she said.

"You want to."

"It's too risky."

"I want you. You want me. Who are we to deny our nature?"

"Lone wolves. We've been denying this all our lives," she pointed out.

She was right, damn her. Still, he wasn't going to let that little truth stand in his way. He made a face. "Well, I sure as hell am not sharing my bed with Gavin or Terry."

Victoria clamped a hand over her mouth to stifle the unexpected giggle that bubbled up.

Gavin returned from the bedroom and sighed. "I need a bloody good drink. And Terry will too by the time that manipulative little bitch is done chewing on his ear."

Adam chuckled. "Yeah. Just how did she pull that one?"

Gavin shook his head. "Terry was just trying to do the right thing and not piss you off, I guess. She's an actress. She's convincing. I think I am going to have to fire his ass though for being so stupid."

"No. Let me talk to him. I'm willing to let this one slide. I can't have this happen again though. And maybe, just maybe, you should go rescue him? I mean, Gloriana is a power unto

herself, and I would hate to see Terry swept up into her personal little hurricane."

"Good point. I'll be back shortly. And I shall require a triple tippie upon my return."

"It'll be waiting." Knowing Gavin's poison of choice, he poured it ready.

"Meanwhile," Victoria announced, "we should check for certain substances in case she unloaded some here."

"Yes. Of course." Their keen sense of smell would pick it up, he knew. Often it was a trick to mask out smells. He waved her way to his bedroom, but she gave him a grin.

"You check there. I'll check out here."

"Chicken."

She had the audacity to laugh at that as she turned her back on him and searched the vast living area. He dashed to his room and conducted a quick hunt, although he had not noticed anything earlier, he also had not been looking, or rather, sniffing. The last thing he needed was a vindictive actress planting drugs in his suite and reporting him to the cops, although he had not detected anything other than a lacing of pot earlier in the living room. He found no drugs in his bedroom, although he did find the scent of Gloriana enduring still. Damn. He needed to get rid of that in a hurry. The best way of course was to mark his territory but he frowned on that. Lone wolf he might be, but he didn't like leaving that potent of a scent where it would be noticed and others could track him. There were, after all, werewolf hunters out to massacre his kind if they could find them. While he did not hide from such, he also did not advertise his ancestry.

With a frown, he slipped into the bathroom and grabbed a bottle of cologne, then flicked a couple of drops into the air in all four corners.

"What are you doing?" Victoria asked, amused as she lounged in the doorway.

"Exorcism. It smells of her, damn it."

Victoria giggled.

"Oh, you think that's funny, do you?"

"Especially since she was not even in here with you in that way, yes, I do."

"Ha ha." He re-capped the cologne and set it on the dresser, then joined her in the doorway. "Let's leave that to air out a while, shall we?"

"Sure. But first, tell me how you do that with your hair?" she asked, reaching up and tangling her fingers in it. "It's longer than it was this afternoon. Significantly so."

"Oh, and you don't cheat?"

"No."

"Saves a bundle on hair stylists. Besides, I like it longer."

"Aren't you afraid someone else will question it?"

"It's a horrible rug. I'm really bald under this." He winked.

"You're such a rotten liar," she murmured, giving his hair a little tug.

"Ow. Yeah. I'm just full of it." Since he had her crowded in the doorway, he trapped her there, leaned close and kissed her. She moaned softly and he deepened the kiss, sliding his tongue into her mouth, tasting her and the wine on her tongue. Damn, she tasted so good. She made him hard and hungry at the same time. Could he command her to his will? He was sorely tempted to try. He had earlier, on the jet, and then again at dinner, but that was just easy stuff. What he wanted was all of her, and that would take much more than a simple command.

The sound of the keycard in the lock made him pull back and reluctantly release her hungry mouth. "Fire," he whispered. "We're both on fire."

"It's your cologne," she lied.

"Right."

They moved back to the bar. "You find anything?" he asked her.

"No. Did you?"

"No. We should probably look through the other rooms, though."

"Agreed. You take Gavin's and I'll do Terry's, and since I am sure already that there isn't anything in there, I'll do the kitchen as well."

"Leaving me the guest bathroom? Thanks," he grumbled, which was no doubt where Gloriana had been hiding when they'd first come in. Victoria just grinned at him and, as Gavin

and Terry approached, ducked into the room that would have been hers if not for Gloriana's machinations.

"Gavin, do you mind if I make sure Gloriana didn't stash anything in your room?" he asked, handing him his drink.

"Jesus, you really think she would have?"

"I don't know. I don't want to take any chances. She's pretty miffed, you know?"

"Go for it. Best you are likely to find is muscle rub."

"I know that, man. I just worry in case she decided to play for higher stakes."

"No problem, boss. I agree with you. Best to make sure we're all clean."

"Surely she wouldn't have?" Terry said, carrying his case to his newly appointed room.

"That's the trouble with women, Terry. They can be so vindictive," Gavin sighed.

"Hey," Victoria challenged as she passed Terry in the doorway. "Not all women."

"Sorry. Some women," Gavin amended. "Not all."

"Good man," Adam grinned, returning from Gavin's room. "All clear, by the way."

"Good. I don't approve of such indulgences. Fucks up the thinking," Gavin winked, taking a healthy dose of his drink.

"Agree there, my friend." Adam returned to the bar and his hardly touched glass of wine. Casting a look at Victoria, he asked, "Well?"

"Clear."

"That just leaves the kitchen and guest bathroom right?"

"Yup."

"Sit. Stay. Good girl. I'll take care of them."

She glowered at him and let him. Chuckling, he went to confirm that the last two places were clean, then returned, able to relax a bit at last. "Okay, we're clear. She smoked a joint in the guest bathroom, but the fan should evacuate that completely soon."

"You know you need to discuss this with Jim," Gavin murmured, perching himself on a stool at the bar with his triple scotch.

"Not unless I have to," Adam sighed. "Getting her canned won't help her."

"Nor will turning a blind eye."

"I know that. It's just at this point, it would seem personally vindictive. I'd rather give her a chance to come clean than dump her in the shitter, you know?"

"That's your problem, man. You're too nice and good to people, even when they are trying to hurt you."

"Gavin, that's enough. I'm just saying let's see how it goes over the next day or so."

Victoria was silently intrigued, Adam could tell. Her gaze flitted between him and Gavin, trying to fathom out what was not being said.

Terry sheepishly came out of his room then and joined them.

"What will you have, Terry?" Adam asked, trying to change the subject.

"Better make it water. My judgment is thoroughly fucked up as it is."

"Look, let's just forget it for now. It's second chance time. I don't want to lose you, Terry. Just don't ever do that again without verbal approval from me, okay?"

"Right. Okay. Sorry, boss. She was really convincing, you know?"

"I know. So what'll it be?"

"Better make it a stiff one then. I am sure she will be back to gnaw on my nads later."

"God, I hope not. Scotch or Jack?"

"Scotch. Please."

Adam handed him the bottle and a glass and let him pour his own, then he poured himself one.

"You have an early start," Victoria reminded him.

"Yes, my darling, I know. Why don't you be a good girl and go get comfortable? I won't be long."

"Careful, or you'll be bunking with Gloriana," she shot back with a pointed glare.

"Okay. I give. You have a point." He tossed back his scotch, set the glass on the bar, grabbed her hand and dragged her off to bed, saying, "Goodnight, boys. Don't stay up too late."

"Wait a second," Victoria protested the instant he'd closed the bedroom door.

"Sorry. No. I can't." And he pulled her into his arms, kissing her thoroughly. He was not going to let her get away. She resisted for about half a second, then opened and kissed him back with a little moan of pleasure, wrapping her arms around him. That was more like it.

Heaven help him, the scent that rolled off her then was so damned erotic, he wondered how he'd lived without it all this time. That should have been enough to shock him out of his amorous intentions. Oddly, he paid the urgent warning no heed, and deepened the kiss, pressing her back against the wall. Giving her no doubt as to his aroused state, he crushed his body against hers, needing, wanting, demanding a response in kind, and she gave it deep in her throat, a soft growl of need that matched his own, a harmonic resonance that touched him deep in his core, where he'd never been touched before.

If she howled, he would be lost.

It was his last rational thought.

He wanted their clothes to just vanish and he knew he needed the relief of bearing her naked body down on his bed and possessing her with one deep stroke that would make him want to howl out his victory. Some last shred of sanity made him pull back from that very attainable fantasy.

Breaking the kiss, he rested his brow to hers. "This is dangerous. Before we do this, we need to find out who's behind sending you here."

A little whimper of frustrated disappointment slipped from her throat. "You're right," she conceded after a momentary struggle. "We should. I'll take a couch out there, once they've gone to bed."

"The hell you will. You're sleeping next to me, whether we make love or not."

"Sex," she corrected. "It would be just sex."

"Right. Just sex. That's it." Exactly what he had always wanted to hear from a woman; so why did he feel so weird about it now, so empty and disappointed? Why did he feel like he was missing something vital? He tried to brush the disturbing thought away and pressed a kiss to her brow. "Come on," he said, opting for the better part of valor. "Let's try and get some sleep. You want the bathroom first?"

"Please," she agreed, slipping out of his arms and going to her suitcase on the bed. "Where do you want me to put my things?"

"Where ever you want."

He went and sat at the table by the windows, which already had the drapes drawn closed. Flipping on the TV, he tried not to watch her put her clothes away in the drawers and closet, laying out nightwear and toiletries to take with her to the bathroom. Then she quietly slipped into that small room and he heard the shower running a short while later.

When she stepped out in a pair of cotton Wiley Coyote pajamas, he grinned, "Cute." Handing her the remote, he suggested before he disappeared into the bathroom, "Why don't you get us a nightcap or something?"

"I thought we had already night-capped?"

"One more won't hurt. Take the edge off. Relax us both."

"What would you prefer?"

"What ever you're having," he replied and escaped to the bathroom before he did something stupid.

Victoria watched him go. With a sigh, she set the remote on the bedside next to the alarm clock, before doing as he had asked. She slipped out into the living room and found that both Gavin and Terry had retired for the evening. Finding the light switch that illuminated the bar, she turned it on, then got down two fresh glasses and pondered the poison of choice. They had both had wine and scotch this evening. Best not to deviate any more than that or they would suffer the consequences of mixing the various alcohols. She grabbed a bottle of scotch and took it, along with the glasses, to the bedroom, turning off the bar light as she went.

At the table in his room, she set the glasses down and poured them both a generous shot, then sat down to wait. While she waited, she sipped at the scotch, topping up her glass when she found it surprisingly empty.

He stepped out of the bathroom a short time later, clad in a colorful plaid robe. Since he had not taken anything in there with him except for the robe, she was pretty sure he didn't have anything on under it. Damn, he looked sexier than ever, fresh from the shower, his damp hair wild about his head and

shoulders. He was very lucky he'd broken their kiss when he had, else he would have found himself pinned to his bed, entered into her own personal Kentucky Derby, and ridden to one hell of a finish, Alpha male or not. Damn, she had to stop thinking about sex with him. She wanted it too bad, with him, to resist much longer.

Evidently, she had been without a man for far too long. She had never been with one of her own kind, however, and the curiosity was killing her. Worse than that, she felt a driving intense need to mate with him. Mate? Oh God. That was not good. She had avoided that easily all her life, since she had not grown up in a Pack. As had he, even though he had been Pack raised. It would be too ironic, not to mention poetic, if they succumbed to their baser natures together and unintentionally trapped each other in a permanent bond.

He clearly had no intentions of doing that. Nor did she. If they burned up the sheets in a horizontal rumba, so what, that didn't mean they were mated for life; mating was different. There was a ritual to it, however brief, imprinted in the deepest recesses of their being, an instinct that had to be followed and obeyed. That was not for them. She picked up his glass and held it out to him. With a grin, he took it, toasted her silently, then slammed the scotch back in one go.

"Thanks," he said as he turned for the bed, went to the far side and tossed the covers back. Removing his robe, he flopped into bed and tugged the covers up over his naked body, settling back into the pillows.

"You don't want another?" she asked.

"If you insist," he smiled.

She shrugged, poured him a second one, and took it to him, having to climb onto the bed to hand it to him.

"Thanks." He took it and shot it like the other one.

"You are not going to be up for filming in the morning," she warned.

"Sure I will. Why don't you turn off the TV, the lights and come here?"

"Because... it's dangerous."

"I promise not to do anything that you don't want to do. Look, it's been a hell of a day. How about we just try and get some sleep?"

Victoria wasn't sure she quite believed him when he said that, but she was more worried that she would pounce on him than he would pounce on her. Reaching for the remote, she flipped off the TV, set it down again, finished her scotch, then settled on her side of the bed and turned out the light.

"Don't I get a good night kiss?" he teased softly, turning on his side to face her.

"You are asking for trouble."

"Really?"

"Yeah," she murmured. "Go to sleep."

"Okay." That didn't stop him reaching out and slipping an arm around her, pulling her close to him until she was nestled against his body. He kissed her pajama clad shoulder, then her jaw, and burrowed into the pillows. With a tired sigh, he murmured, "Night."

"Night," she murmured back, then tried to sleep.

It didn't take long for him to drift off and she was surprised. Sure, he'd had a long day and had a long day ahead tomorrow, but she was certain that he would have tried to coerce her once more into having sex. Surprisingly, he hadn't, except for that scorching kiss when they'd first come into his room. And his very naughty suggestions earlier on the flight and in his trailer.

Smiling in the dark, she put her hand over his on her belly, and stroked his long fingers, those same long fingers that had brushed her panties so insistently earlier. Just the thought of those elegant long fingers sliding in and out of her flesh nearly made her whimper and Adam tightened his hold on her in his sleep, as if he sensed her need. His subtle response made her feel strange, and gave her something else to focus on. It took her a while to recognize what it was that she was feeling. Safe and protected, something she had rarely ever felt. She fell asleep, content.

Adam awoke slowly, before dawn and the alarm. He smelled her before he even opened his eyes and he smiled as he realized he had an armful of beautiful woman. She had turned toward him in her sleep and was plastered against him, her left thigh draped over his right hip. The very fond wish that her pajamas would simply melt away did not help his morning wood. Lucky for her, her jammies didn't cave to his desire.

Foiled by a cartoon wolf, Wiley Coyote, no less! He almost laughed out loud. A frustrated groan escaped him instead.

She stirred then and rubbed herself against him. Horny bastard that he was, he pretended to still be asleep and let her. Damn, that was nice, tormenting as hell, but damn nice. Then she gave a little start, coming fully awake and to the awareness of what her body was doing, and she froze.

"Adam?" she whispered.

"Mmnnn?" he rumbled sleepily, pulling her closer, seeking a good morning kiss and hopefully more. He kept the kiss gentle and coaxing, sensual and tender, enticing her to come and play with him. She lingered there, hesitant, longing

to give in and yet belatedly resisting, slowly pulling back from his mouth. Reluctantly, he let her escape with a sigh, murmuring as he rolled onto his back, "Okay, okay. Don't say it. Just let me die here for a minute."

"That's not funny, Adam."

"Am I laughing?"

"What time is it?"

"Four."

"Ugh, you are an earlier riser."

"Yeah. Sorry about that, but you shouldn't rub up against it like that, baby. It enjoys the encouragement far too much."

Victoria groaned at his little joke. "It's far too early for that."

"No, it isn't."

"I meant your sense of humor."

"Oh. That."

"Yes. That."

"Look at the bright side. We survived the night. Sort of. Well, you did. The jury's still out over here."

"What, you need a public hanging? Oh God, now you've got me doing it."

He giggled at her naughty little suggestion that her hand might provide a substitute noose and her disgusted tone as she left the bed and found her way to the bathroom in the dark. "Mmmnn, yes please. I'd love hand with that," he called after her, grinning as he watched her pretty little tail sashay across the room. Werewolves had great night vision.

"Forget it." The bathroom door closing punctuated her response.

While she was in there, he turned on the bedside light and got up, pulling on his robe. For background noise, he flipped on the TV to a news channel and settled back on the bed, switching off the alarm so it wouldn't go off later. Although the news was on, he wasn't paying any attention to it. Instead, he was contemplating the day ahead and dreading a run in with Gloriana, for she was sure to still be smarting from being outwitted last night.

When Victoria emerged from the bathroom wrapped in only a towel, his earlier problem returned with a vengeance. "Not fair," he grumbled, scowling at the pole that was

erecting a tent with his robe. She snickered. "Oh yeah. Go ahead and laugh. You try living with it. There's no reasoning with it," he complained.

"Maybe you shouldn't watch porn in the middle of the night?"

"It's a commercial. And that is not responsible for this. This is your fault entirely, baby, you know?" he grumbled, rolling off the bed and heading for the bathroom. Taking a leak would hopefully resolve the problem.

"Sorry," she called after him, but she didn't sound it and he was sure he heard her snickering still.

"Stop laughing, damn it. It's not funny."

"Yes it is."

"I heard that." He pointedly closed the door and got ready for work.

By the time they were both ready to go, Gavin and Terry were up and ready too. Adam's hair, Victoria noticed, was shorter this morning. She gave him a look as they made the drive to the set's base camp. He gave her an innocent smile in return. "What?"

"Someone will bust you on that one of these days," she murmured.

He shrugged.

Base camp was still setting up. Trailers were turning up at last and security was a bit tense with all the vehicles moving around. His own trailer had not arrived yet, but then that didn't matter so much at the moment. More disturbing was the lack of the wardrobe trailers. At least makeup was present and that was where he needed to be anyway. He dragged Victoria with him. About an hour later, Gloriana arrived in the makeup trailer, looking as if she'd taken a short trip to hell and back, maybe more than once. She gave Victoria a glare, he noted, while he warranted a chilly smile.

"Do you know if wardrobe is here yet?" he asked her, trying to break the ice.

"How the hell would I know?"

"Oh, just thought you might have noticed on the way in."

"No."

"I'll go check," Victoria said, slipping out the door to see. She was back a few minutes later. "Yes. They're here."

At the news, Jenna, his makeup artist, suggested, "Why don't you go get changed and come back for a final touch up and hair?"

"Sounds good. Back in a bit," he said, escaping the chair as well as the frosty air that had permeated the trailer since Gloriana's arrival. It was going to be a rough day. "What was the hold up, do you know?" he asked Victoria as they made their way to his trailer, which had finally arrived. His costume should be awaiting him there.

"An accident en route; held everything up for hours."

"None of our people were hurt, I trust?"

"No, I don't think so. I don't think any of our people were involved, just held up."

"That's a relief."

Entering his trailer, he found Frankie and Pete present, and both gave Victoria a chilly reception. Damn. That wasn't good. He wondered if that was because Gloriana had been at work already or if they were both just miffed because he had taken Victoria to the dinner last night?

He didn't have time to address it at the moment, so went through to the bedroom and changed into his costume. If it continued, he'd deal with it. "Victoria, here a sec," he called.

She appeared almost instantly in the doorway. "Yes?"

"I want you to stay here this morning, if you don't mind."

"Why?" she asked, a little taken aback since he'd been keeping her so close since yesterday.

"Gloriana," he sighed. "I don't want to do anything to set her off. This scene we're shooting today is going to be awkward enough without flare ups between you two."

"Oh sure. Put me in the dog house. I'm not the one who had her foot up your..."

"You're not in the dog house. And believe me, if there was a way out of today's shoot, I'd take it. I am not looking forward to this. She looks like hell this morning, don't you think?"

"Yes, but then, I might be biased."

"Don't be mad at me, Victoria. Please." He tugged her toward him and kissed her, backing her against the closet

and pressing himself against her, boldly reminding her of who had slept in his bed last night. "Will that tide you over until lunch?"

"Breakfast, maybe."

He grinned. "Yeah. Good point. Okay, until breakfast. Speaking of which, where the hell is it? I'm hungry," he growled playfully against her lips.

"Held up like everything else. It should be coming up soon. Meantime..." Victoria stole a kiss this time.

"Keep that up and this movie will never get made."

"See if I care," she whispered, making him grin.

"I care. I want to get paid."

"Liar. You want to get laid."

"Mmmnn, that too."

"You don't do it for the money. You do it for the fun and the challenge."

"You may have a point."

"No. I think that's yours."

"Funny lady." He kissed her again, more thoroughly, then complained, "Damn, now look what you've done... ruined the drape of my pants and my makeup."

"Oh poor pretty boy, is his lipstick all smeared?"

"Mmmn and it looks good on you too," he teased, smearing a little more on her lips for good measure. "Guess I had better behave and go get retouched. Don't be rude," he warned playfully before she could make a comment. "And where's my coffee? I need my coffee."

With reluctance, he released her and went to hunt for his coffee, which he found waiting in the kitchen as a courier arrived for Victoria. She signed for the hand delivered package and the courier went on his way. Curious, Adam asked, "What's that?"

"Your new laptop," Victoria replied, bringing the box to the table.

"Oh. Great. That was fast. Listen, can you transfer all my files and settings from the old one?"

"Sure. I'll do it this morning."

"Thanks." Unable to resist, he added softly, "Victoria?" When she looked up at him, he reached out, cupped his hand around the back of her neck and drew her into a passionate kiss.

A pencil hit the floor in the kitchen, presumably from Frankie's gaping mouth, while Pete murmured, "Hot damn," from the couch.

"Wow," murmured Frankie.

"You'll ruin your makeup," Victoria warned him softly when he released her.

"Never." With a grin, Adam wiped his thumb over her lip and told her, "I'll see you for lunch." As he left he gave Frankie a wink and Pete a thumb's up, then he was gone.

He'd been right. The morning was a nightmare. Gloriana was being a pain in the ass. After having rescued her from the brutal arms of a tree, they were supposed to share a screen kiss; one of those taken-by-surprise kiss's where a declaration of love was often confessed. And she was not intent on making it brief, but lingered lustily, long after the director had yelled cut. It was hard to fend her off. The crew thought it was funny and laughed like maniacs but Adam was having a hard time of it, and not in a fun way. He literally had to pry her off him and set her aside each time.

If she was this bad now, what was she going to be like later when they shot the more intimate love scenes? He shuddered at the thought.

Freeing himself after the last take, he joined the director, who was frowning with concern. "I hope you got it that time," he grumbled, licking his lip where Gloriana had nipped at him. He smelled and tasted a trace of blood, not just his but hers as well. Great. Now he had to worry if that tiny taste of his saliva crawling into her own small wound would turn her.

"What's going on, Adam?"

"Good question. Is there any way we can nix the love scene in this thing?"

"No. It's integral to the plot and you know it. Now, what's going on?"

"Can we discuss it over lunch?"

"No. Let's take five and discuss it now. We're just wasting time and film right now. Come on."

Adam sighed and followed him off the set into a tent that was designated Command Post. It was the director's little retreat to huddle and have meetings to discuss issues. And this was an issue.

"Well? Spit it out."

"I can handle it, Jim."

"Either way, tell me what's going on."

"Okay. Gloriana's mad at me. Make a long story concise, she tried to install herself in my hotel suite last night. She thought because there were no rooms left, and she'd already given up hers, things would be just peachy. So I had Terry give up his room for her and now she's pissed at me."

"Looks more like she's trying to hump you like a rabid dog from where I'm seeing it."

"Yeah. And that's why she's mad at me. I'm not biting. I'm not in the mood for a clinging starlet looking for a short trip to the A List."

"And I can't have her holding up the production like this. I'm going to talk to her and tell her to knock it off. Whatever problems you two have, you can sort them out on your own time."

"I know, I know. I'm sorry. I probably should have just let her stay in my suite, but it felt like a violation, you know?"

"It was. We can't have that. I'll talk to her. Go see Jenna and get your makeup retouched."

"She's very... intense, Jim. Tread carefully, okay?"

"Will do."

Adam left him to it, having no desire to be anywhere close by when Jim talked to Gloriana. He had a wretched feeling things were going to get worse. He did not immediately see Gloriana as he left and he was relieved for that as he made his way to where Jenna was set up in another tent. "I think I need a little re-app," he told her as he entered and took a seat.

Jenna looked at him and tsked. "I'll say. What the hell's up with that girl? She nicked your lip a bit."

He took a look in the handheld mirror Jenna handed him and said, "I know." Taking a peek, he saw the little smarting cut with a bead of blood and mild inflammation on his upper lip. "Great. A fat lip. Can you cover it?"

"I'll do my best. If we can't hide it enough we'll just give you a little smudge of dirt there or something." She went to work, cleaning the small nick first, applying a little ice to reduce the inflammation and treating it, then trying to disguise it and blend it in so that it didn't show. When she was done, she handed him the handheld mirror back again. "What do you think?"

"I think you're a genius. Great job. Thank you." He gave her a hug and kissed her cheek before he left, assuring her, "I love you, Jenna. Will you marry me?"

"Careful. I might say yes."

He grinned. "And leave that high powered studio exec you keep at home?"

"In a heartbeat, darling. Just see if I don't."

"Good to know." He left, chuckling, and made his way back to the set area, where the wreckage of a WWII aircraft was strewn around the 'crash site.' He stood and chatted with the crew while they waited. He didn't think anything of Gloriana's approach until she flew into his face and lashed out at him, going for his face with her red-painted claws. "I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on the planet!" she screamed at him, then stormed off, leaving everyone standing there, shocked, staring after her and casting him sheepish looks.

In the silence that followed her outburst, there came a low threatening growl that nixed his own rage and made his heart clench with fear.

"Jesus!" one of the crew yelped, darting off. "Wolf!"

Adam had already whirled toward the vicious sound. "Don't anybody move!" he ordered, not for his sake or theirs, but for hers. He did not want some trigger-happy security guard firing on Victoria. "Just stay calm. She won't hurt you. Will you, girl?" His gaze was locked on hers. She was in attack stance, the hackles on her neck and shoulders standing

on end; she was ready to go after Gloriana. He smiled at her as she crouched there in a break between a piece of wreckage and a large Hollywood-set bush, and held out his hand to her, slowly approaching the sleek blonde wolf.

"What are you doing, man? You're crazy," the gaffer hissed.

"Ssshhh," he advised. "It'll be okay. You just have to maintain eye contact. Don't look away. Show her who's the boss, isn't that right, girl?" He crouched down in front of the wolf and she inched toward him, her stance changing then from attack mode to submissive, lowering her gaze and her tail as she nuzzled his outstretched hand.

"There. That's it. Well, aren't you a beauty? Good girl." He gently rubbed her ears as she huddled against his leg, tilting her head into his touch. She made a soft sound of appreciation. "Yeah, you like that, don't you? I bet you like your tummy rubbed too." She gave him a look that made him grin, then with a whimper she lifted her head and licked his face where Gloriana had raked open his cheek with her nails.

"Thank you, Victoria," he murmured very quietly so only she would hear. Her timely arrival had checked his own response to Gloriana's attack, preventing him from making a deadly mistake. "But you shouldn't be here. Go back to my trailer and wait for me there. I don't want you hurt, beautiful." He hugged her close for a moment and then sat back. She angled her head and looked at him long and steady, making sure that he was in control before she turned tail and vanished in a single bound.

"Holy shit!" exclaimed the gaffer. "I never would have believed that if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. Man, you're the Wolf Whisperer."

Adam stood up and turned to face the rest of the crew who were still standing there shocked and staring at him. "It's no big deal. You just have to give them the look to back down without issuing challenge, is all."

"No big deal? You're bleeding, man. Best get that cleaned up."

"Yeah." He rubbed absently at the bloody furrows in his cheek and knew that they were not going to be as easily covered as the nick on his lip. His fingers came away smeared with blood.

"Shit man, what did you do to get her all het up like that?"

"Which one?"

"The two-legged bitch."

"Good question." Of course he knew what was behind it. Jim's little talk with her.

Jim arrived then and came to a halt as he stared at Adam and his now lacerated face. "What the hell happened to you?"

"Oh you missed the excitement. Hurricane Gloriana blew in. And then you should have seen this man, Jim. God damn, he can tame and charm wild wolves, but not that fiery bitch," the gaffer explained.

"What? What wolves? Wait a minute." Jim shook his head, trying to get things straight. "Gloriana did that to you?"

Adam held up his hands helplessly. What could he say? Yes, she had. There were dozens of witnesses.

Jim swore. He was seriously pissed off, not with Adam but Gloriana. "You need to report to the first aid trailer and get that looked at and treated. We'll take an early lunch and then see what's what."

Adam nodded and began to head to the area where the cars were waiting. Gavin saw him coming, took one look at him and demanded, "What the fuck happened to you?"

"Long story. Let's go. Early lunch."

Terry, snoozing in the driver's seat, jerked awake as they both hopped into the vehicle. He stared at Adam for a long shocked moment in the rearview mirror. "Cut yourself shaving?" he asked, trying to lighten the mood.

Appreciating the attempt, Adam smiled. "Something like that. Mother always told me not to play with sharp objects."

Terry pulled out of the small parking area and drove back down to base camp. "Looks like that smarts a bit."

"Yeah. A bit." Adam did not want to talk about it.

Victoria was there to greet him, looking as shocked as everyone else, even though she already knew about it. "Oh my God, Adam. Let's get you cleaned up." She ushered him into his trailer and back to the bedroom, passing a shocked Frankie and flabbergasted Pete.

"He should go to the first aid trailer," Gavin pointed out, dogging their steps.

"Have them come over here," Victoria ordered, seating Adam at the vanity. Gavin nodded and left while she looked at Adam's wounds and winced. "That bitch," she hissed softly. "You should have let me rip her throat out."

They stared at each other with a modicum of shock in the mirror. They both understood that her reaction was that of a loving mate.

"Now, now, baby, we can't have that. That would entail the police, an investigation, the production grinding to a halt, not to mention the exposure of our kind on all the news channels. It just wouldn't do, you know?"

"Like I give a flying..."

"Victoria," he smiled at her in the mirror. "I'm okay, really."

"Not the point is it? All right. I'll shut up. I guess we should be taking your makeup off?"

"Yeah, probably. Jenna will have to start from scratch. Um, no pun intended."

"Funny man." She took up a jar of cream and gently began to remove his makeup, being extra careful and attentive around the wounds and discovering the small cut on his lip too. "What's this?"

"Overzealous kiss."

"She cut you and bruised you during a screen kiss?"

"Bruised?" He looked at it in the mirror and made a face. Sure enough, it had darkened up now to include a bruise. "Great. I look like a battered husband, but you'll be happy to know that she wouldn't marry me even if I was the last man on the planet."

"When did you propose to her?"

"I have no idea." He flinched as she gently ran a cleansing cloth over the furrows in his cheek.

"I'm sorry."

"At least she didn't get my good side."

Victoria smiled at his humor. "Aren't you even just a little bit angry with her?"

"Furious."

"Just not letting it show?"

"What's the point? It'll only make matters worse. And thank you again for the intercession. Your timely arrival

saved me from a nasty reaction: I would have been the one who ripped her throat out."

"No, you wouldn't have."

"I might have. I wanted to. Bad. I was this close." He pinched thumb and index finger firmly together, leaving not so much as an air molecule between the two. "So I'm glad you announced yourself when you did."

Victoria hesitated. "I... had to come. I knew something wasn't right."

How had she known, he wondered? Unnerved himself, he did not ask, simply repeated, "Well, I'm glad you came."

"Do you have to worry about her turning now?"

And how did she know that he was already worrying about that very thing? Was it a clever guess or something more? "I'm not sure. I didn't bite her, but she'd just tried to ram her tongue down my throat. She cut herself when she cut me though. I'll have to consult with someone older and wiser."

"Who?"

"A Pack Elder, I suspect."

"Oh my God," Frankie rushed in, eyes wide, blonde hair flying. "I think the director just fired your 'Scarlet Harlot!'"

"She's not mine," Adam grumbled. "He can't fire her. It'll put us in limbo."

"Well, your face will have to heal anyway," Victoria pointed out as someone from first aid hurried in behind Frankie with a portable first aid kit. Of course, he could heal it all by simply changing to his wolf form and back again, but people would notice and comment on it, so he was stuck allowing it to take the normal course of healing as much as possible. They didn't need any more rumors.

"Oh my. Looks like you've been playing with big cats, not wolves," said the med tech.

"The wolf had nothing to do with this," Adam assured him, noticing Victoria's blush in the mirror.

"What wolf?" asked Frankie.

"You didn't hear? They are calling him the 'Wolf Whisperer' now. Taming wild wolves between takes," the med tech chuckled as he went to work on cleaning up Adam's scrapes and treating them. "The cameraman got the whole

thing on film. These are pretty deep. She really did go to town on you, huh?"

"Took me by surprise," Adam admitted. "She's got sharp claws."

"I'll say. There," said the med tech. "All cleaned and treated. Apply this 3 or 4 times a day and let the air get to them. No makeup for a few days. I'll let the director know."

The med tech left and Adam sighed. "We don't have a few days. We're on a tight schedule as it is." Adam met Victoria's gaze in the mirror and she tried to offer him a reassuring smile. If only he could morph to wolf and back... but no, they both knew it was not an option.

Jim arrived and joined them in the bedroom. He took a closer look at Adam's face, then perched on the bed and said, "Well, here's the deal. I've fired her. I can't have this crap going on. We have enough problems without battling an ego the size of Texas every day. And how long are these scratches going to take to heal? A week I'll bet. Then there'll likely be scarring. You might want to think about a plastic surgeon."

"They're not that deep. They'll be okay," Adam assured Jim.

"I don't know. We'll see I guess." He paused, looking uncomfortable. "Are you going to sue?"

"What?"

"Come on, I need to know, Adam."

"No. Relax."

"I wouldn't blame you if you did."

"Jim, I'm not suing, okay? We have enough problems right now without that concern. What are we going to do about the role of Gwendolyn, now that you've fired Gloriana?"

Jim sighed heavily and his gaze drifted to Victoria. "You," he said, sizing her up. "Have you done any acting?"

"Me? No. Not since high school, why?"

"Good. Then you won't have any bad habits. Someone will be over with the paperwork after lunch. Once we get that signed, it's off to wardrobe for your fittings and makeup. Then in fifteen days, you'll have to apply for your SAG membership," Jim told her.

"Wait a second..."

"I don't have time to recast the part; our back up choices on this are all involved in other projects now. You're it, sweetheart, or this production folds like a bad hand at the poker table." Jim shot Adam a look. "Do you think she can do it?"

"Sure."

"That's what I thought."

"But I'm not an actress."

"You are now, trial by fire, at that. Now, as for your mug," Jim said, eyeing the damage to Adam's face, "they are telling me no make up for a few days."

"I'll talk with Jenna. We can use some synthetic skin maybe; and since we have to reshoot some stuff, maybe use these as cuts that happened in the crash if we can't conceal them completely?"

"Good creative thinking. Might work if we can hide one or two of them and work maybe the worst one up as an injury sustained in the crash, either before you jump or in the descent through the trees. Some of the scenes from the Flagstaff shoot will need to be redone, but maybe we can squeeze some of those in locally? If not, we'll have to return to Flagstaff for a day or two. Damn it. Maybe the cut on the plane in the scuffle...?" Jim muttered more to himself as he left them to it, intent on his own plans, already trying to work out the logistics of the reshoots. He went off for a working lunch, calling together his producers, set designer and assistants, to try and figure it all out.

Victoria stood there, incredulous still, her mouth agape. Frankie was blinking like an owl, looking back and forth between Victoria and Adam, who was himself a little taken aback at the latest development.

"Did you have anything to do with this?" Victoria demanded, glaring at him.

"It never even crossed my mind. Hell, I didn't even think he would fire her. Damn. Now she really will be gunning for me. She'll think I did it."

"Her own actions got her canned."

"You and I know that, but she's not rational. She's snorting cocaine, for God's sake."

Frankie gasped. "If he found that out, he would fire her no questions asked. Jim doesn't tolerate that on his set. We all know that."

"That still doesn't explain how he picked me to fill in for her. You know what this will look like. You know what she'll assume," Victoria worried.

"You are similar in build, you have a great figure, you are beautiful, and you're here," Adam shrugged.

"Gee, thanks. But I can't act."

"Sure you can. Besides, pretty much all you have to do is say a couple of lines and kiss me," he grinned. "What's so hard about that?"

Frankie giggled and Victoria gave him a look. "You?" she deadpanned with a frosty smile.

"Mnnn, good point."

"Okay. Enough of that. I am not dueling innuendoes with you."

"Chicken."

"Get me out of this."

"No way. Come on, you're saving the movie."

"I am not."

"Yes, you are. If we have to go back and recast now, it'll put us on hold, and then the financing will start to dry up. And if we get that far behind, it will conflict with other productions everyone else already has scheduled. Then what will happen is we'll get canned, the entire production. So yeah, there's a lot riding on your ability to pull this off."

"Oh, good way to make me feel better about it. No pressure there, at all, huh?"

He shrugged. "It's the way it is. Frankie, get her a copy of the script."

Word came later that afternoon that they were wrapped shooting for the day and while they returned to the trailers, they still had work to do. Victoria had to read the script and rehearse her scenes. While she, Adam and a few other key actors did that, Jim and the producers, set designer and a few others, were out in town scouting for a location to reshoot some of the Flagstaff scenes which Gloriana had participated in. They could redress some storefronts and the interior of one of the stores and a restaurant. It would be a mad scramble, but once the word was given, miracles could almost happen overnight. It would cost extra but would still be cheaper than moving the whole entourage back to Flagstaff to reshoot.

Jim arranged a private dinner at the hotel for nine o'clock that evening and all the lead actors joined him with all the department heads to discuss over the late meal their revised plan for the next day. They would be trying to reshoot some of the scenes they had done in Flagstaff. Adam's lacerated face presented a problem, but they would work around that by blocking him so that the damaged side of his face did not

show and there would not be any full on close ups of his mug. Adam joked that that was a good thing.

It was almost eleven by the time Adam and Victoria made it back to their room and after quick showers, they fell into bed and went right to sleep. They had an early start in the morning and Adam's ideas on his makeup were going to be tested out.

Adam awoke with a start. He was breathing hard and a cold sweat clung to his skin. He'd been cowering in the bushes, watching some unknown horror unfold. There was blood everywhere. The werewolf hunters had found them. The screams he heard, woke him, thankfully.

Next to him, Victoria whimpered in her sleep. He must have disturbed her, he thought, settling back into the bed. Her body stirred restlessly. She too appeared to be in the grip of a bad dream and she pined.

Adam rolled toward her, wrapped his arm around her and murmured in her ear, "Ssshhh, it's okay, baby. I'm here. It's just a dream. Just a dream."

Whether she heard him and was soothed or the dream simply ended, he didn't know, but she settled again as he nuzzled his nose in the curve where her shoulder and neck met, finding he loved that location. There he could feel her pulse, steady now, could hear her heartbeat and smell her scent. The scent of her fear had already been replaced by her normal scent and he breathed it in, soothed himself in return. He drifted back to sleep for another hour, then was awakened by the alarm.

"Ugh," Victoria grumbled. "Already?"

"Yeah. People think making movies is fun. And while it can be, it's also grueling work at times." He swatted off the annoying alarm and sighed. Victoria agreed and snuggled against him, wanting to go back to sleep. He wouldn't mind that himself, he was tired too and he was looking forward to the weekend. His plans for the time of the full moon had been simple: hole up in a mountaintop cabin and run wild and free. Now he would have company, he decided. Victoria. He would take her with him. Together, they would run wild and make love, and frolic, carefree for a while. He'd teach her to be more comfortable in her second skin. "Victoria, I want you to come with me this weekend."

"Where?"

"A secluded cabin in the mountains, we can be free there. It's safe. Just you and me, baby. We can run wild, together. Play, sleep, whatever you want."

"Really?"

"Really. Say you'll come."

"I'd love to. We can really run free?"

"Yes. I go there whenever I can."

"For full moon?"

"It makes things easier. I don't have to worry then about being discovered or holding back. I don't have to fight what I am there."

"Sounds wonderful."

"You'll come?"

Snuggled in just then, she would have agreed to anything. She didn't want to move. She murmured softly, "Sure."

Adam smiled in the dark. She was already drifting back to sleep. "You want the bathroom first or would you like to try and catch another few minutes?"

"Um, yes, please. You go first."

Amused, he leaned over her and kissed her cheek, letting her feel his erection. "Alternatively, we could get in a little early morning exercise and shower together?"

"I'll go first," she volunteered, rolling out of his embrace and the bed. His laughter chased her all the way to the bathroom.

They were shooting a scene between husband and wife, who were dining at a restaurant, having a mild argument. Adam stood off to the side, watching. After Jim yelled "Cut," Adam met Victoria's relieved gaze and winked at her, while her screen husband congratulated her on a job well done. The hug Bill was giving her got his hackles up and his smile turned to a scowl.

"She's good," Jim told him. "You sure she hasn't done this before?"

"Not that I know of. And I agree. She's a natural."

"Yes. I should have cast her from the start. Where the hell has she been hiding all this time?"

"I don't know, Jim. I wish I knew."

"You have a serious thing for her, huh?"

"Um... yeah, I guess I do."

"I can tell. You're scowling. Relax. She only has eyes for you."

Adam wanted to deny the scowl on his face and made an attempt to dispose of it. "Good," he muttered. "Otherwise I'll have to rip Bill's throat out."

"Please do not turn into another Gloriana," Jim implored. "My nerves won't stand it. I have enough to deal with in the wake of her antics."

Adam grinned at that. "It's okay, Jim. I'll restrain myself. For now."

"Glad to hear it. So what's Jenna's verdict on your mug?" Jim asked, changing the subject.

"We're going to work on it this afternoon. If this stuff holds up over the course of the morning, we should be able to work it up for the post crash scenes."

"How is it feeling?"

"It just pulls a bit when I laugh or yawn."

"I'll bet. Smarts some too, I should think."

"A bit; it presents a bit of a problem to shave around as well."

"Ouch. Yeah. That will be a bitch for a week or so, I expect. I still say you should go see a plastic surgeon."

"I don't think it's that bad, Jim. It's just a nuisance more than anything."

"Mick said the wolf licked it. Is that true?"

"Um, yeah, she did."

Jim frowned with concern. "God, what if she was rabid or something?"

"She wasn't rabid."

"How do you know?"

"She was not foaming at the mouth for one thing."

"Still, a wild animal; God knows what diseases she might be carrying. I mean they are hunters and killers, they eat raw meat. The bacteria and stuff..." Jim shuddered.

"They clean up pretty good, Jim. I'm sure I'll be fine."

"I think I want you to go back to LA and get checked out, just to be sure."

"Jim, I'm okay. There's no sign of infection. The wolf was placid."

"That's not what I heard. She sounded pretty threatening from all accounts."

"We've probably invaded her territory. She has a right to be pissed and was just letting us know that we are the intruders in her domain."

"Granted. But still, I don't like you taking chances like that."

"Jim, I am more worried about Gloriana than I am about the wolf. She won't take being fired lying down."

"Yeah. Damn diva," Jim grumbled, scratching at his salt and pepper hair. "She's likely to sue. The only ammo I have to hold her off that course is the threat of you suing her for assault and bodily damage."

"I don't want to sue her, Jim."

"I know that. But she doesn't know that. It's the only ace I've got. Let's hold onto it."

"Maybe her agent will talk some sense into her."

They looked at each other, hopeful and yet dubious.

"Well, anyway," Jim shrugged. "Keep an eye on those lacerations. Any sign of infection and we'll get you back to LA immediately for treatment."

"Okay," Adam agreed, knowing it was the only way to put Jim's mind at ease.

"Let's get this next shot done, then we'll break for lunch. Let me know how the makeup session goes this afternoon."

"Will do." Adam looked over at Victoria as he was going to be in this next shot: Gwendolyn would be hurrying from the table, upset, and would bump into his concerned arms. They had blocked the shot so that the damaged side of his face would not show at all.

As he took a step toward Victoria, Jim reminded him, "And Adam, don't forget we have that meeting tonight with the mayor."

"Oh damn, right. Eight, isn't it?"

"Yeah."

"I don't suppose I can plead my period?" Adam sighed, shaking his head.

Jim laughed, clapping him on the shoulder. "Sorry, pal. If I have to go, so do you."

"You're all heart, boss." Adam moved over to where he needed to be, and he and Victoria ran through the scene several times before it was actually immortalized on film. Catching her in his arms was nice, Adam decided, well that and when she first looked up at him, startled, with tears in her eyes, followed by the relief of bumping into a dear friend was sweet too. And the tender embrace he could give her under the guise of acting. He wanted to kiss her senseless and she probably knew it too.

As soon as the scene was done, he grabbed her hand and dragged her off to a quiet spot out back of the restaurant.

"What are we doing?" she asked.

"Emergency relief."

"Um... for what?"

"This," he said, tugging her into a small space between the back wall of the restaurant and a big rig truck that was parked there. He pulled her into his arms and kissed her hard, annoyed that he could smell Bill on her.

She kissed him back for a few moments then tried to pull away, "Mmmnnnnn, Adam. Makeup."

"Will be retouched after lunch; humor me," he murmured against her lips. "Kiss me."

"I shouldn't. We shouldn't. You're cheating..."

"How so?"

She inhaled him, brushing her nose close to the corner of his mouth, then his jaw, just under his ear. "You know how so. You're not playing fair."

"You want me as much as I want you. How's that not fair? What's not fair is seeing Bill hang all over you."

"He wasn't. You can't possibly be jealous over that little hug?"

"You're mine. I won't have him sniffing around your..."

"Adam Gentry! I can't believe I am hearing you..."

He smothered her amused protest with another kiss. Victoria caved quickly to his passion and kissed him back, a soft growl sounding deep in her throat. That pleased him and placated the angry wolf within. If he had to challenge Bill, he would, even though he understood that Bill had no idea what his hug had sparked. Adam made sure he rubbed his cheek and jaw against hers, and turning her, inhaled deeply at the nape of her neck, marking her with his scent and himself with hers. He pulled her back against him and let her feel his erection against her spine as he licked her neck. "I want you," he whispered in her ear.

"We can't."

"You can resist me for now, Victoria, but come full moon, when you turn, your inner wolf will be on the prowl."

"No."

"Yes."

"Then we should stay far away from one another."

"I will have you, Chicken-wolf."

"Stop calling me that!" she snapped.

"Admit it then. You'll flag your pretty tail at me."

She shook her head.

"So stubborn," he whispered, turning her gently around to face him once more. Affectionately, he rubbed his nose against hers, brushed a light kiss on her mouth and forced himself to step back. With a sigh he let her go at last and tried a reassuring smile. "Come on then. If I can't appease one hunger, let's go get lunch. You're shooting scenes with Bill this afternoon, aren't you?"

"Yes," she said, eying him warily as he held out his hand to her. "You're not going to go all wolf-man on me again are you?"

"No. I'll be in makeup, trying to fix this." He lightly thumbed his jaw just below the ragged scratches. "I'm sorry about that. I just... I don't know, Chicken-wolf and Gorilla-wolf, we are a pair, eh?"

Victoria smiled at that and finally took his hand as they started back inside the restaurant. "We are. And I promise not to let Bill molest me this afternoon."

"Good."

"Adam," Victoria said, hesitating just shy of the door.

"What?"

"I don't think it's a good idea."

"What's not a good idea?"

"Well, I don't think that it would be wise... that I come with you this weekend. I mean, look at us already. We're asking for trouble if we go away together."

He gave her a long steady look, wanting to argue. In the end he dropped her hand and said quietly, "Okay. If that's what you really want." He turned and opened the door for her, ushered her into the room where the cast and crew were dining and told her, "Go on and eat." He turned to leave.

"Wait, where are you going?"

"I have to make a call first. Go on. Go eat. You don't want to be late getting back." He left her there and disappeared.

By the time Victoria realized that he was not going to come back and eat, it was time to get back to the set. Jenna

was waiting there ready to retouch her makeup and did so quickly. The afternoon passed in a flurry of short scenes to set up a bigger turning point in the plot.

Adam came back to the set around four and he was quiet, focusing on the work. It was difficult to get the time to talk to him. Most of his scenes were with Bill, so that didn't give Victoria much of an opportunity to corner him. He was purposefully avoiding her gaze, ignoring her attempts to catch his eye. In the end, she gave up and since she would not be needed again until six, she left the set and went outside, out the back where Adam had taken her before lunch.

Beyond the trucks and the parking lot, trees and shrubs rose amidst rocky outcroppings, clinging, sometimes precariously, to the mountainside. The fresh scent of pine and rain from an early afternoon shower hung on the air, competing with the acrid tinge of exhaust fumes and wood smoke. It was already starting to get dark.

The urge to escape was strong, to run wild and free amongst the trees, higher up the mountain, deeper into the forest, and away from temptation. Although that did not seem like it was as much of a problem since lunch time. Adam had stopped pursuing her. Instead, he was shutting her out. It felt strange and it hurt.

With a sigh, she wondered how they were going to get through the rest of the day, let alone the night? She should check with the hotel to see if she could get Gloriana's room, if it was still available. If it wasn't, maybe she could sleep in the trailer? If it came to the worst, she'd turn wolf and sleep in the forest.

Before she realized it, she had crossed the parking lot and was leaning against a tree, her back to it, her head tilted upward, her eyes closed, inhaling the scent of the forest which was stronger there, under pine needles that still dripped the occasional drop of rain. That was the source of the droplet on her cheek, she assured herself. It was all sap anyway, wasn't it, one way or another?

Something warm and wet tenderly caught her drop of sap and lifted it from her cheek. "Adam." She hadn't detected his approach. He was just suddenly there. She opened her eyes and found herself locked in his hot dark gaze.

"Don't," he murmured, and then he kissed her and she tasted the saltiness of her own sorrow upon his tongue.

He kissed her under the chin, then slowly lapped at her throat with his tongue as she confessed, "I missed you at lunch."

"I lost my appetite when I lost you. Now I hunger."

He caught her mouth and kissed her deeply.

She tasted his hunger. It matched hers. Greedy for more, she slid one hand through his hair, cradling the back of his head, while she curled the other around the back of his neck, pulling him closer and dining leisurely on what he offered.

Reluctantly he pulled back. "We have to get back inside," he said.

"I don't want to."

"Me either. I want to take you back to the hotel and make love to you."

"We can't, Adam. It's two days until the full moon."

"No, don't protest and list all the reasons we shouldn't."

"But..."

"Please, Victoria. Don't. Right now, they are all moot anyway. We're needed inside. Let's go get this over with." He rubbed his nose affectionately against hers. "We'll talk about it later."

"Okay."

Hand in hand, they walked back to the restaurant and the work that awaited them.

That evening they went to the meeting and although they had changed into their own clothes, they still had their screen makeup on. It made for some entertaining comments, especially the bloody gash on Adam's face.

Mayor Grainger about fell over himself to thank Adam for the other evening's meal and confessed his embarrassment that the bill had been passed to him at all. Adam assured him everything was fine and that it had been his pleasure to do it.

"Well, there'll be none of that this evening," the mayor chuckled. "Tonight's bill has already been paid in advance."

The meeting really was a glorified dinner party, they did not discuss much other than the production was grateful for the town's businesses allowing them to use their facilities on such short notice, while the mayor and the business owners involved expressed their gratitude for being chosen for such an honor, as well as receiving the added business.

Drinks were served along with an excellent meal, and conversations flowed and ebbed around the table with a lot of good cheer. Since Adam had skipped lunch, he ate his fill.

After dessert had been served, Adam leaned close and murmured in Victoria's ear, "I hope this wraps soon."

"Me too. I need my beauty sleep or I shall be a growly bitch tomorrow."

Adam smirked, "No, you won't. I might be." He yawned. "And we have an early start again."

"Ugh. Wake me when it's over."

"Roll on after dinner drinks," he murmured and savored his dessert, which was some fancy puff pastry that looked like a slice of pizza, only it was topped with a rich apple and berry pie filling, whipped cream, and slices of cheese, apple, grapes and a variety of berries. Adam was not much for desserts but this one he delighted in. "Mmnn damn, that's good."

"Careful," Victoria teased. "You'll spoil your girlish figure."

"Lucky I know a great way to burn these added calories off."

"You would." Victoria took a bite of her dessert and hummed her own delight.

"Ahhh, who has to worry about their figure now," teased Adam.

"Oh, sinful and decadent, totally evil, and absolutely horrible; I wouldn't eat yours if I were you. Here, allow me, so we don't offend our hosts."

"Back off. It's mine," he made a teasing little growling sound deep in his throat. "All mine."

"Would you two care for another piece?" the mayor asked, amused at their play.

"Hell, yeah," Adam said. "But I hadn't better. Wardrobe will have to adjust my costumes come morning."

"Mine too," Victoria sighed, relishing the last bite from her spoon with a little moan of pleasure, oblivious to all the men around the table that were paying avid attention to her and her sensual tongue as she licked a wayward dab of cream from her lip. "Mmnnn."

"Nonsense" murmured the mayor, ordering more.

"Oh no, I couldn't possibly," protested Victoria.

Adam intervened smoothly, suggesting, "We'll take a piece to go." He had great plans for that... and they would share it, and damned, if he was going to wait another minute to make love to her after that. She might be unaware of it, but he knew she had aroused more than just his beast around the

table. For her ears only, he murmured behind his napkin, "I'll eat my share off of your belly, baby."

By the time they got back to their suite however, they were too stuffed and too tired to play. The boxed desserts got placed in the fridge and by the time they had removed their makeup and showered, they fell into bed, cuddled, and fell straight asleep.

“Jesus Christ, do I have to get that other bimbo back?” Jim snapped on Thursday morning. “It’s just a kiss, for Christ’s sakes.”

The blush that lit Victoria’s cheeks was part embarrassment and the rest was a good deal of rage. She was holding back, nervous, aware that all eyes were on them.

“Relax,” Adam told her softly. “You can do this. Forget about them. It’s just you and me now. Just look into my eyes and say it like you mean it, all right?”

She gave a small nod. They’d gotten the rest of the scene done fairly quickly, it was just this kissing thing. His character, Alex, had rescued her character, Gwendolyn, when their plane had been shot down by enemy fire. They had jumped from the severely damaged plane after Alex had fought her husband for possession of the parachutes, and her parachute had caught in the branches of a tree. She had trusted him implicitly when they’d been dangling up in the damn tree on a couple of harnesses. He had cut her loose and then had climbed down the tree with her clinging to his back until they’d reached the lowest branch, then he’d set her

aside, leapt down, and caught her in his arms when she'd dropped the last few feet.

They reset the scene under the tree. Adam stood with his arms tightly about Victoria, holding her close, for Alex had just caught Gwendolyn and set her on her feet; now he was reassuring her and himself that they were both still alive and in one piece.

The scene was announced. "Take seven."

"Quiet on the set please. Rolling."

"And action," Jim said.

"We're okay. We're okay." Adam cradled Victoria's head to his shoulder, pressed a kiss to her hair.

She pulled back and looked up at him, her face a study in torment as she flinched in response to imaginary explosions off in the distance, munitions from the aircraft going off. "He would have left me to die," she cried softly, clearly both shocked and incredibly hurt by such a betrayal. "And thought nothing of it, Alex."

"Forget him. He's gone. We're alive, Gwendolyn. We survived."

She touched his bruised and cut face, which was quite a picture now that Jenna had redone his makeup. Blood coated her fingers, but her gaze was locked on his, seeing him perhaps for the first time. "You're always the stalwart friend and silent savior, Alex. Do you feel nothing else for me?"

"You know that I do."

"Then show me." She kissed him then, laid a right scorcher on him, and he kissed her back, passion exploding at last between them, hungry and primal. They had survived a harrowingly close call with death and the celebration of life was called for.

When Jim called "Cut!" it was all Adam could do to stop and pull back. Victoria seemed dazed as he broke the kiss and set her back a pace. "I think we got it," he confided quietly as cheers and whistles went up for the hot passionate clinch.

She blinked and took a breath.

"Okay?" he asked.

"Yes. Thank you. What's next?"

He grinned. "You're getting into this acting thing."

"It has its merits."

"Yeah. Jim, I think we need to reshoot that scene," he said, walking off to discuss it with the director.

"The hell we do. You can kiss her more on your own time. It was great. We're moving on to the trek through the trees and finding the wreckage; making sure everyone is dead."

"Oh come on. I don't think you got my pretty side." Adam posed rather hilariously, hands on hips, head reared back, a big fake happy grin on his face that was more comical grimace, while he looked wide-eyed with both self-confidence and hesitancy at Jim. Everyone laughed at his antics.

"Please," Jim snorted, appreciating the comic relief. "If I thought for one second that you were serious, I'd have to give you a bloody nose."

"Ostensibly to go with my bloody cheek," Adam deadpanned, making Jim and a few others groan long and loud. He grinned, having successfully taken the attention off of Victoria, so that she could regain her composure after such a scene. Sometimes it was difficult to pull back from the moment and regain your equilibrium. Being new to acting, he was sure she felt a little disorientated and was somewhat glad himself that the love scene, which should have been shot that evening, had been deferred until tomorrow. It would give them both a little time to rehearse and get comfortable with being so intimately close with one another in a not so private setting.

"That was horrible," she laughed as she joined him.

"What? You don't think I'm pretty?"

"Yeah, pretty awful with your puns and double entendres," she snickered.

"Oh." He pouted, far too prettily.

"Thank you, though."

"Ah. You're welcome. Takes a bit of getting used to, doesn't it?"

"Yes. Tomorrow is going to be, um, very difficult for me."

"It'll be hard for me too." He said it quietly, seriously, and yet he saw the start of a little smirk on her face at what he'd said. "Um, yeah, okay. Unintentional. Honest."

"Right."

"But now that you mention it..." He slanted her a saucy look. "It will be hard, in more ways than one."

She shook her head. "Awful. Shameless. Beneath contempt."

"Oh come on. It wasn't that bad."

"Don't make me bite you."

He laughed at that and draped an arm around her shoulders. "We'll do all right, baby. We'll do all right."

They filmed until nine o'clock that night, scavenging what they could from the wreckage for those nighttime scenes while the temperature dropped. They were both tired and cold by the time Jim finally released everyone for the night. Weary from the long day, they returned to the hotel to find a meal awaiting them in their bedroom.

"I didn't realize how exhausting acting was," Victoria yawned, picking at her food. She wasn't all that hungry and really just wanted to take a shower, then curl up in bed and go to sleep.

"Yeah, it can be long hours, especially when you have hiccups like on Tuesday."

"That wasn't a hiccup. That was a vicious assault," Victoria pointed out. "Why do I still smell her?"

"Because she's been in here, poking about, and left her scent on things," he supposed. Although he said it lightly, the possibility that Gloriana was still hanging around and invading his privacy startled him. He met Victoria's worried gaze and tried to come up with another answer. "Probably trapped in the vents until now?" he suggested. They had

both been a little cold when they'd finally been allowed to leave the set, and had turned on the heating just to take the chill off the room and get comfortable once more. That might have explained it, even though Gloriana's scent was still rather strong. Had she been in here again? "I hope Terry didn't give her a keycard."

Victoria tensed at the thought. "You'd better check."

"Yeah." Leaving his meal, he knocked on the connecting door and waited for Terry to open it. The bodyguard was half asleep. "What's up, Boss?" he yawned.

"You didn't give Gloriana the room key, did you?"

Terry's eyes went wide. "No! Hell no. No, I just let her in and let her cool her heels. Why? What's going on?"

"Nothing. Just making sure. A woman scorned and all that."

"Yeah. She's a vindictive one, Boss. You sure everything is all right?"

"I think so. Just wanted to be sure, you know? Good night then. Sorry to have disturbed you."

"No prob. Night."

Terry closed the door again and Adam returned to his meal, although he wasn't feeling all that hungry either. "Some scents just linger, I guess," Adam sighed. The persistence troubled him though. It seemed too strong here in his bedroom. Of course, it was an enclosed space and he knew more than most did that some scents lingered longer than others. That did not stop him a while later when he checked the closets, looking allegedly for a favorite pair of jeans. No. She wasn't there and that made him feel a little foolish for checking, although he'd sleep better knowing that there were no red-clawed monsters in the closet.

"You know what I think?" he said, refilling their glasses with more wine as he resumed his seat at the table.

"No. I don't. What?"

"I think we need to rehearse for tomorrow."

"Oh." She flushed, knowing exactly what scene he meant.

"It would take some of the awkwardness out of it, don't you think?" He sipped his wine, trying to look innocent.

"I don't know. Maybe not knowing what to expect is a blessing for me."

"You do know that the set will be cleared of all non-essential crew, right?"

"Good."

"Just do what you did today. Just focus on us. Forget about the rest."

"Isn't that inherently dangerous?" she asked.

"Yes. Trust me, Victoria. I won't let things get out of hand."

"A paragon of virtue and self-restraint?" she teased.

"If I wasn't, I would have made love to you already, multiple times," he reminded her, his eyes blazing with lust, reminding her of every intimate moment they had shared since Monday night and just how restrained he had been.

"What if I'm not?"

"What?"

"Not a paragon of virtue and self-restraint?"

Adam grinned. "I'll take my chances."

"Oh, you brave and foolish man."

"Yeah, well, read up on your lines. I'll take care of this." He put their unfinished meals on the trolley they had arrived on, swept away cups and condiments, everything but the wine, while Victoria read over the scene and sipped at her wine, far too quietly. He set the trolley outside the room and closed the door again.

"Okay. Let's see here. Alex and Gwendolyn are getting away from the crash site. They have words and Alex angrily grabs the annoying but beautiful Gwennie, pins her to a tree and does his caveman thing," Adam chuckles.

"Yeah, that about sums it up, ham and all," she agreed.

"Well, it's our job to de-ham it some. We want the romance and the passion, and a hint of the caveman tactics, but not so over the top that we see woolly mammoths. So, let's play that down and use more eye contact and body language. Come here." He set his script aside and held out a hand to her. She joined him near the wall that was going to serve as a tree in the forest. "Alex is worried. He wants to lighten your load. You want to carry your share. Stubborn that way, aren't you?"

"Not always."

"In this case, Gwendolyn, you are. So I say to you, 'Let me take that,' and I reach for the heavy pack you're carrying."

"I've got it," she snapped at him, female pride roaring; she will not be seen as a weak and feeble woman.

"You're exhausted."

"I said, I've got it!"

"Fine. Then we'll stop and rest for a minute."

"I don't need..."

"Well I do!"

In the scene, an angry Alex grabbed her, dumped her pack and pushed her back against a tree, shedding his own pack in the process. Improvising, Adam shoved her back against the wall and before she could yell, he kissed her, hard, until she submitted and responded, then he pulled back enough to speak.

"Damn, you could make me forget myself," he said. "Okay. Focus here. Alex is going to haul up your skirt and rip your panties off. Don't fight me on this. Then we'll do a little strategic body placement, use your leg to block the camera's view; Alex is going nail you to that tree, baby." He grinned. "You ready for that?"

"How are you going to lose the caveman out of that?"

"Passion. She needs it as much as he does. It's that survival instinct: a near death experience and one must procreate. It really wouldn't matter if they loved each other or not at this point. It's a biological requirement. But they do love each other and almost getting killed in a plane crash drives the need for them to consummate it. So, where were we?" he said, grabbing a handful of her skirt and lunging right back into the kiss, fierce and passionate. While he yanked off her panties, she tugged at his belt and unfastened his pants, reaching inside. They both moaned as she caressed him and he hauled her right thigh upward, around his hip as he pressed her up against the imaginary tree, preparing to thrust into her.

He'd forgotten something. They were playing with fire here. There was no protective barrier between them, as there would be tomorrow on the set. He was glad there wasn't and was very tempted to follow through; he was after all right there, poised at her entrance, wanting desperately to push inside her, but she froze at the feel of him there and tore her lips from his.

"No!"

One little word and he had to douse his ardor. In that moment, he hated that word. "Oh damn..." He dropped her like a hot rock and backed away so rapidly that the backs of his legs connected unexpectedly with the bed several feet away. He sat heavily and flopped back on the bed, breathing hard, his erection still proudly at full attention. "Fuck," he whispered. "I'm sorry." Then he confessed the truth, "No, no, I'm not. I want you. I can't help it. I didn't mean for that to happen but damn, I want it to." For a full minute he struggled with the decision to not pursue her. Of course, he could not seem to help himself. "Come to me," he added, using the tone of command that he'd used on the jet. He needed her. She needed him. It was time to stop playing games and get down to business. "Make love with me."

She took a step toward him, mesmerized by his commanding voice, giving him a momentary hope, then, as if she had come to her senses, she drew back. "No," she whispered. "And don't do that. You know we can't."

Surprised and disappointed that she could resist him when he was really trying to command her now, while on the jet he had hardly used any effort at all and she had obeyed him then, at least initially, he growled at her and tried even harder. "Victoria, come here. I want you. Now."

Victoria gave a low pining sound. She wanted to obey him. At least, her body did, but her mind was resisting and the effort made her sweat and tremble. "Please. Don't do this to me. I can't mate with you, Adam."

"I don't want to mate with you, damn it, just make love with you."

"I can't! Don't make me! Please... You don't understand... I can't."

He could smell her fear then and guilt assailed him. He tried to reassure her. "We could. I told you. We don't have to mate."

"It's too risky, Adam. We could easily slip into it and not realize it until it's too late."

"No. Trust me. I wouldn't let it go that far."

"We can't risk it. It's too close to full moon."

She had a point. Then, so did he. Of course, he couldn't put his away just yet, not without breaking something. Damn.

"Don't be such a little chicken. I command you to come to me. Take off your clothes and give yourself to me," he tried again.

"No! Stop it!"

"Victoria..."

"No! If I submit to you right now, I will want to mate. Don't you understand the risk you are taking?" she snarled at him. "What if I can't pull back? What if I can't ignore that instinct? We'd both be trapped, Adam."

That should have doused his desire completely. Unfortunately for him it did not. "No, we won't be. I can stop it before we go that far. Trust me. Please."

"For both our sakes, Adam, I can't take that risk."

"Have mercy," he whispered, seeing it was hopeless. She was strong enough to resist him. She would make a fine mate. The thought startled him and finally took the edge off of the urgency in his loins. He was not going to force her. As much as he wanted her, he knew he would irreparably break something in her if he truly forced her to submit to him. It was a humiliating blow to his ego to discover that the one woman he wanted above all others wanted nothing to do with him. "A shower," he muttered, conceding defeat. "I need a cold shower. That's it." He sat up slowly and kicked off his shoes, intent on that goal now, for it seemed the best course. How would he be able to sleep beside her now? He wouldn't. Once she was asleep, he would slip away and run until he was exhausted and the urge had passed.

He looked up, startled to find her standing directly in front of him. "What? I'm going. I just..."

She looked enraged as she stood there before him and dropped her skirt to the floor. He shut his mouth, surprised. Her grubby torn blouse, all part of her costume, went the way of the skirt and she had, he noted, already kicked off her shoes. He stared at the industrial period bra, with its fierce cotton containment and thought it had better shielding than any nuclear power plant he'd ever seen. She unhooked it and dropped the evil undergarment on the floor. That left her standing in nothing but a black garter belt and black silk stockings.

"Oh God," he murmured. No male could fight against that sight, human or werewolf.

Her hands on his shoulders, defiantly pushing him back on the bed, made him hold his tongue then, and gladly, he went, assuring himself that he was not in fact being submissive but luring her to couple with him – his command for her to do so was finally having the desired effect. She was obeying him. He watched in awe as she climbed up above him, standing there on the bed, straddling his hips. She looked gloriously angry, as if she didn't want to be doing that, yet she couldn't seem to help herself. His fingers found her stocking-clad ankles and caressed gently, a silent reassurance and a subtle plea for her to continue.

With deliberate intent, she slowly lowered herself over him, her thighs spread wide, and all he could do was stare in wonder. Perfection and magnificence all in one, that's what she was. And she was ready for him at last.

She took him in hand and guided him to her heated core, putting him back where he knew he belonged. When she paused there, the tip of him nestled against her moist heat, he groaned and gently pushed upward, a wordless plea for completion.

Not yet.

She hadn't spoken it aloud but he understood the need for the pause. He wanted to watch, wanted to see her take him deep inside her, and yet he felt the demand she made silently of him.

Look at me.

He lifted his gaze to her eyes, locked there, became lost there, in an endless moment when untold lifetimes coalesced between them. He wanted to say something meaningful, something so decadent and erotic that she would never forget it, but all that tiptoed across his tongue was a simple, "Yes." His fingers stroked slowly up her stocking-clad legs, along her inner thighs, to her hips, and while he wanted to urge her down onto him, he did not. He simply held her there, waiting, his thumbs tenderly caressing her hip bones, and he held his breath as he waited. She could still pull away. It would kill him if she did.

With agonizing slowness, she sank down on him, taking him inside; he couldn't help it, he had to watch as she swallowed him with her sweet hungry body. She stopped

just shy of taking him all. Oh no, she toyed with him, lifting herself up, up, up, until she nearly freed him, revealing him slicked with her glistening wet glory, then down again, so slowly, he thought he would surely go mad with it. He growled softly, wanting her hard and fast, his body desperate to clinch hers and take what he wanted. This was her show, however, and to take control would be akin to destroying the fragile trust between them. So he endured the sweet agony, forcing himself to remain still, using every bit of self-restraint he had. She was in control. It startled him to realize that he had given her such power over him and yet she needed that trust from him as he needed her trust in this as well as other matters.

"Adam," she whispered, pausing at the zenith of her stroke.

His gaze locked on hers once more, waiting, wanting, and needing her so desperately. Dear God, she was going to make him suffer an eternity here. And deep inside, under the desperation of need, he felt the beast stir within. It rose from its cozy den, scenting the possibilities, hearing the siren call, alert and ready to pounce. He felt the shift stir through his body, a warning hum in his veins as it tried to gather the energy for transformation. The heaving ripples of his flesh, a change in his body temperature, and a slew of goose-bumps, all the heralds of warping bone and sprouting fur.

"No," he gasped, hearing the growl start deep in his throat.

Poised there above him, Victoria called his name again, an instant command. He stared at her, fighting the nature of his own beast, leveling willpower against biological need. And then she let gravity take her, engulfing him in a hard deep stroke that signaled a change in her own need and momentum. She settled her weight upon him for the first time, then leaned forward and gripped his flexing shoulders, as if she could hold them to their human form by the strength of her own will. His grip tightened on her hips, fingers itching to turn into claws, and he arched up under her, hearing her little whimper of delight at his fierce response, and yet there in her eyes, he saw the fear lurking, the fear of what he was, of what he would become, and of what he would be in between.

Transition — half man, half wolf, this was where the werewolf stories came from, the transition between the two. Some could not master the full transformation and that was rightfully to be feared. Not one, nor the other, a place of madness and pain, and confusion.

Adam was lucky in that he never got stuck in mid-transition, his had always been smooth, flawless and almost instant affairs, but even so, he could not let the beast win right now. It was dangerous, that beast. Fighting it was fraught with its own perils and he knew by doing so, he was risking a protracted residence in that dreaded mid-state.

He strained and fought against it, trying to maintain his focus on his lover. She had closed her eyes. Afraid to look? Probably. He was afraid to see himself thus. He bit back the growl and urged her to ride him, focusing on the sweet clutch of her body, trying to maintain human vocal chords. "Yes, baby. Take it." Focusing, human lips suckling the tight buds of her nipples, human hands caressing her silken flesh, allowing the reciprocating thrust of his body to torment her instead of resisting, for he was fighting a greater battle to remain in human form, and thank God he was winning. He felt the beast subside, hunker down in his dark den, waiting, waiting, soon... but not yet. Soon. Full moon. Run. Free. Soon, but not yet.

"Victoria..."

"Adam!" she gasped, head thrown back, reveling in the sensations that were rioting through her body and he could feel her gathering, quickening inside, starting to come.

"Victoria..." A soft command.

She looked down at him then, her amber eyes luminous with lust, and she saw him, only him, not the beast she had felt and sensed rising from his bones. With a startled little whimper, a small curtailed howl of joy, she came hard, clutching him in wave after shuddering wave of hot liquid sensation. He pulled her down to him and rolled her under him on the bed, driving into her, his head thrown back. Her body arched upward as she drew him closer. Her gasp was both pure pleasure and surprise, a welcome and greedy sound that drove him onward as she wrapped her legs around him and pulled him deeper, and he sought her mouth

again to stop both of them howling out their union as their bodies strove together to become one.

It was magical, perfect, the best. Why the hell hadn't he found her sooner?

Just when he thought it could go on forever, she seized him harder, crying out, her body stiffening, going over the edge again and this time taking him with her. He stifled his own cry in the depths of her sweetly moaning mouth and kissed her long after they had fallen quiet.

He gentled the kiss and slowly drew back. Would she hate him now? Would she loathe what he was, even though she was of his kind? She lay there, her eyes closed, hiding the truth from him. She might be of his kind, but she was unfamiliar with them and their ways; she feared mating and he wondered why. He dreaded it himself but for different reasons, purely selfish ones.

"Victoria," he whispered. "Please. Look at me."

Her eyes slowly dawned open and to his relief, it was not hate that shone there but desire, and dare he hope, love? She smiled at him, a tender lover's smile, her fingers lovingly stroking his ragged torn cheek. It felt better and he knew it had healed some already from his partial transformation. It still stung and was raw, but it was not an open wound any more. Jenna would likely remark upon that and he would have to make some witty comment to distract her, no doubt. Putting the random thought out of his mind, he turned his head enough to press a kiss into Victoria's palm.

"You changed," she whispered.

"I'm sorry." He met her gaze again, his own dark with regret. "I didn't mean to scare you like that. It snuck up on me. It won't happen again."

"Sshhh, don't. I trusted you to maintain control."

She shouldn't have, he thought, although he didn't say it. "I'm glad," he said simply and kissed her again. He didn't want her thinking on that too long. "I just hope we don't get carried away like that on the set tomorrow," he sighed, rolling them onto their sides so they lay facing one another.

"We won't."

"Speak for yourself. I might. You tempt the beast in me," he teased, kissing the tip of her nose.

"I noticed."

"I'm sorry," he repeated very softly, cuddling her closer.

"It's okay."

No, it wasn't. That had never happened to him before. Losing control like that. It was more than just the approaching full moon, he thought. It was her. Having one of his own kind so close. She was awakening something inside him. Something he had denied for too long already. "I am looking forward to running wild and free with you this weekend."

"Mmmm, sounds like heaven."

"I thought so too, at least until tonight and being in your arms. Now that is heaven."

"Ah, the big bad wolf and all of his flattery, crafty and sly, you are. Talked your way into Little Red's grandma's. Shame on you."

He laughed softly at that. "You're confusing me with my Uncle Warrick."

"Oh, my mistake. You're far too young and innocent, is that it?"

"No, see. They got the story all wrong. The wolf didn't eat Grandma. Grandma *was* a werewolf and she got caught by Little Red, so she made up this story about eating Red's grandma. And then she had to turn Red too, you see, to keep the secret."

"Ah. I always wondered about that story. Makes sense now. Okay, so what about the Three Little Pigs?"

"You like bedtime stories, don't you?"

"I love them. If you're a good boy and tell me about the Three Little Pigs, the real scoop that is, I'll give you an even better bedtime story."

"Really?"

"Promise."

"Okay. The Three Little Pigs were really farmers who were hunting a particular werewolf, you see? The houses were all traps meant to kill the wolf. But the wolf was clever and saw through all the traps, even the boiling pot... And she bit all three farmers, turning them into werewolves themselves, so the farmers lied and said they had killed the big bad wolf. Meanwhile, the lusty wolf took all three farmers as her lovers, and they lived happily ever after."

"Mnnn she was a lusty and crafty wolf indeed. Your mother, perhaps?"

"Aunt Vivian."

"Ah."

"About that bedtime story..."

"There once was a lusty she wolf called Rapunzel..."

In the middle of the night, Adam awoke and found her snuggled against him, her silky back against his front, his nose buried in her hair, inhaling her lush sexy scent. A feeling of peace and great tenderness ran through him and he couldn't seem to help himself as he nuzzled that tender spot where her neck and shoulder came together. She stirred and backed against him, igniting his senses. Want and need burned through him, tempered by the tenderness.

It was enough to make him still and just hold her, giving him pause for thought. She settled again and drifted back to sleep while he held her, as those strange new feelings seeped deeper into his being. It took him some time to come to terms with what he was feeling, and when he had resolved it in his own mind, he burrowed gently between her thighs and found her sweet wet core. Like a thief, he gently stole those first moments while she still slept, sliding into her, then holding still, waiting, holding back, tormenting himself with the feel of her surrounding him, holding him in her warmth until it seeped into her awareness that he was there. The first little clutch was sweet, tentative, made while she still slept. Then

she stretched and pushed back against him, an invitation he could not resist.

With a soft growl, he moved over her, pressing her into the bed as he tenderly ground himself into her heat. Opening her legs, she angled her hips upward to give him better access while she sighed her pleasure into her pillow. He slipped a hand under her, his fingers finding and teasing her moist folds and the little pleasure center hidden therein. She gasped his name, muffling her release in the pillow as he drove into her, harder and deeper, his mouth clamping on her shoulder, moving to the sweet curve he loved best where it joined the elegant column of her neck. The urge to mark her gripped him, evidenced by the sharpening of his canine teeth. Unable to resist, he bit into her there hard enough to draw blood. It intensified her orgasm, making her bite her pillow in order to stifle the howl she wanted to let loose. Both triggered his own orgasm and he bit back his own howl as he filled her.

And after, as he lay there still buried in her, he licked the small wound that he'd made, and he rubbed his scent into it, marking her as his own. She didn't protest and he knew she did not fully realize the significance of it. She had not been raised amongst their kind. She did not truly know what he had just done.

She whimpered when he shifted his weight off her, wanting him to stay there, buried in her. Keeping her locked to him, he turned them on their sides and held her, then he tenderly kissed the small wound he had made on her. While he was filled with a sense of guilt for having done it, he could not regret it as she drifted back to sleep, blissfully unaware of her new status. He prayed she would forgive him when she found out.

They were in the middle of shooting the first love scene when Adam suddenly stiffened, having caught a whiff of Gloriana's hostile scent. Victoria must have caught it too, for she froze as he pinned her against the tree, in the process of tearing off her panties for the fourth take that morning. Her hands were on his pants, stilled in the act of unfastening them, and he'd just pulled her thigh up toward his hip. He was supposed to kiss her mouth then.

Some sixth sense made him go for her exposed shoulder. He lunged for it as if he meant to tear her collar bone out.

She gasped, hearing the soft rushed sound of something traveling at speed through the air, and the impact it made in taut flesh as she felt Adam flinch. He pulled back to stare at her, looking instantly pale and shocked. "Get me out of here," he whispered. "Gavin..."

Victoria saw it then, the small dart in his neck and knew he felt it already, the poison flooding through his system, shutting him down. A dart that had been meant for her throat, she knew. Gloriana's scent was on it.

"Cut!" Jim yelled. "What's going..."

Adam lurched off into the brush and she heard him collapse out of sight, heard his quiet growl and a whimper as Jim demanded what the hell was going on. "Get Gavin!" she shouted. "And stay back. All of you. Stay back!"

Victoria found Adam lying several feet away, his body twisting and writhing on the ground as he tried to transform into the wolf. His bones popped and morphed, his flesh rippled, fur began to sprout as his body flexed and writhed for several agonizing moments, phasing between human and the initial stages of werewolf, and back again, which strained at his clothing but did not tear it. Then his efforts lapsed and he settled back to human form, his body stilling, leaving his eyes wide open and staring.

"Adam," Victoria whispered, dropping to his side. Taking his hand in hers, she found him cold and clammy with sweat. Terrified, she put herself into his view and told him, "Gavin's coming. Hold on, Adam. Please."

At a luncheon in Los Angeles, Meredith Gentry gasped and held out a hand as she felt her son slipping away. Her brother Warrick caught her as her knees gave way and he gently guided her to a chair, ordering an attendant to have the car brought immediately...

In the darkness of her vault not so very far from that luncheon, Astarté's eyes snapped open and she sucked in a shocked breath as she felt Victoria's terror. "Adam..." There was nothing she could do despite her full awareness of what had happened...

Halfway around the world, Ransom Gentry suffered the double blow of both his son's and his mate's plight. He dropped his cocktail as his knees buckled and his howl of pain startled the other people at the evening's cocktail party, including his own pack members. "Adam!" he gasped, seeing for just a second the image of the trees that towered over his son as he writhed in agony on the forest floor and even though he saw the face of the beauty that rushed to his aid, he knew with dreadful certitude that there was nothing she could do to help his son...

In a distant dark and dank cavern, a chained wolf lifted his head and pined long and low, before he broke into a mournful howl. In the distance, two other howls joined his briefly before they were brutally culled into yelps of pain that tapered off into whimpers, then the dreaded silence.

He had no need to see with his own eyes what had happened.

The quiet rush of evil wind was the most dreaded of all, for it heralded the arrival of punishment as it blew into his muzzle and ruffled his fur. He snarled into the dark a second before his master's blow struck him. Dazed from the vicious blow that caused blood to spill from his mouth, he whined and cowered, rolling onto his back, his paws in the air in both submission and self-defense. His enraged master buried a brutal boot in his side, breaking his ribs, making him yelp and whimper loudly for a moment.

"Be silent or they will pay the price!"

The wolf rolled away and buried his face in his paws, shuddering, yet silent now, despite the knowledge that his brother had lived and now lay dying. It was a hollow victory. Adam had escaped this fate, at least.

“What the hell?” Jim had ignored her advice about staying back. “What’s wrong with him?”

“Look.” Victoria pointed out the dart in his neck, relieved that Adam had stopped morphing but terrified now that he would die from the poison that had invaded his body.

“Oh my God, is he dead?” Jim whispered.

“Not yet. He needs help though. We have to be discreet about this. She’s still here somewhere.”

“She? Gloriana, of course; her break out role was a young white girl raised by a lost tribe — she knows all about poisons and blow darts. Dear God, the rumor that she wears a vial of it around her neck must be true. I have seen it but never for one second thought that she kept real poison in it,” Jim said. “Gavin is on his way up. We can airlift Adam out to the hospital.”

“We’ll need an expert on toxins.”

“I know. We’ll get the best. I’ll shut the production down and notify the police, account for everyone and have security keep an eye out for her. Victoria, that dart was meant for you, wasn’t it?”

"I think so. Yes."

"That means you're not safe here. We need to get you out of here, right now."

"I'll be leaving with Adam."

Jim nodded, understanding and agreeing, "Of course."

"I'm coming in," called Gavin. Moments later he appeared and stared at his boss in shock. Adam was just lying there, unable to move or speak, staring upwards and likely seeing nothing. "What the hell happened?" Gavin demanded angrily.

"Blow dart. Some kind of neurotoxin I think," Victoria told him, reaching for it, intending to pluck it out.

"Don't touch it!" Gavin snapped. "You haven't, have you?"

"No."

"Good. Don't." He yelled over his shoulder, "Someone get me a baggie right now! He's still breathing on his own?"

"Yes. Slowly but yes he's still breathing. Gavin, we have to get him out of here," Victoria insisted.

"Don't move him yet."

The gaffer arrived with a clear plastic Ziploc® bag and stood holding it out as he stared down at Adam. "What the hell happened?"

"Not a word," Gavin warned him as he took the bag, opened it, and using a neatly folded handkerchief from his pocket, he plucked the dart from Adam's neck, wrapped it very carefully in the handkerchief and packed it with care into the bag. His cell phone rang then and he turned away to take the call after a glance at the screen. "Gavin. Yes, a big problem. A blow dart to the neck. It's bad. We need an expert on neurotoxins and an airlift, asap. He's barely hanging in there."

"Best do up his pants," Jim advised Victoria gently.

"Yes." Victoria did so, then she waited, holding Adam's hand, afraid of what was going to happen. Could he process the toxins and recover? Was there an antidote? What would happen, come full moon, if he was still like this, she wondered? Would he transform and be okay? Or would he be unable to? She didn't know the answers to those questions any more than she knew the answer to why he had put himself in the path of the dart meant for her throat.

Gavin returned. "Okay. I'm going to move him to base camp and then we'll get him airlifted out."

"Gavin, I'm going with him."

"I know." Gavin picked Adam up as if he weighed no more than a child and carried him down to the car while the crew gaped after them, wondering what had happened to Adam. Victoria was hot on his heels. She was not letting Adam out of her sight.

In the car, Victoria cradled Adam against her while they drove down to base camp. Gavin said carefully, "He probably won't want to go to the hospital."

"No. He said something about a cabin."

"I've spoken to his family. That's what they said too. They'll send someone to attend to him."

"Good. I'm still going with him."

"I know that. How much do you know?"

"Enough."

"Are you sure? You could be getting yourself into some dangerous territory."

She took a risk, meeting Gavin's gaze in the rearview mirror. "Gavin, I'm like him."

"I wondered. The way he took to you so quickly. It's not like him. I mean he's friendly with everyone but taking someone into his immediate circle like he did with you, that's unheard of. Usually a person has to earn his trust."

"You know then what he is?"

"Yes. Although he's taken pains to hide it from me, I know. It's been a case of having to sometimes, to protect him. We don't ever speak of it, but I know when it's getting close and can make sure to get him away from wherever he is before it hits him. That's why he can't go to the hospital. If he changed there..."

"I know. I was thinking the same thing."

The helicopter swooped in as they arrived at the base camp, obviously on standby for such emergency extractions.

Gavin lifted Adam from her arms and turned to the helicopter as a large man climbed down from the aircraft and moved to take Adam from him. Gavin shook his head and carried Adam aboard himself. Victoria followed and was brought up short by the big man who gave her a slow and thorough looking over. He leaned down, putting his

face below hers, looking up into her eyes as he sniffed at her. Smelling Adam on her, he recognized that she was his lover and prospective mate. He greeted her with wary respect, knowing that she could take a bite of him if she wanted, even as he bumped his nose against hers.

"I am Rolf," he said.

"Let me pass, Rolf," she ordered, and he ducked his head, stepped back and offered her his hand to assist her up into the helicopter. She took it and boarded quickly, sitting beside Adam and cradling him in her arms once more.

Rolf closed the door and gently stroked his fingers through Adam's hair, then leant close and nuzzled just behind his ear, giving a low pining sound, before he turned away and took his own seat. Victoria recognized it as both a greeting and an affectionate expression, a concerned subordinate pack member perhaps trying to let Adam know that he was not alone.

Gavin and Rolf shared a long challenging look, Victoria noticed. Gavin knew better than to let his gaze slip away submissively. It was Rolf who looked away first. That surprised Victoria although she did not comment on it, and returned her attention to Adam.

When they landed at the cabin, Gavin carried Adam into his bedroom and together, he and Victoria removed his clothes and got him settled as comfortably as they could in his bed.

"His mother and uncle are already en route with a doctor who is an expert on toxins," Rolf told them.

"Good," Victoria replied, finding herself tenderly nuzzling Adam's jaw and ear as she stroked his hair. "Did you hear that, Adam? Your mother and uncle are coming. They'll be here soon. Please hold on and come back to me." All Victoria could do was wait at Adam's side and talk to him while she held his hand. He gave no indication that he heard her or saw her.

Gavin quietly herded Rolf out of the room, leaving her alone with Adam until they heard a second helicopter coming in an hour or so later, and Gavin reappeared in the bedroom doorway. "They're here," he said. "I'm going to hand over the dart and then I'll be at the cabin down the road, about a mile. You can reach me on my cell if you need anything."

"Thanks."

He left to greet Adam's mother and hand over the dart.

Victoria waited with Adam and it was Rolf who returned to introduce her to the beautiful woman who was Adam's mother. Meredith Gentry had dark sable hair and the same dark brown eyes as Adam. She had not come alone. A whole entourage of guards and attendants had arrived with her.

She paced the bedroom with quiet dignity while the doctor examined Adam and the other members of the group waited in the living room, anxious for news. The doctor had the dart and was running an analysis on the toxin via a specialized portable spectrometer that was hooked into a laptop computer. Data was popping up on the screen at a wild rate.

"Well?" Meredith demanded when the doctor moved to the computer to check the results.

"It would have killed a lesser man."

"You mean a human."

"Yes."

"Why? Why would anyone do this to him?" Meredith said, deeply troubled.

"I think the dart was meant for me," Victoria offered.

Meredith stopped in her tracks, her hackles up and her angry gaze nailing Victoria to the spot. "Why?" she demanded.

"His co-star was angry and jealous. She wanted an affair with him, but Adam wasn't interested."

"There is more to it than that. She attacked him. Even though it is not fresh, I still smell his blood."

"Yes. There were a few incidents before this one and she was fired for her misconduct. She was angry with me, because Adam made it clear he wanted me, and then I was chosen to take her place in the production. I think she thought that if she could get rid of me, she could still have Adam."

"If she was aiming at you, how did she end up shooting Adam in the neck?"

"He put himself in its path."

"Why?"

"To protect me."

"You are his lover; I smell him on you. And you on him," Meredith growled with soft accusation.

"Yes."

"Then you will do what is necessary to help him."

It was not a question, Victoria understood. "Yes. I will." Whatever that would entail, she would do it. "He should not have done what he did. It should be me lying there."

"Yes," Meredith agreed. "It should be. But a wolf always protects his mate."

"I'm not his mate."

Meredith hesitated, then assured her, "You will be."

"No. He doesn't want a mate."

"Of course he doesn't. He's run from it, as you no doubt have. That does not change the fact that he's marked you. You can run, but you can not escape that fate now. He will find you." And she did not sound too happy about his choice, Victoria surmised.

Victoria was not too happy to hear the disclosure either. When had he marked her? How? When she had made love to him or when he'd made love to her?

"You'd best get some rest. You will need it," the doctor advised her. "We don't know exactly how the toxin will affect him. And it is full moon rising. Considering that he has marked you, if he is at all able, he will be on the prowl to consummate the Mating Bonds he has already initiated."

"Oh," Victoria mumbled, feeling weak in the knees and trying to suppress the little shiver of delight that clenched between her legs. Traitor, she thought, betrayed by her own lust.

Adam's mother actually smiled at that, as if she'd read Victoria's mind. No, it was her scent, she realized, feeling her cheeks heat. Of course they would smell it.

"It's gratifying to know that my son is such a good lover."

"He is, but that is beside the point. Neither of us wants to mate for life."

"Our kind does, my dear. It cannot be helped. It is in our nature. If you are what he wants, then he shall have you, even if I have to chain you to his bed myself."

"You wouldn't!"

"I would if I had to. I don't think I will, do you? You're dying for full moon and what it will bring."

"No," Victoria lied. But she was. She knew she was. She knew because she was throbbing down there deep inside,

wanting him, needing him, right in there. The wave of need that rushed through her was potent and strong. Full moon, she warned herself. That's what it was, a fierce biological need to procreate, to mate, with her chosen partner.

His mother merely smiled knowingly while the doctor injected Adam with a serum that would hopefully neutralize the toxin in his system. Knowing Adam was in the best of hands, Victoria followed Meredith into the living room, where the others waited.

"How is he?" asked a still handsome older man with silver at the temples of his dark hair. He had the same dark eyes, definitely another member of the family.

"You?" Victoria instantly recognized his voice. He was the man who had hired her.

The man had the grace to look embarrassed. "Yes. I'm afraid so."

"You knew? You set me up!"

"Well, you and Adam both, I'm afraid."

"Warrick, what did you do?" Meredith demanded.

"Meredith, now calm down. I didn't do anything too awful bad. It's just that it's way past time that Adam mates and takes on his proper Pack responsibilities. I merely sought out an acceptable candidate and hired her to prove he was not a werewolf. A candidate he would not be able to resist. That is all. And you," he added, looking Victoria over with a delighted smile, "are no longer without your own kind, my dear."

"He'll kill you when he finds out," Victoria told him, angry that she had been as manipulated as Adam.

"I rather doubt it, dear girl."

"He won't take that betrayal kindly."

"He will thank me for finding you and sending you to him."

"Did you have anything to do with this?" Victoria demanded, indicating Adam's current state.

"Dear God, no, but we shall be hunting for the bitch that did." Warrick said it coldly and a couple of the others agreed with quiet nods and snarls.

"What will you do with her if you find her?"

"Personally, I would like to rip her throat out. However, she will be placed in the custody of the Pack and there will be a tribunal to determine her fate."

"Shouldn't she be turned over to the police?"

"This is a Pack matter. She will be dealt with according to our laws," Meredith decreed.

"She bit Adam and nicked her own lip in the process. Will she turn?" Victoria asked.

"Where did she bite him?" Meredith demanded.

"His lip. During a screen kiss."

"So that is not all makeup?"

"No. The scratches are real too. He decided to use them to add character. It's why she was fired. Will she turn?"

"It's possible. There have not been many cases of a human biting a werewolf. It's the saliva that can infect her, not the blood. If she got enough saliva in her cut, then yes, she will turn. Either way, she must be found and isolated until we are sure."

Adam could smell her, the allure of her sex and her need. It seeped into his being like a drug, chasing out the last remains of the toxin that had incapacitated him. Slowly, he rolled from the bed, naked, and unsteadily made his way to the living room. He stood there, bracing himself in the doorway, watching her as she removed her clothing, waiting for him. He shivered, feeling the change coming. He should fight it, he knew, but he did not have the strength. Did she know that? Did she sense it?

He wanted her. In the most base and intense way, and he needed every bit of his strength for that.

She was his for the taking. He had marked her. That was his guilty little secret. While she had lain sleeping, he hadn't been able to help himself, he had mounted her and marked her, while she had sleepily welcomed him and contentedly, she had drifted back to sleep after, unaware of the deed he had done.

Why had he done it? He hadn't wanted a mate. Not until now.

Why?

She did not want a mate either.

Why?

More importantly, would she ever forgive him once she realized what he had done?

The others had left their clothes neatly folded and hightailed it off into the woods, a pack of wolves on the prowl in the night. Off in the distance, one of them howled, a call that sent shivers down Victoria's spine and she found herself wanting to answer it. Felt the breath quiver in her lungs in anticipation of doing so. It was time, she knew, to prepare herself. To that end, she took off and folded her own garments. They would become ruined if she did not remove them.

Ready or not, her nature had caught up with her.

Aware of his eyes upon her, she turned to see Adam standing in the bedroom doorway, watching her, still unsteady from his close brush with death, still struggling to maintain his humanity even though he did not have the strength to resist the call of the wolf that ran in his genes; he shuddered as his body rippled and flexed, half man, half wolf. He growled at her, a soft sound of want and need. Her knees went weak and she shuddered, feeling the rush in her own veins, and the need clutch deep between her legs.

"What have you done to me?" she whispered.

"Will you forgive me?"

"You marked me."

"Yes. Will you forgive me?"

"Why?"

"I didn't want to lose you."

Another howl off in the distance.

"They hunt," she said.

"Yes. They hunt."

"For Gloriana."

He hesitated at that. "I would have dealt with her, for trying to take my chosen mate from me."

"Would you?"

"Yes. I would have dumped her in rehab. She'd hate me for the rest of her life."

"They will put her before the Pack; a tribunal."

He nodded. "Wise."

"Dangerous, surely?"

"Potentially. Do you forgive me, Victoria?"

She really had no choice. He was to be her mate. It was full moon. He was calling to her, wanting her, needing her. She felt the answering call, a soft rumble in her own throat as her body rippled and flexed, transforming, trying to match him. Why was he not transforming fully?

"Are you stuck?" she asked softly, fearing that state herself.

"No. Just waiting for your answer. I'd as sooner have it while there is a little humanity left in each of us."

"You've given me no choice."

"You have a choice," he said quietly. "If you do not accept me, I will release you. You must choose soon, however."

"You would do that?"

"Yes. If that is what you want."

"But will it not hurt you?"

Abominably, he thought. "That's not the issue. I want you as my mate. Do you accept me or not?"

Half woman, half wolf, she looked at him, understanding that he was not going to answer her on that point. That meant that yes, it would hurt him, and her too, she thought. Trembling badly, she gave him the only answer she could. She turned away and slowly dropped to her knees, presenting herself to him, a female ready to receive her mate.

Unsteadily, he approached and dropped behind her, placing one hand on her hip, the other on her shoulder. She

didn't resist but made a sound of need, a soft whimper. Yet he hesitated, taking the time to lick affectionately up her spine. Instinct drove him to clamp his powerful jaws gently on the back of her neck, holding her there where he'd bitten her before, in case she resisted.

She did not. Would not. Couldn't he smell how much she wanted him just then?

"Hurry, Adam."

He released her flesh then, for he knew that he had no need to hold her to submission. "Are you sure?" he whispered, pressing against her heat as he licked her neck, just there where he'd nipped her and marked her. He loved that location, because he could feel her heart beating with excitement when he touched her there.

"Yes. I choose you. Please."

"This is for life, Victoria."

"I know."

"I need you to forgive me."

"I forgive you. Mate with me, Adam. Mate with me. Hurry. Please hurry." She quivered and shivered, need and desire running riot through her, the wolf taking full possession of her body. She pushed back against him, teasing him, enticing him – she needed to mate and then she needed to hunt. She whimpered for the completion only he could give her.

He paused, allowed himself to fully transition to wolf also, then he gave a soft growl and took what she freely offered, his hackles up from neck to tail, a sure sign of his arousal. Pressing against her, he eagerly worked his way into her until he felt her clamp down upon him, locking him tightly within her and he gave a low rumble of pleasure deep in his throat. She dug her claws into the wooden floorboards and pushed back against him, and when she came, she howled long and hard. His howl joined hers in the night as he came with her, sealing their fate.

Off in the distance, another howl came, an acknowledgement of their new status: two wolves, newly mated, for life. The others all joined in the chorus.

Soon they would join the others on the hunt.

But not yet. They couldn't. Adam was deeply tied into her and it would be some time yet before she would release him. She laid down, taking him with her. He rolled so that he

lay on his side, facing her, and gently licked at her jaw. She gave him a squeeze inside and he sucked in a breath, spilling inside her again. He enjoyed it while it lasted, for it could end any minute or go on for hours. He would not be able to pull out of her until her body released him. It was one prison he was content to stay in, but he wanted to make love to her in human form too.

Of course he could cheat and gain freedom by changing back to human form; she would not be able to keep him trapped inside her if he did that, but he wasn't sure how she would take it if he did. She could take exception and he did not want discontent between them.

She gave a soft pine and squeezed him again. He moved then and rolled on top of her, thrusting gently, spilling in her again. He sighed. She had the upper hand in this form. For well over an hour they remained joined together, snuggling between orgasms.

At last her body relaxed and released him.

He pulled away from her and transformed into his human form. She did the same, asking, "Why did you change?"

"I want you this way too." Kneeling, he pulled her to him and seated her over his thighs, entering her again.

She gasped softly. "Yes."

"I love the way you feel, inside and out, woman and wolf."

"Mmnn, you too," she murmured, gently riding him, seeking his mouth for a kiss. "Oh Adam, I love you so much."

Adam stilled and looked at her, smiled gently as he caressed her face. "I love you too, Victoria. So very much. You are so very precious to me."

"You shouldn't have done what you did."

For one terrible moment he feared that she had not forgiven him for the love bite that he'd marked her with after all. With trepidation, he asked, "What?"

"Her dart was meant for me. You shouldn't have taken it."

The relief that it had nothing to do with his marking her made him giddy for a moment. He let his pent up breath seep slowly out of him before he admitted, "I was just trying to

protect my mate. I wasn't even sure what it was until it hit me. And even if I had known, I still would have done it. You're mine. I need you. I could never stand by and see any harm befall you."

"It scared me. Don't do that again."

"I can't promise you that, baby. You would do the same for me. I know it."

That was true, Victoria realized. It was senseless to argue over it. "It scared me," she said again.

"It scared me too," he whispered, pressing his brow to hers. "I couldn't move. Couldn't speak. I felt for sure I was going to die. I could not even unleash the wolf in me..."

Victoria had seen him struggle to change, to change and try to quell the poison, so she knew that was true. "Oh Adam..." She kissed him tenderly then, knowing how much that last had frightened him. To be locked inside yourself, with no way out and no way to communicate, would be too awful. "I would never have let you go. I would have found a way to reach you."

"I know. You did. I heard you. But as much as I wanted to, I just could not respond. I love you. I love you so very much." He held her tightly against him then and made love to her sweetly, gently, confirming with his body what he'd said with mere words.

Gloriana might have known about toxins and blow darts, but she knew nothing about finding her way out of the forest. When she had realized that she'd hit the wrong target, she had panicked and run off, afraid that she would get caught. As a result of her precipitous flight, she had gotten lost in the forest. As night descended and the moon rose, full and bright, she began to feel very weird. She shivered and trembled, and although she had no trouble seeing where she was going, she had no clue if she were getting any closer to civilization.

And then the wolves had started their infernal howling, a sound that grated along her spine like a rusty saw. Thank goodness they sounded as if they were miles away. She would hate to run into one. She did not like wolves, nor dogs of any kind; horrible smelly, filthy creatures, always slobbering—she shuddered and tripped over a root, then cursed loudly. She was cold and miserable, and worse, she had missed that bitch and killed Adam instead.

An uncharacteristic whimper escaped her. It was followed by a soft low growl that was not hers. It made her freeze in

her tracks and she found herself staring into a pair of yellow eyes that glowed out of the dark at her. Not just one pair she saw as she gathered her breath to scream. A hand roughly clamped over her mouth and yanked her back against a solid naked male form. She struggled and screamed, and tried to bite him, but he held her fast until she exhausted herself and stood weeping and struggling for breath.

"You," the man hissed nastily in her ear, "will remain silent. Do you understand?"

"Please don't hurt me," she whimpered when he released her mouth.

"Silence!" he snapped.

She nodded her head that she would be quiet.

"Good."

The man then turned her, picked her up and threw her over his shoulder. She was jostled like a sack of potatoes as he ran and leapt through the forest, amidst a pack of wolves, while one howled a call, announcing their catch.

An answering call came from the distance and Gloriana knew they were running toward it. Who was this strange naked man and why did he run with wolves? Where was he taking her? And more importantly, what was he going to do with her once they got there? She feared the answers and the terror she felt incapacitated her.

When the man finally stopped running and he dumped her on her rump, she found herself on the wooden floor of a cabin, and for one brief moment, relief swelled in her chest. Then she stared at the naked man's angry face and the menacing faces of a dozen wolves that had crowded into the room, and then pleadingly at the faces of the other people gathered there, until she recognized Victoria. "You!" she spat. "You should be dead!" She lunged for Victoria, ready to rip her hated face to shreds.

The naked man caught her and easily restrained her.

"Let me go!"

"If you cannot behave like a lady, you will not be treated like one."

"You have no right to hold me here!"

"We have every right," Meredith said. She, like the others who were in human form, was once again dressed. All except

Rolf, who had delivered this evil creature to her well-deserved fate. "This tribunal is in session. You tried to kill my son."

"I did not! I tried to kill that bitch!" Gloriana snarled, pointing at Victoria.

"That bitch is my mate," Adam said, moving to stand beside Victoria. Noting his mate's fury and her sudden desire to kill — a purely instinctual response to a threat to her mate, he slid his arm around her shoulders and pressed a kiss to her temple. Victoria relaxed marginally against him. "Easy, baby," he murmured.

"You should be dead," Gloriana whispered, amazed that he was not.

"Very nearly was. I did not like it."

"I had to have missed."

"No. You did not miss."

She shuddered then and felt her body quiver as her skin rippled and a cold sweat gripped her. Terror, she thought. Just terror. Wasn't it? As she stared, her nails changed, growing into claws and coarse hair began to sprout on the backs of her hands. "What have you done to me?"

"You did it to yourself when you bit me."

Gloriana gasped in horror.

"What do you have to say for your actions?" Meredith asked her.

"You're mad. All of you."

"Yes. We are rather angry with you," Meredith admitted, choosing to misinterpret her meaning.

"She has by her own words confessed to the crime. Does anyone here find her not guilty of attempted murder?" Warrick asked.

Not one voice rose to absolve her.

"This is insane!" Gloriana snapped, rounding on Warrick, only to gape in confusion at him as recognition slammed through her. "Warrick?"

"Yes, my dear. It's me. I dare say you are feeling somewhat humbled and afraid? If not, you should be."

"But..."

"You all find this woman guilty?" he asked.

They all answered that they did, even the wolves with little yaps, yips and growls.

"She is found guilty of attempted murder. What sentence do you recommend?"

"Death," said several, and Gloriana's eyes widened with fear.

"Life," added a few more.

"She is unreliable. She will turn," one of them warned. "Death would be the safest course."

Everyone looked to Adam for his view on the matter. "Death is too harsh, although it would be the safest course. I think Life would be sufficient, providing that she is well guarded and in no position to harm any."

"Then you must allow me to take her," Warrick said.

"Yes!" Gloriana agreed quickly, relieved, well aware that Warrick was one of the heads of a major studio, Howling Wolf Productions, the same studio that was producing *Target of Deceit*. She wasn't stupid. If she played her cards right, she might come out on top after all.

"I will put her to service in my personal den. It is well guarded and she will not escape. If she behaves herself, she might even come to enjoy it, in time." Warrick smiled at the once promising starlet, watching her closely as she tried to digest his meaning. The others knew exactly what he meant – that she would service him in the most personal of ways.

"I'll do anything," she promised.

"Anything?" he almost purred.

"Anything."

"Yes, you will. And if you ever displease me..."

"I won't. I'll be good. I'll do whatever you say. I promise."

"You're sure?" Adam asked Warrick.

"Absolutely. It seems the best solution, don't you think?"

"Yes."

"Very well then," Meredith agreed. "So it is decreed. Life it is, under Warrick's personal guard. Have her removed from this place immediately."

Warrick made a call on his cell and soon, his chopper arrived to take him and his new personal assistant to the airport, and from there on home to his mansion, along with his personal guard of seven. Gloriana stared in mortified fascination as each wolf shifted and turned into a man before she was marched out to the helicopter. "What are you?" she demanded.

"Werewolves, my sweet, and now you are one of us." Warrick smiled at her and she fainted. Rolf simply swept her up into the chopper and handed her over to his boss.

It was the last Adam and Victoria would ever see of her.

"Will she be all right?" Victoria asked.

"Yes," Adam replied softly. "She'll be fine. Warrick is not a harsh master. She might even come to enjoy it."

"I can not imagine that."

Adam hid his smile. He had no doubt that Gloriana would adjust to her new life with his uncle. She had after all promised to do anything. And she would not be disappointed. Adam did not want to think about her any more. He wanted only to look at his lover, his mate, and run with her in the moonlight. Wanted only to frolic with her and roll her in the sweet grass, and make love to her. He wished they were alone and yet knew that certain proprieties had to be observed.

"Adam," Meredith said.

"Mother." He went to her, kissed her cheek.

"Your father will be disappointed that he missed your mating."

"He'll get over it."

"He's delighted, of course. However, the shock of what happened to you almost keeled him over."

"I'm sorry for that."

"It is the nature of our bond, my dear." And sensing his desire to run with his mate, his mother rolled her eyes and sighed, "Oh go on. Go play chase her tail. And for Heaven's sake, be quick about it. I want grandchildren."

Victoria gaped at that and Adam laughed. "We were working on that earlier and were rudely interrupted."

"Adam!"

"Ssshhh, baby. Come on now. That's a royal decree. Let's go make some babies."

"But..."

"Run," he grinned, undoing his shirt.

Victoria darted for the door, throwing off her clothes as she went, knowing he would be right behind her as she ran off into the forest. As soon as she was naked, she transformed into the wolf and ran faster. He was right on her tail, a beautiful big black wolf with a red stripe down his back and beautiful

deep brown eyes. He could have taken her then, she knew, but he ran with her, tempering his pace, chasing her, enjoying the moonlit run until she came to a shivering halt. Teasingly she flagged her tail at him and he playfully pounced on her. She submitted instantly, eagerly, and while he kept up the pretense of the bite to force her to submission, they both knew it was only that, a playful enactment required more for show than any need to force her to his will. With greedy delight, she welcomed him, while the members of Adam's Pack watched from a discreet distance, satisfied that their wayward lone wolf had returned to the fold at last.

They returned to the set bright and early on Monday morning, much to Jim's relief. He had truly feared his production was going to be shut down but phone calls over the weekend with Warrick had assured him that Adam was doing fine, making a swift recovery after the antidote had been administered.

There was gossip on the set of course, but Adam's arrival quelled most of it. And Gloriana had issued a press release over the weekend, saying that she was going into rehab and that she seriously doubted that she would return to acting. Warrick was well pleased with her performance both on the camera and off, for she was eager to please him in any fashion he desired. Of course he knew that at first it was just her own cunning that made her seem eager but after he had fully initiated her into his den, she was more than a willing participant, ready and willing to do anything he wanted her to.

Well sated and mated, and with full moon behind them, Adam and Victoria had no trouble at all with the love scene they had had to abandon on Friday. The day went smoothly

and Rachel returned to the set with the happy news that her father was doing fine and was already resting comfortably at home. She was ready to resume her duties and somewhat surprised at all the changes that had occurred in her absence. The day went so well that they even wrapped filming early, finding that Pete had postponed Frankie's birthday party after Friday's mishap until Adam was able to attend. The party was held that evening instead and everyone had a great time.

Later, as Adam and Victoria lay in bed together after a tender bout of lovemaking, Adam finally brought up a subject he had let lapse, but felt he had a right to know now. "So, my beautiful and cunning mate, are you going to tell me who raised you or not?"

"I'd rather not," she said after a minute.

"Oh? Why not? I mean, how bad could it be? Wasn't Rumpelstiltskin, was it? You know he was really a werewolf, right?"

"No," she giggled, amused at how he claimed every famous nursery rhyme character was really a werewolf.

"Well, good. So who was it? What was it? Sasquatch?"

"No. She won't take kindly to that comparison, either."

"Ah, so at least we have established that it is a she. Come on, tell me already. I'm dying here."

"You won't like it."

"Oh God, it was Snow White's evil stepmother, wasn't it?"

"No."

"Come on. Tell me."

"No."

He tickled her and she squealed, begging him to stop it. He did and said, "Tell me."

"Guess."

He groaned. "A genie?"

"No."

"An angel?"

"Not really."

"A demon?"

"You're getting warmer."

"A troll?"

"Nope. She won't like that one either and she might even bite you for that."

"You wouldn't let her. Not Red's Grandma?"

"Nope."

"I give up. You're going to have to spill the beans."

"A vampire."

Adam gave a start as her words triggered a memory that blindsided him: a cold dank chamber, siblings chained in a vampire's lair and sucked dry, and he felt himself shutting down in response, letting the hate and the rage usurp quiet control, adding another layer of protection against the evil memory. "Excuse me?" he managed to say quietly. "Did you just say what I think you just said? Because if you did..."

"If I did, what?" she asked. Neither of them were laughing now. She had known this would be a bone of contention between them and she knew that she had already lost him, had felt him withdraw with swift revulsion.

His eyes were dark and stormy as he stared at her. "There's no way a vampire would raise a werewolf."

"She was feeling generous that night."

"Generous? Vampires don't know the meaning of the word!" he spat, pulling away physically now as well.

"You cannot accept it then?" she asked quietly, closing off from him also and shutting out the anger and pain he was radiating, made all the more dreadful by his silence.

He was sitting on the edge of the bed, his back to her, rigid and angry. When she touched his shoulder, he flinched as if burned, his tone frigid as he said, "You should have told me before."

"Does it really make such a difference between us, Adam?" When he did not reply, she felt her heart sink. "So you wish to sever our bond already, is that it?" she asked boldly.

Still he said nothing.

"I was just a child, Adam. I would have been slain like my parents if she hadn't intervened."

Silence.

It was far worse than she had thought. His inner turmoil was palpable despite his outer frosty calm. As she had feared, he could not accept the fact that she had been raised by a vampire.

Victoria rolled from the bed and fled to the bathroom, where she threw up the evening's pleasantries and watched them vanish down the toilet bowl. After, she cleaned her teeth and showered. When she left the bathroom, she found she was alone. Adam was gone. His new laptop sat open on the table and she stared at the screen he'd left up in his haste to flee. There on the instant messenger was the damning evidence as to what he really thought.

'You knowingly stuck me with a vampire's suck toy? Damn you, Warrick – you'd better have one hell of a good explanation for this!'

'Now don't be testy. It wasn't like that.'

'A vampire raises a werewolf and does not feed off it? I'm more likely to believe that you'd go celibate.'

'We need to talk, Adam.'

'Damn right we do. You'd better have one hell of a good reason for trapping me in a permanent relationship with...'

Victoria could not read any more. Shaking, she slapped the laptop closed and quickly pulled on some clothes. She could not stay to face the questions that would be asked of her, nor Adam himself if he should return now, if she were honest with herself. It was clear what he thought of her. It was best if she slipped away while she could. She would find a way to sever their bond on her own and set him free. Putting pen to paper she left a brief note on his pillow.

“How could you have done this to me?!” Adam demanded incredulously.

Warrick shrugged. “What difference does it make who raised her?”

“Our kind does not mix with vampires and you know why, damn you.”

“She’s not a vampire, she’s a werewolf. She is our kind.”

“I cannot believe you stuck me with a ...”

“A what?”

“A vampire’s suck toy.”

“She’s not a suck toy. Did you even ask her what happened?”

To his shame, he had not, Adam realized. He’d been too shocked, too hurt that she had kept something so devastating from him, too filled with revulsion and vile memories.

“Where is she now?” his uncle asked.

“Where I left her, I suppose,” Adam replied, looking even more troubled.

“Where was that?”

"In the bathroom, throwing up."

"Dear God, Adam. That was cruel."

"I was confused and angry. I still am."

"And how do you think she is feeling right now?"

Oh God, Adam thought. Betrayed, at the very least, and deserted. He couldn't feel or sense her; she had closed herself off from him too. He'd been relieved at first. Now he was worried.

"Do you love her or not, Adam?" his uncle asked quietly.

"Of course I love her!"

"Then shouldn't you be telling her that instead of standing here yelling at me, dear boy?"

Adam flushed. His uncle was right. He pulled out his cell and called her. There was no answer. Next he tried his hotel room. Nothing. Afraid now, he called Gavin's cell.

"Boss, what's up?" Gavin answered sleepily.

"Gavin, go to my room and check on Victoria, please."

"What? Why? Where the hell are you?"

"Never mind that. Do it. Hurry."

"Okay." Gavin grumbled as he did as he was told and then a minute later said into the phone. "She's not here."

"Did you check the bathroom?"

"Yes. She's not here. What's going on?"

"What about her clothes?"

"What do you mean, what about her clothes? Did you two fight?"

"Just check, damn it!"

Gavin checked the closet and drawers. "Her things are still here. She can't have gone far. Maybe she just went down for coffee?" Then he spied the piece of paper folded on the pillow. "Um. There's a note on the pillow. Do you want me to read it?"

"Yes."

Gavin unfolded it and read it. "*I'll free you from the trap.*" What the hell does that mean?"

Adam growled a low sound of rage and pain.

"Adam, what do you want me to do?" Gavin asked quietly.

"Stay put. If she returns, keep her there." He glared at his uncle as he closed his cell. "She's gone."

"What did you expect? She was not raised in a Pack. Did you really think she would sit obediently by and wait for you after you treated her like something the cat dragged in and left on the rug? She will do what any lone she wolf would do. She will run and hide from you."

"I'll find her."

"She'll gnaw off her own paw before she submits to the trap a second time."

Yes, Adam understood too late, she would. And she would never forgive him his rejection of her. He should not have left her the way he had. What had he been thinking? "And you should have told me," he growled angrily at his uncle. "Damn you."

"It should not have made a difference, Adam; she is not the one who took your brother and sisters lives," Warrick pointed out. "If you really loved her, it wouldn't matter who raised her."

"No. It shouldn't. But you know why it does."

"That is in the past, Adam. You must put that behind you now. There was nothing any of us could do. We were lucky to get one of you back. Now, stop dwelling on that tragedy and go find your mate."

"She will hate me now. She is as trapped as I am."

"Trapped? Adam, you have a dim view of Pack life and mating."

Yes, Adam thought, he did, didn't he? Why?

"What you must ask yourself, dear boy, is why you marked her as your mate before the full moon?"

That question slammed into his mind like a sledgehammer between the eyes. Why? Why had he done that? Because he had known, even then, that she was his. And now he might have lost her forever.

"You hired her," he accused softly.

"Yes."

"Give me the details."

"Why? What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to catch a wolf."

Warrick threw back his head and laughed.

Adam's concentration when he returned to the set Tuesday morning was shot. It was awful. He should have just stayed in LA, but the vampire would not be up and about until nightfall. He could not justify staying in LA but he might as well have, for he couldn't focus and Jim was demanding answers.

After a morning full of frustrations and arguments back and forth, Adam had confessed to Jim that he and Victoria had argued and he was now trying to track her down. Jim was beside himself. Adam promised he'd make it up to him, even if he had to pay for the lost days of production out of his own pocket. He told Jim to continue shooting what he could without them and they would be there as soon as he found Victoria.

Every minute he spent not hunting for his mate was an agony. He finally left the set mid-afternoon and by the time he arrived at the Myths & Legends Paranormal & Private Investigations Agency back in Los Angeles, it was almost dark and his unknown nemesis was waiting for him.

She was an exotic beauty, he discovered, a little thing with a riot of blonde curls, but he was in no mood to appreciate such niceties, especially on a vampire.

"Well, well," she smiled from behind her desk. "So you really are a werewolf? I wonder how the studio will take that news?"

"Don't trouble yourself much over it. So you really are a vampire? I wonder how the good citizens of Los Angeles would feel about knowing that a vampire runs this little paranormal private investigations operation?"

"Oh please, what better creature to investigate the things that go bump in the night?" she smirked. "Besides, you rat on me, I rat on you; just where do you think that would leave us both?"

He sighed. She had a point. Besides, he had not come here to spar with her, but to find his mate. "Where is she?" he demanded quietly, striving to be civil.

"Assuming I knew, why would I tell you, wolf?" she taunted, knowing he despised having to come to her for help in trying to find Victoria.

"She's my mate, vampire."

"And you should have remembered that this morning when you deserted her without a backward glance."

"I was in shock," he defended.

She lost her civility for a moment and leapt across the room in a blur, snarling in his face, "You hurt her!"

"I know! I didn't mean to. I just had an uncle I had to confront. He set us both up, but you know that, don't you? You even helped him. You had to have!"

She gave him the smallest of smiles and a tiny shrug. "What was more important, wolf, your uncle or your mate?"

"I was betrayed," he growled softly.

"And how do you think she feels?" the vampire asked him with quiet menace, losing her smile.

"Where is she?"

"Bite me," she whispered.

"You would protect her from me?"

"I raised her. She is like a daughter to me. Of course, she has that irritating habit of shedding her skin and going all furry once a month, sometimes twice, on a blue moon. Do I need to protect her from you?"

"No. Not from me. But I must see her, speak to her. I'll make this up to her, I promise."

"I don't think that you can, wolf."

"Probably not, but I must try."

She gave him a measuring look. "Well dunk my biscuits in a witch's well and haul me before the bishop!"

"Biscuits?"

"Or is it buns?" she wondered then waved it away as unimportant. "Never mind that. You really do love her, don't you?"

"Yes."

"That's too bad."

"Please. I'm begging you. She's my mate. I must see her, explain my actions."

"You're looking in the wrong place."

"What does that mean?"

"Where is the last place you would expect to find her?"

"My hotel room?" he asked, puzzled.

"No. That's the first place she knows you would look. She's a wolf like you. Where would you go to ground and hide?"

Of course, the forest, where they had mated, where their scents would still be rampant in the air. She could hide there and hide well. In his relief, he grabbed up the tiny vampire and hugged her close. "Thank you!"

Realizing what he was doing, he set her down slowly and met her amused gaze. "I should bite you," she told him softly.

"If it would help, I'd let you."

"So, The Chameleon is really just a big bad wolf? One that is not so bad after all, is he?"

"Well, maybe."

"You had your reasons."

Adam stared at her and knew in that moment that she had somehow accessed his deepest and darkest secrets. "Then you know why I reacted that way?"

"I am sorry for your losses. There was nothing to be done for them. Perhaps it was best that they did not survive that, Adam. Things would have been much worse had they lived. There was not anything that you could have done differently to save them. We are not all evil like him. It is those evil few like him that give us all a bad name."

For a long minute he couldn't even speak, for she had tapped into his memories and his own secret shame at not being able to save his brother and sisters. Somehow, she soothed that bitter pain inside of him and he at last managed to speak. "I... am sorry I judged you so unfairly."

She smiled then. "Go find her, wolf. And be convincing."

"Any other weapons you can give me to assist me in my quest?" he asked.

"She doesn't, as you may have noticed, take rejection well. You have a lot of ground to recover. My scent upon you may or may not help your cause."

"I'll take that risk," he said, pulling the elfin creature back into his embrace and rubbing his jaw against her, collecting her scent.

"Mmmnnn, it's really too bad you already mated with her."

"Why?"

"It's been a while since I've had a werewolf."

"Liar. No werewolf would lay with a vampire."

"Really? Maybe you should ask your Uncle Warrick?"

"What?!"

She laughed at his suitably shocked and horrified expression. "Your Uncle Warrick is a randy old hound. He's always jumping the fence. And they say the apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

"This apple did."

"That's too bad."

For a long minute, Adam was caught in her mesmerizing gaze, unable to break free. He had the intense desire to kiss her senseless and knew it was not his own desire, but one shamelessly fostered by the creature in his arms.

"I am a vampire, wolf boy. I can take on any form I wish. Do not assume it is always that of a bat," she confided against his lips, conjuring images of her copulating with his uncle, both of them in wolf form. She was tempting him. Why was she doing this, he wondered, as she brushed her mouth across his, stealing the kiss he had tried so desperately not to give her? His mind screamed out for his mate.

Victoria!

I am Astarté, wolf. Never forget my name. She released Adam with a sigh. "Ah, that's good. Very good. Loyal at least."

"That was not..."

"You asked for a weapon to assist you."

"How does that help me?"

"She will know that you would never betray her that way. If you can resist me, you will never be tempted elsewhere. Besides, now my scent is truly upon you and will gain her attention."

"And her wrath."

"Exactly." She smiled. "And an angry wolf is much more reasonable to deal with than a wounded one."

Adam scowled at her. "Whose side are you on, Astarté?"

"Well, that would be telling, wouldn't it? Now, off you run, wolf boy. Go find her and be sure you convince her that you want her back. If you fail, you'll have worse things to deal with than my kisses."

"Great. Thank you. She's more likely to bite me now than you are."

"Mnnn, yes. And the moment she does, she will know that you resisted me. Besides, what's a little bite between lovers? It isn't as if you haven't bitten her before, is it?"

Adam blushed. "How did you know...?"

"I am not willing to divulge that information, Adam Gentry. I will tell you that you had best hurry and find her. And warn Warrick to keep his new den toy locked up safely. If I ever get my fangs into her, I will drain her dry."

Astarté watched him leave and worried over what she had discovered. She ran Adam's memories of his siblings through her mind once more and murmured, "Damn you, Cedric. Damn you to hell."

The big black wolf found his mate's trail in the forest more easily than he had thought and he followed it warily. Every step she took she left her scent behind for him to trace, and yet he felt he was being led into a trap. Surely she would have taken care to hide her scent from him? Or did she truly believe that he would not come for her?

When he finally found her, she growled at him. He growled back, annoyed at her uncharitable welcome, even though he knew he deserved it. He approached her and she snarled at him, catching a whiff of the vampire upon him, no doubt.

She flew at him as he morphed back to human and it was too late for her to divert. Her teeth sank into his defending arm, tearing flesh. His yelp of pain was quickly smothered as she released him and he rolled away from her, crouched and wounded, staring at her warily, holding out a hand to stay further attack.

"Victoria," he said softly.

She bared her teeth and snarled low at him.

"We need to talk."

Apparently, she was not in the mood to talk and gave him another low snarl, maintaining a prepared to attack stance, her legs bunched beneath her in readiness to spring at him.

"Please, baby. I know I was wrong."

Her snarl was lower and less intense and she rose out of her attack-ready crouch, standing up to look at him with sad amber eyes.

"Come here," he commanded softly, using the tone that would make her obey, while maintaining eye contact with her as she edged closer, wary now, for she had attacked him and she deserved his wrath in return. He reached out to scratch her ear when she was within reach and she flew at him again, a purely defensive response, clamping her teeth on his hand. He did not pull back from the bite but let her hold his hand in her fierce jaws and saw the confusion in her eyes. "Easy," he said softly. "I'm not going to hurt you."

She made an odd little sound deep in her throat and backed away, tugging his hand.

"Oh? You want to play now, is that it?"

She let go and darted away, pausing only long enough to see if he would follow. He lunged after her, morphing on the fly, giving her a verbal warning that he was coming after her. She ran hard and fast, and he let her run ahead for a while, let her tire herself out some, before he finally leapt on her and took her down, rolling her on the ground. When they came to a stop, he had her pinned under him, the scruff of her neck clamped gently in his powerful jaws.

She pushed up under him, her tail flagging to the side, offering herself to him, and he was almost fooled into taking her. At the last moment he froze, feeling no real response from her, just a slavish offering of her body. He rolled away, morphing back to human. "All right. You've made your point." He cast her a glance as she got up and sat down, giving him a haughty look. "Will you come back to the hotel so that we can talk?" he asked.

She gave no response.

"You'll need your clothes."

She yawned.

Weary himself, he muttered, "Fine," and morphed back to his wolf form and trotted off into the night. He did not

look back to see if she would follow. He didn't have to. With reluctance, she followed after him.

A mile from the hotel, Adam paused and let out a series of calls, clearly a signal to Gavin, whom they found waiting for them at the hotel's rear entrance. Gavin let the pair of wolves in and took them up to their suite, let them into their bedroom and quietly withdrew, closing the door behind him.

Victoria changed and immediately disappeared into the bathroom without a word, to take a shower.

Adam jumped up on the bed and made himself comfortable. Head on paws, he waited, his eyes trained on the bathroom door.

When she emerged, she was wearing his robe. She paused, giving him a look. "I thought you wanted to talk?"

He sighed.

"Hard to talk like this," she muttered, pacing back and forth as she brushed her damp hair.

Adam rolled onto his back, stretched his head back on the bed and made a lonely soulful sound, almost like a howl but so very quietly it couldn't be mistaken for one, and with his paws in the air, he played dead. She paused and looked at him.

"Adam."

Silence.

"Look, do you want to talk or not?"

Nothing.

"Adam!"

He did not move. Just laid there, head tipped back, jaws slack.

"Adam?" Victoria tried again, more softly this time. Still no response. She sat on the bed beside him and ran her fingers softly over his throat. "Adam. I'm sorry I bit you."

He sighed heavily.

"Will you forgive me?"

Adam made a little sound deep in his throat that vibrated against her fingertips. Victoria wasn't sure if it was a response to her words or to the gentle stroking of her fingers on his throat. She sighed and turned off the light, then lay down beside the big wolf, facing him, stroking his chest and his belly.

"We can talk about it later," she said as she snuggled against his side. "We're both tired. We should sleep." She kissed his jaw and breathed in the scent of him. He was intoxicating and suddenly sleep was the last thing on her mind. She wanted him, really wanted him. Surely he could smell her desire and know how much she wanted him just then. In the hopes that he would turn back to a man, she daringly opened the robe and pressed her naked flesh to his furry flank, draping a thigh over his belly, while her hand wandered lower and he made a soft noise in response that sounded like a groan of pleasure.

"Go to sleep," she whispered, nuzzling his throat and jaw, hoping he would change soon, knowing he would not sleep if she kept at him. He couldn't. Sooner or later that primal male instinct would slip the bonds of his control. She was stoking his fire, she realized. And she smiled in response to that. He'd taught her to like it. Fire. For several long minutes, they both endured the teasing torture, but, she concluded, he was not about to give in to her.

It was time to raise the stakes.

Pushing herself up, she slid over him, straddling his stomach. He didn't move, didn't change, didn't respond, even as she rubbed herself against his belly, nor when she touched herself, releasing a much more potent scent of desire. She sighed and looked at him in the dark. She found his eyes watching her. "Adam, do you want me to come as a woman or a wolf?"

He growled softly and she felt him then, morphing beneath her, heard and felt bones and flesh reform, saw fur retreat, revealing silken flesh, and he was moving. Pulling her down and flipping her onto her back as he dived between her thighs, latching his mouth on her. He was merciless as he tasted her and growled into her wet heat, making her come. She tangled her fingers in his beautiful dark hair, pulling, trying to make him give up his prize. He resisted her efforts for long blissful minutes as he feasted on her flesh, then at last he lifted his head long enough to growl at her, "You're playing with fire."

"Yes."

"You'll get burned."

"Oh God, I hope so," she whispered, rolling onto her knees.

Hands on her hips, he entered her with one deep thrust and she whimpered when he stilled, buried inside her, breathing hard.

"Adam..."

He rocked back on his knees and pulled her towards him until her back was against his chest, and he had her spread wide over his thighs. His tongue licked slowly up the side of her neck and he nuzzled her ear. "Ride me," he whispered as he thrust up inside her. "Burn for me. Only for me."

"I do. I am." And she did. She burned for him. She rode him and came again and again, but he held fiercely back.

"Do you really want me?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"The man or the wolf?"

It was a trick question and she knew it. She was coming again and she couldn't help it, and he was holding back, resisting still, needing her answer before he gave her anything more. "Both. I want you both," she gasped. "Please, Adam."

"I want you bound to me."

"I already am."

"In human terms as well as Pack. Marry me, Victoria."

"Yes. And in blood."

He hesitated. "You mean vampire?"

"A simple blood oath."

"Yes. It seems only fair. Although I think you've had your pound of flesh," he murmured in her ear.

"Not yet. But I'm working on it," she assured him, squeezing him inside her.

"Mmmnnn, naughty girl," he smirked. "Do you forgive me for being an ass?"

"Do you forgive me for biting you?"

"Yes. I deserved it."

"Yes. You did. Don't make me bite you ever again."

"Only in play, I promise." He began to move again, thrusting up inside her, and they both knew it was different this time. Something else was happening between them. He was seeing something from her past. She was seeing something from his. "Victoria..."

"Adam, what's happening?"

"Oh my God... Full bond," he whispered, not at all prepared for it. He'd only heard rumors of it. Myth, he'd

thought, fanciful tales for wistful lovers. Memories tumbled through them both, hers his, his hers, becoming too much as their minds brushed and merged as they came.

I should have known, he thought after, holding onto her tightly. They were both trembling, shaken by the experience. The signs had been there, he saw that now.

How could you?

The first time. It's you. The first time we made love. Don't you remember?

I don't know what you're talking about.

Baby, we're not talking. Not out loud. And you did that the first time we made love.

"No, I didn't."

Yes. You did. 'Not yet,' and 'Look at me.'

"I couldn't have. I don't..."

"You did," he whispered. "Yes, baby, you did. Who are you?" he asked, but she did not have to answer. He knew now. The last of her Pack, she had been lost long ago, thought slain with her parents. Her Pack history was all there, deeply embedded and hidden, perhaps suppressed by the vampire who had rescued and raised her, censored to save her own young mind from the barrage of Pack knowledge, for she had not been old enough to carry that burden then.

"Adam," she whispered, feeling panic rising. "I know things I shouldn't know."

"I know, baby. It's all right now. Ssshhh. You are supposed to know these things. You are the last of your Pack. It is the ancestral knowledge of your Pack, given to you to hand down to your children and their children."

"Did you know that the first night, at dinner?"

"No. No, of course not."

"You said, 'I bet I could make you howl and remember your ancestry.' Are you sure you didn't know?"

"No. I couldn't have."

"Maybe you did but didn't know you did?"

"I don't know, Victoria. I just don't know. Are you okay?"

She was still trembling and knew that he didn't have to ask her that. He knew everything that she was thinking. Just as she knew everything he was thinking. He was worried about her, knowing that she was not yet comfortable talking

mind to mind, even though he claimed she had done it before.
"I'm fine. Adam? The wolf's head at the restaurant?"

"Ssshhh, don't."

"I think it's my father."

"Oh baby, I'm so sorry."

"The hunters... They must be here, Adam."

"Possibly. We'll have to be more careful. Come on now. You're tired. You need your rest." He gently ushered her under the covers and pulled her into his arms.

"Adam?"

"What, baby?"

"I'm sorry about your brother and sisters."

Adam swallowed hard. "Me too."

"I understand now why you hate vampires so much."

"Well, seems I was wrong too. They're not all evil, apparently." He tried a smile and she gave him a tender kiss.

"They're not all bad. Can you accept Astarté?"

Adam knew he had to. "Yes. I can."

Victoria was relieved to hear it. She seemed content then to settle but after a few moments of quiet, she asked, "Adam? Why didn't you take me in the forest?"

"You know why."

"Say it anyway."

"You were not with me. I wanted more than just the use of your body. I love you, Victoria. It broke my heart when you did that."

"I feared it was all you wanted."

"You know that's not true."

"I know it now."

He kissed her brow and stroked her hair. "Good."

She tilted her face up for a kiss and he gave it, tenderly.

I love you, Adam.

I love you too, Victoria. So very much. Sleep now. We have a long day ahead of us.

Oh, the movie.

Yeah, the movie.

Your scratches are healed.

I'm a fast healer.

No one will buy that.

That's why there's makeup.

I've been meaning to speak to you about that. Can I borrow your lipstick? Victoria asked.

"Well, if you're not sleepy, baby, just come here." Adam grabbed her, tickling her until she giggled and plead for mercy. "How about I borrow yours?" He kissed her soundly, stealing what was left of both her breath and any lipstick traces she might have had left.

Biography

Elizabeth L'Inconnu is a writer of varied interests whose fiction is often witty and charming. Whether her tales center on a love-struck lone werewolf or the lonely heart of a vampire, they are sure to entertain.

Prior to embarking on a writing career, Elizabeth worked in a variety of jobs from fruit picker to library technician, including juggling household engineering and being the mother of two wonderful children.

Elizabeth also functioned as a web page designer for a few years and as a newsletter editor/publisher for several organizations.

Having always had an interest in writing fiction, Elizabeth finally decided it was time to take out the silver bullet and aim for the stars. She loves to read and write paranormal, science-fiction, fantasy, action and suspense, and of course romance, and has been happily married to her romantically charming Gemini firefighter, Dennis, for twenty-seven years after a whirlwind, love at first sight, romance, and a Valentine's Day proposal just two weeks after they met.

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