



Tempting a Wolf
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Amira Press

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Amira Press
Baltimore, MD 21216
www.amirapress.com

ISBN: 978-1-935348-01-6

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Chapter One

For two years, she had watched him. Her sister's boss. He stopped by the house every now and then, ostensibly to pick up papers Renee had been working on, but Tameca had her own theories about why a man so fine, so made for a woman to bow in submission at his feet, would bother coming to his employee and not the other way around.

Tameca often blocked out that he might want Renee, and so he chose any excuse to see her more often than three days a week, her work schedule. And what man wouldn't want Renee?

She sighed with her cheek pressed at the corner of the wall between the hallway and the living room of their tiny home. While Renee tilted her head to discuss something found on one of the sheets of paper, her long sheet of perfect hair fell forward over her shoulder. The sunlight caught it just right. Marcus would be a fool not to notice that and everything else about her older sister.

Tameca tugged at her unruly hair. On any given day, if it wasn't frizzy, it was limp. Today was a frizz day. She reached up, not taking her eyes off Marcus, to smooth it down with both hands. The movement brought her attention to her breasts. Too big. She groaned in frustration.

To her shame, the sound caught Marcus's attention. He gave a slow, sexy grin that set her body on fire. He turned in Tameca's direction. "Well, hello, Tami."

Her heart threatened to stop at both his nickname for her and the timbre of his voice—deep and seductive.

"Leave her alone, Marcus," Renee warned.

He ignored her sister and strolled over to tower above Tameca. The top of her head came to his nose. He was a good height at somewhere around six-foot-five, above average, but not too tall.

He played with a lock of her hair, probably fighting not to frown in confusion at its wildness, she thought. "And how's my little mocha beauty today?" he whispered. "Did you miss me?"

I'm twenty-five, not an impressionable teenager, she reminded herself. The pep talk meant zip. He smelled too good. Not cologne, or not only cologne. There was an animal scent to him, something wild and untamed. She longed to rip her clothes off and beg him to take her.

She tried playing it cool instead. "Hey, what's up, Marcus?" She flattened her back against the wall and folded her hands behind her. She wanted to be cool, but the knack had all gone to Renee. Instead, she was a dumpy, plump woman, still a virgin at her age. Not normally down on herself to the extent she was feeling now, she figured it was Marcus's fault. He brought out the worst in her.

His deep brown eyes, almost black with intensity, narrowed as he looked down at her. He rested an arm beside her head and moved so close that the heat of his body alone produced the wetness in her panties.

His gaze dropped to her lips. She alternated between licking them and chewing the bottom one. His head lowered until his full lips were a fraction of an inch from hers.

“Do you wonder what I think about you?” His breath warmed her mouth.

“W-What’s that?”

He shifted his hard, muscled frame, which caused his thigh to brush hers. She had to fight not to spread her legs in invitation to him. The flick of his eyebrow toward his hairline was an indication that he knew how he affected her.

“I wonder what your mouth would taste like, whether you would be sweet and intoxicating.” To her relief, he turned his head after he spoke, but he soon ran his nose along her neck. As if she had no command over it, her head tilted back to expose her throat to him. “Because you smell like you’d be delicious,” he declared.

Before her knees could give and she sagged against him, Renee jerked him away. “Marcus, get the hell away from my sister! I told you, she’s off-limits!”

Why, why, why! Tameca fought a groan of frustration. The man got her wet and excited every time he came to their house, but he never did anything other than tease her. So unfair.

When he pushed his hands into the pockets of his slacks and strolled toward the front door, Renee directed an angry glare at her. “I told you he wants one thing and one thing only, Tameca. Besides that, he’s out of your league. Now, stop encouraging him!”

Encouraging him? Men did not line up at her door to spend time with her. There was no manual written on how she should seduce him, not a man like Marcus and a woman like her. So, at what point had she been encouraging him?

“I didn’t do anything,” she grumbled. “If you want him so much, just go ahead and jump him. A man like Marcus wouldn’t be a problem for you to get.”

Renee looked over to Marcus, who appeared not to be paying either of them any mind. She bet he was straining his ears to pick up their conversation despite the look of disinterest. Nor did he look like he needed to take a cold shower, which is what Tameca felt she needed to cool down her raging lust. Her sister hooked her arm and dragged her along the hall and into the kitchen. Tameca rolled her eyes. There was more than enough distance between them and Marcus to keep him from overhearing. Renee was being dramatic.

“Tameca, it’s your hormones, your desire for him that’s driving him.”

“What are you talking about? A man like that can have any woman he wants, and you said yourself enough times, he’s all sex.” She shrugged. “From where I’m standing, he doesn’t

have to be provoked. And I still maintain that I didn't do anything this time or any other. You act like I'm breaking the damn law just to look."

Renee paced away, clenching her fists at her sides. "I don't want this life for you."

"What life? What are you talking about, Renee?" She glared at her sister. From the first moment Marcus had begun to tease her and she had started to lust over him, Renee had gone into "Mama Bear protecting her young" mode. The attitude seemed blown out of proportion, especially given that Tameca was not a young innocent who couldn't look out for herself.

"I can't explain it to you. Look, when you lust over Marcus, he picks up on it. Men like him are more attracted to women who want them. A blind man can pick up on the vibes you send out."

Tameca crossed her arms over her chest. "You don't have to be insulting. I still say there's nothing wrong with looking. But quit worrying. He's what, thirteen years older than I am? Rich. Successful and sexy as hell. I know he's out of my league, okay. I'm not going after him. Perhaps you haven't noticed, but I'm not the prettiest woman on the block."

Capturing her in a bear hug, her sister crooned, "Aw, baby, you're beautiful, and you'll find the right man soon. Not a sex-crazed wol . . . ah . . . man like Marcus. Trust me."

Tameca wiggled in the viselike grip. "Okay, okay. You can stop with the mothering, Renee. Message received."

Renee laughed and left the kitchen to see her boss off. Tameca sank into a chair and rested her head on her arms. She prayed her sister was right, that she would find someone.

Unlike her sister, who didn't seem to care if she herself found a steady guy, Tameca longed for someone special in her life. The men picking up Renee from one week to the next were varied and many—all of them sizzling hot. Yet, from conversations she'd had with Renee, the woman didn't have a drop of feeling for any of them. They were no more than bedroom fun or someone to spend an evening with at dinner, taking in a movie, or dancing. What Tameca wouldn't give for just that much.

After the slam of the front door reached her, Tameca looked up to see her sister as she strolled back into the kitchen while flipping through a stack of mail. "Bills, bills, bills. Not!"

"Not what?" Tameca spotted an orange and black postcard in the stack. "What's that?"

"It doesn't concern you, Tameca." Renee would have thrown it into the trash if Tameca hadn't leaned over the table and snatched it away.

Ignoring the comment, she read the glossy card. "A Halloween Bash! At Marcus's mansion! Oh, wow, are you going, Renee?"

"Not on your life. I can just imagine what goes on there."

“Who cares?” Studying the invite, Tameca imagined a giant ballroom with Halloween decorations and low lighting filled with writhing bodies swaying to spooky yet sensual music. She would kill to go. “I bet you any amount of money, it won’t be the lame event my office party will be. Look at that, same night. While I’m fighting against dropping dead of boredom, Marcus and his crew will be having all the fun.”

Renee laughed. “His crew? Trust me, you wouldn’t enjoy it.”

“You keep saying that, but I can’t bring myself to believe it.”

“It’s a moot point.” Renee reached across, snatched the postcard back, then ripped it in half before she dropped it in the trash. “Dispute settled. Now, I have to run. I’ll catch you later. Don’t include me in dinner. I might be back too late.”

With that, her sister was gone, leaving her to wonder just when her dreary life would take a turn for the better.

Chapter Two

“So, why do you even listen to her? You’re a grown woman, Tameca, and it’s not like she’s your mother.”

Tameca heard Pat but pretended she didn’t. She pooched out her lips and bobbed her head in sync to the music blaring from her headphones. She lay with her head on Pat’s lap and her feet up on the bench’s armrest.

Pat reached down, pulled out the earpieces, and repeated her question.

“Habit, I guess. She practically raised me. We never knew our father, and when our mother took off for parts unknown, she didn’t have a choice. It was either that or foster care.” She shivered at the thought. “I want to go to that party, though.”

“Why don’t you?”

Tameca sat up and twisted to swing her legs around and her feet to the ground. She glanced around the neat, little tree-lined area outside her office building. The place looked like a mini park, all well manicured with birds chirping in the air. If you looked at it, you would never believe that inside the concrete structure adjacent was a zombie fest. Then again, maybe that was a good thing for the coming holiday. Except that the zombies were the drones who worked for Carrington and Associates, the deadliest engineering firm in the world.

“Because a part of me agrees with her.” She tilted her head back and stared with slitted eyes up at the blue sky. “You know that stupid saying you hear loser guys say on TV sometimes, ‘You’re so fine, I would drink your bath water?’”

Pat burst out laughing, which caused her to choke on her roast beef on rye. “You’re not serious.”

“Girl, if you had seen the man. Yum! I want him so bad, it’s not funny. I mean I’ve seen hot guys before, and I’ve felt like, ‘oh, if only.’ You know how I prefer white guys. But Marcus . . . He goes beyond that.”

Her friend’s eyes lit up. “Describe him.”

“Walking sex.”

Pat snorted. “Seriously.”

“Okay, deep brown eyes that go almost black when he’s excited. Straight, thin nose and full lips. He has this long, rich, dark brown hair that’s like six or seven inches past his shoulders. When I see him, I dream about running my fingers through it while he—”

“Got you!” Pat shrieked.

Tameca laughed. "Well, you asked." She sighed. "His invitation said there would be a full moon on Halloween night, and the bash at his mansion will start at eleven. I imagine it will go all night. Truth be told, I'm scared. He acts like he wants me, too, but Renee says he goes from woman to woman. What would I look like pursuing a man like that?"

"You'd look satisfied."

They both dissolved into laughter, Tameca inwardly wishing she had the boldness to do more than look. She had often wondered if Renee had ever slept with Marcus. She'd never asked, and her sister hadn't volunteered any info. That might explain some of the bitterness her sister displayed sometimes when talking about Marcus. And the thought that she would be getting her sister's leftovers should have turned her off, but it didn't.

When her mirth eased, Pat continued. "Seriously, you're not looking for love, right? And neither is he."

"Who says I'm not looking for love?" Tameca scowled.

"Not with him."

"True."

Pat shrugged. "So, he's had many different women, has a lot to teach, and maybe this time around, he wants a woman with a little meat on her bones."

Tameca flared her nostrils, then put her headphones back in place. "That's your way of saying he's considering a fat girl."

"You're not fat."

"I'm pushing a size eighteen!"

"Tight sixteen."

Whatever."

Pat laughed. "Well, we're two of a kind. I'm chunky, too, but Ray likes it. Says 'more cushion for the pushin'."

Tameca rolled her eyes. "Original. But Ray will say anything. He's just glad you're giving it up to someone like him. Goodness knows none of those other geeky guys in the office is getting any. How much do you want to bet our party is lame again this year?" She groaned. "I just criticized the geeks, and I am one of the ones who doesn't get any. My life bites big time."

"Hey!" Pat cried out. "I'm trying to convince myself that I give a flying you-know-what about him and that I'm not just giving it away with no hope of a real relationship."

Tameca sighed. "All right, I admit it. I'm jealous. Even of you and Ray."

"Don't be." Pat's downcast expression mirrored what Tameca was feeling. All of a sudden, her eyes went glassy, and her mouth dropped open.

Tameca followed her dazed friend's line of sight, which stopped on two people—a man and a woman who had paused in their bike riding to take a drink from their water bottles. The woman was beautiful, but Tameca's gaze skittered past her to the man. He rivaled Marcus with his blond good looks and toned body. What caught her attention in particular, though, was his boldness in wearing biking shorts. Not a bad thing in general, but the man was so well endowed that the bulge in his shorts was unseemly. And the arrogant ass knew it!

He braced a fist on his hip while the other hand held his water bottle to his lips. Tameca was sure she'd seen him glance at the women nearby. Feminine eyes were glued to his crotch. Every one of their mouths must have been watering as they took in this godlike man.

Pat slapped Tameca's arm, which made her wince. "Am I dreaming, Tameca?"

"Nope." She laughed. "He's got way more than any woman needs. But, boy, oh, boy, wouldn't it be fun trying to work it all in."

"You have such a dirty mind for a virgin," Pat accused her.

"That's *why* I have a dirty mind."

The man stopped speaking to the woman and turned their way. Tameca's eyes widened, and she held her breath. He seemed to excuse himself, and then he sauntered over to them. To Tameca's embarrassment, her eyes were glued to his crotch.

He paused before her. "You're her, aren't you?"

"Uh?" She tore her eyes from his groin to glance up. "You're talking to me?" Pat made a disappointed noise at her side, likely hating that *she* was her, whoever *her* was. Her mind was muddled.

He stooped over, his muscled legs parted and one hand resting on his knee. Why was he tormenting them? He wagged a finger toward her and sniffed the air with a knowing look in his eyes. "Yes, you're her. The one he wants. The one he'll have."

Tameca stared in disbelief. This must be a case of mistaken identity, because there was no way there was some man out there who wanted her, who had decided he was going to have her no matter what. Not outside her fantasies anyway. Still, she didn't mind that blond and beautiful thought she was the one. He smelled just like Marcus, with that animal wildness. His scent was stronger, maybe because he had been exercising, but it was not a bad smell by any means.

She and Pat both leaned closer like he had them under a spell. He grinned, no doubt used to women drooling over him. With supreme effort, her mind pieced together a sentence, and she mumbled it. "I don't know what you're talking about. I'm not who you think I am."

He looked deep into her eyes. She considered climbing on his lap and kissing his neck. *Snap out of it, Tamecaaaa*, she sang to her psyche, which wasn't listening.

"Tami, right?" He raised his eyebrows.

Her world dipped and swayed before it righted itself again. "W-Who is the man you're talking about?" she asked. "What's his name?"

He chuckled. "Marcus."

Chapter Three

Tameca lay in bed and stared up at her ceiling. She shifted around in an attempt to get comfortable, impossible on her lumpy mattress. Pretty soon, she would have to break down and get a new bed, but she had been delaying while she decided whether she wanted to move out of the house she and Renee owned together, an inheritance, and move into an apartment with Pat. Then, she would be out from under her overprotective sister, who couldn't see that she had long since grown up.

She squeezed her eyes shut and ran her hand over her forehead. Who was she kidding? Thoughts of replacing her bed were not the most pressing issues to be considered right now. That guy outside her workplace had scared the mess out of her. The knowledge that Marcus wanted her and had plans to seduce her should have been exciting, but instead, she had freaked.

Sure, the man had apologized for opening his mouth and had said that Marcus would kick his ass for saying what he did, but that didn't change anything. She glanced down at her body, which was encased in a cutesy, unsexy nightgown. Marcus had no idea what she looked like naked, curvy but way more than was necessary for any woman. He just thought—well, she had no idea what he thought.

“No,” she decided aloud. “Forget it. I don't care what he wants. My first time will not be with a man that hot.” Worries about him judging her, being disgusted by her would take all the enjoyment out of the experience, if there was any enjoyment.

With that settled, she rolled over to her side and pulled her sheet and blanket up over her shoulder. The fan she that kept going all year around gently blew her hair and lulled her to sleep.

* * * *

Tameca knew she was dreaming. Not by some smoky, unreal quality to everything around her, but by the fact that she was out in the middle of the woods, back pressed against a tree, and it was almost pitch black out there. She wouldn't have been caught dead here in the real world.

She glanced at the sky in time to see heavy storm clouds drift away from the moon. Small mercies. The trees around her came into sharp focus. Unfortunately, so did the creature that stood a few yards away watching her with glowing eyes. *A wolf!* A cry of terror tore from her throat, and she was off again.

She must have been running from it all this time. Barefoot and in a dress, also clues to a dream because she preferred pants at every opportunity, she bolted through the brush. Sharp, thin branches tore at her skin while stones dug into the tender flesh of her feet with every step she ran.

Her heart pounded, blood thudded in her ears, and she whimpered. He was going to catch up. The monsters in dreams always caught the person trying to escape. And just when they

were about to bite, only then would reality return. The thought almost made her stop and surrender so she could wake up. *Almost, but not quite.*

Attempting to break through an overgrown area, she closed her eyes and just ripped into it. She broke free and fell flat on her face. Dirt coated her lips after she hit the ground. “Oh, no,” she cried out. “Don’t think of what might be in that dirt, Tameca. Just get off your ass and run!”

“Why do you keep running?” a voice nearby asked.

She scanned the area but saw nothing. “Who are you? What do you want?”

“You.” A male voice. He chuckled, confident that he was scaring the crap out of her. “He wants you, Tameca.”

This whole nightmare must have been produced from that guy and what he had said. But that thought didn’t wake her or change what was happening. “What if I don’t want him!” she demanded. “What then?”

“So, you don’t?”

“Why is he scaring me like this,” she screamed. “A real lover wouldn’t do this!” He didn’t answer. She shuffled to stand, then put one foot in front of the other and jetted. Her thighs burned along with her lungs. Her throat had long since dried, and she had run out of tears.

Soon she came out on a small bank overlooking a river that gurgled in the moonlight. She stopped, trying to remember if you could drink from any kind of moving water.

“Oh, hell, this is a dream.” She splashed down in the water and drank to her heart’s content. Movement from the corner of her eyes caught her attention. Four wolves stood at the edge of the water. Something told her the one on the far left represented the blond god from earlier in the day. He spoke to her without moving his lips.

“Why do you torment him, Tameca?”

She snorted. “Me torment him? What do you call all this?” She waved her hands to take in the night, the woods, and the wolf chase in one sweep. “What do you call him pinning me against walls every time I see him, making me hungry for just one touch?”

She pushed the back of her hand into her lips and then dropped it to her side. Who would tell him of her subconscious admission?

“He’s a tease. He likes women to fall at his feet, even if she’s an unattractive woman who couldn’t possibly be his type.” She left off the “like me” part of that. “Maybe it amuses him to tease, but I don’t like it. I . . . At the risk of sounding melodramatic, none of my past *interests* have worked out, which leaves me as I am—alone and inexperienced.”

A howl echoed through the still night. Each of the wolves looked in the direction from which she could only assume it had come. He called them, and they behaved as if they had to obey. One at a time, they ran back into the trees except for the blond god.

“What of destiny or fate,” he asked.

“What about it?”

“What if I told you that you two are fated to be together, that he couldn’t allow another to have you, so he caused little . . . accidents . . . to befall the men who dared come near you?”

She blinked, dazed. “I’d say my mind has gone into overdrive, and I seriously should not have had that last slice of pepperoni with extra cheese.”

He chuckled. Or she heard him laugh. The wolf just stood there. He had a look that seemed as if he was about to have her for a midnight meal. He might have had no expression at all, but her mind had left reality far behind.

“His mate must remain pure until she comes to him for the first time,” the wolf explained.

“Meanwhile, he gets to bang everything with boobs. Am I right?” She smirked. “I’m tempted to run out and get me some from whatever guy isn’t turned away by these melons and this round belly.” She slapped her hands over her breasts and then stroked her stomach. The wolf seemed to ignore her hand movements and stared lower. She glanced down to find that the water had made her dress rise, and when she had drifted to more shallow water, it had stuck in place, revealing her thick, black curls down there.

She stumbled backward and landed on her ass in cold mud beneath the surface. Great. She wasn’t wearing panties. The wolf waited until she got ahold of herself before he spoke again, apparently to be sure she understood what she was doing.

“If you do that, you will force his hand. He has been patient,” he told her.

“Meaning?”

She heard a low growl at her obvious lack of respect for the way of the . . . well . . . the way of the wolf. Anger filled his tone. “Go to him. Give yourself to him, and avoid bringing innocent people into this. Marcus will not allow another man to have you before he does. Even if he has to kill. If you think for a moment he doesn’t know what you do and where you go at all times, think again.”

With that cryptic statement, he turned to follow the others. Tameca drifted out of the water, then glanced around. She wondered why Marcus had sent his henchman instead of threatening her with that caveman nonsense in this dream.

Coming to consciousness, she yawned and stretched, while feeling her awful bed beneath her and hearing the whir of her fan. Even with it, the room was too stuffy, and she willed her tired body to get up and open the window.

With a groan, she forced her eyes open halfway, sat up, and swung her legs over the side of the bed, then her feet to the floor. Shuffling like a zombie, she moved to the window and began to fumble with the stiff lock. Hammering it with the heel of her palm, she worked it loose and shoved the window open.

Cooler night air rushed to greet her nose when she stuck her head out. As she rested her head on the sill, she eased back toward dreamland, but a whimper nearby jerked her awake. She pushed the window higher and leaned out to search her backyard and the alley beyond.

All was quiet until she spotted the man a few doors down. She blinked and hoped it was a figment of her imagination or that she was still in la-la land. Half-hidden by the shadows, he didn't appear to be anyone she knew. She sensed more than saw him nod his head toward the sky.

Tameca glanced up. A full moon. When she looked toward where she had seen the man, she instead saw a wolf in his place. The beast nodded again and then trotted out of her line of sight.

"A dream!" she told herself as she drew her head in from the window and slammed it down. "That's all this is. A silly little dream. Nothing to worry about."

She quickly got back into bed, yanked the covers up over her head, and shut her eyes. All would be back to normal by morning. She hoped.

Chapter Four

“So,” Vic mumbled.

“Yeah,” Tameca answered, not really sure what the hell they were *so* and *yeahing* about. A double date with Pat and Ray with Tameca and his cousin Vic. What had she been thinking? He had to be two times as nerdy as his relative. And she had twisted her best friend’s arm to do something other than have a booty call with Ray for this disaster.

They had already watched two lame movies the men had chosen and proceeded to enjoy more than she and Pat had. Tameca had had to put her foot down about sticking around at the theater for a third. Her mood could not bear it. She and Vic stood awkwardly in front of each other while Pat argued with Ray about where they could find a late-night place to eat that wasn’t a fast-food joint. Tameca knew they should have eaten earlier.

“So, you work with Pat and Ray, huh?” Vic had found his small-talk mental file.

Tameca nodded. “Yes. You? What do you do?”

He said something, but she didn’t hear. Across the street, a man stood talking to a woman. She didn’t recognize either of them, but the weird thing was that the man seemed more interested in what Tameca was doing and the woman looked like those actors in the background scenes of movies. They moved their lips and gestured with their hands when the microphone was off. You knew they were pretending the whole time.

Overactive imagination, Tameca. Chill.

That dream and seeing the man in the alley had freaked her out. But it had also made her come to a decision. She glanced at Vic. His lips were moving and she heard his voice, but she couldn’t focus long enough to take anything in. She guessed he was droning on about his work. This wasn’t about dating or getting to know him.

She let her gaze drop over his body. Decent; not muscular, but not frail. He seemed to keep himself clean, and he had stared at her boobs a few times.

This was about her losing that huge V on her chest. Just to get it over with. Vic was the man. He probably thought he had to work for it, date her for a few months. But, no, this was the night. Then no more dreams about beautiful godlike wolf-men. She suppressed a chuckle.

She cut across his chatter. “Do you have your own place, Vic?”

He jerked in surprise. “Uh, yeah. Yes, I do. Why?”

“Well.” She put a hand on his chest. His heart was already pounding. “I’m not that hungry. Why don’t you and I ditch Pat and Ray and just”—she raised her eyebrows—“you know.”

Chewing at her lip kept her from cracking up at the stunned look on his face. His excitement got the better of him, and he began to stutter. "I-I-I. Yes!" He took her hand and practically dragged her down the street, yelling an "I'll call you later, cos," over his shoulder.

Tameca shrugged toward Pat and hurried along. *Note to self: Get car out of the shop or go out with men who have their own.*

They stood at the bus stop arm in arm. Twice Vic tried to kiss her, and twice a crow or what she assumed was a crow swooped down as if to attack him. Huddled with her shoulder pressed tight to his and her eyes on the sky, Tameca told herself this had nothing to do with Marcus. Nothing at all.

"You're so pretty, Tameca," he told her. "I wanted you the minute I saw you. Man, I love a woman with big tits."

She winced at that word. For some reason she felt degraded by it, always had. She patted his hand. "Don't worry about it, Vic. You're in. You don't need to sell me on spending the night with you." At least she didn't feel the least bit afraid like she did when Marcus was up on her. But, then, Vic's body didn't make her desperate for all kinds of wild sex like Marcus's did.

Vic seemed to be coming in for another try at a kiss, but she leaped to her feet and paced back and forth in front of the bench. "Where is that damn bus?" She glanced down at her watch, and when she looked up again, there was Marcus, right in front of her. Her mouth went dry. "M-Marcus."

"Hello, beautiful. Fancy running into you tonight." His expression said it wasn't an accident at all. And why should it be? All the signs pointed to him, but she didn't want to believe it. She couldn't. A man like him was out of her league, she almost chanted to herself. Too hot, too experienced, and she wanted him too much.

As alluring as Marcus was to Tameca, when he shifted his gaze to Vic, the dark look that came over him dispelled all his animal magnetism. Instead, he repelled and frightened her. Tameca could have sworn he growled under his breath. Her eyes went wide, and she glanced around them, spotting the blond god across the street with the woman. She realized only now that they were the same two who had been chatting across from the theatre. And the man at the corner could have been the one in the alley behind her house. Terror licked at her insides. This was serious business.

Tameca turned away from Marcus and half-faced a lamp post. She rested her hand on it while pretending to check to see whether the bus was coming. Right there in Vic's face, Marcus moved up on her until he brushed her from behind. She trembled. The man hadn't even done anything, but she was close to an orgasm. He *was* sex.

"The scent of your hair, the curve of your ass, even the tinkle of your laughter tempts me," he whispered in her ear.

"Marcus, don't."

“Don’t what?” He moved closer, if that were possible. She fought to not push her ass into his groin. He was hard as a rock, and unless she missed her guess—huge! “Do you know how bad I want to be inside you, Tami?” He nipped her earlobe. “Do you know how many ways I can take you, how often I can make you scream my name?”

“Hey!” Vic protested when Marcus squeezed her thigh.

Two other men approached. One said, “Let us see you home, buddy.” They gave poor Vic no chance to protest, all but carrying him down the street.

Tameca looked up at Marcus. “Please don’t kill him. He has nothing to do with this,” she pleaded.

“You were warned.” The man had no remorse.

She started to cry. “You have no right.”

He sighed and drew back. He snapped his fingers, and his friend turned to look at him. Marcus said, only loud enough for her to hear, “Don’t kill the idiot.” His friend nodded and followed the two men dragging Vic. Tameca blinked at their sense of hearing. Were they really wolves? Some sort of shape-shifter?

Marcus turned back to her. “There. Now don’t cry. Your tears should be of joy, because I will make you feel good. Not sadness.”

She found strength from somewhere deep and shoved him to put distance between them. “Is that all you think about? Sex? I don’t know much about you, Marcus. In these last two years my sister has worked for you, I haven’t learned what kind of business you run. Do you have brothers and sisters? Are your parents around? Where are you from?”

He didn’t answer. He simply stood there watching her. She put up her hand to brush him off, and turned to walk away. He strolled beside her. Folding her arms across her chest and hating that she had worn uncomfortable shoes just to impress Vic, who had turned out to be a wimp, she scowled at Marcus. Of course, a guy she just met wouldn’t have stood up to a feral group like Marcus and his buddies. The date had been doomed from the start.

After a while, she asked, “You can’t control birds, can you?”

He chuckled and wiggled his eyebrows as if that answered anything. The man had secrets, and he was keeping them to himself. She wondered whether he would tell all if she opened her legs to him. For that matter, what would it mean for her to give herself to him?

“What’s the man’s name who told me you want me? The blond one.”

“Why?” Marcus was jealous.

“Just wondering.”

He frowned. "Your only concern regarding men is me. None other. Do not try to have sex with any man before you share a bed with me. Is that clear?"

"Actually, no. It's crazy." She stopped walking. "I don't know what's come over you, Marcus. Is it because Halloween is next month, that it's a blue moon then, or what? I know people start to act nutty, but it's all psychological. Don't make the mistake of thinking you own me. You're my sister's boss, nothing more."

He took her by her arms and pushed her up against a brick wall, firm but not painful in any way. He bent his knees and pressed his erection, tented big in his pants, between her legs. She moaned so loud one would think it had gone inside her. Her powder-blue panties were soaked, that was for sure.

The rumble was back in his throat. She thought she saw a flash of sharp teeth in the dim light around them but couldn't be sure. He ran a hot tongue along her neck, up her cheek, and dipped it into her ear before he bit her a little too painfully. Then he licked the aching spot, but he hadn't broken the skin.

"Come to my party." The words were a demand.

"Renee says—"

"I don't give a damn what Renee says. She has blocked me from you too long."

She gasped. "You won't fire her, will you? If I deny you?"

He laughed. "You can't deny me." He pumped against her. She screamed, and to her embarrassment, she came. Right there in public, fully dressed and with a single grind. Marcus's eyes never left her face as she fought against the waves of pleasure taking hold of her body. She shook her head back and forth. Corkscrew curls blocked her vision, and Marcus brushed them back.

After a long time, she gained control and he moved back to release her. She didn't say a word. She just stared at the ground and refused to meet his eyes.

"Well, Tami?"

Her heart skittered. "I'll come. I have no choice."

"Why?"

He knows why! "Because my body needs you."

Chapter Five

Tameca tugged at the rear of her cat costume and heard the rip of the Velcro that kept the tail in place. She already knew she'd be fighting with it all night. What had she been thinking wearing a silky, black, form-fitting outfit like this with her paunchy stomach? As it was, she expected Marcus to laugh her out of the party.

Pat glanced over at her, looking just as uncomfortable in a matching tiger outfit. She grimaced. "You're yanking on the butt when you should be worried your boobs will pop out." Pat laid a hand over her exposed cleavage. Tameca didn't think the poor girl had enough to be concerned about, but Pat was right about her.

The bodice of her costume cut all the way to her navel with a wide V, and strips of material netted over the opening. When she had stood looking in the mirror at the shop, she'd thought she never looked sexier, but here at Marcus's door, she wasn't so sure. The line down the back of her sheer pantyhose wouldn't stay straight, and the spiked heels she wore were too high.

"Well, we better just do it. We were brave enough to get this far," she told Pat. "Even if we are wallflowers, we can feast our eyes on the male candy that's sure to be here. All of the men with Marcus that night he ran Vic off were sexy as hell."

Pat licked her lips. "Think that one guy will be here?"

"Which one?"

Her friend groaned in anticipation. "The blond one. I've had dreams about him ever since."

"Dreams!" Tameca screeched.

Pat laughed. "Okay, I was fantasizing while Ray and I were going at it."

"That's so low, Pat."

"I know, and I feel guilty, but men do it all the time, I bet. And Ray and I aren't in love. I'm pretty sure we'll never get to the dating level. Movie night was a joke."

"True." Tameca reached out to press the bell. A look over her shoulder revealed the limo Marcus had sent for them pulling off. "At least we came in style, huh?"

Pat's agreement was lost in the night air when the door opened and a burst of music seemed to come out and suck them inside. A servant took their jackets and ushered them into a ballroom, or what Tameca liked to think of as a ballroom. The lights were dimmed, the music loud. Real-looking cobwebs hung from every corner of the ceiling and, in spots, even formed nice little alcoves that almost completely obscured anyone who slipped into one. As she and Pat scanned the room, Tameca was sure she'd glimpsed snatches of bared skin through the slits in these semiprivate recesses.

“Like they couldn’t find a room in this joint?” Pat whispered with her lips pressed close to Tameca’s ear.

“They probably like the public feel of it. Only a gauzy strip keeping them from total exposure.”

Tameca had been right about the men. They swayed on the dance floor, leaned against the wall, came and went everywhere. There seemed to be no limit, and as far as she could tell, they were all fine. She stretched and lifted her chin to see over the heads in an attempt to spot Marcus. He was nowhere in sight.

The blond god walked up to Pat and took her hand without a word. Transfixed by his beauty, she tripped off after him and left Tameca to fret against the wall. She crossed her arms. If the man who claimed she tempted him just by her mere existence wanted her so much, why the hell wasn’t he around?

She glanced down at herself. Damn it, she looked pretty good, even with her extra curves. If Marcus wanted to play games, whatever! She scanned the floor and found a man watching her. He grinned. She took a step in his direction, realized she would not be able to dance in her shoes, and then slipped them off.

She rocked her hips to the music as she sidled up to him. “Hi. I’m Tameca.”

He howled. “Tameca! Yum!”

She laughed. They danced close, and feeling brave in the uninhibited atmosphere, she moved in before she swung around with her back to him. Glancing back, she saw his eyes focused on her ass. Her fake tail brushed the erection he sported.

“I’m Laramie.” His lips teased her ear. “Do you want to go inside the cobwebs with me?”

Was he serious? “Uh, we just met.”

He shrugged. “So?”

She was about to tell him “Hell, no” when she spotted Marcus. He strolled into the room with a woman on his arm who looked a little too satisfied with herself. Jealousy rocked Tameca. She tore her eyes away from Marcus’s sexy vampire costume, turned around, and placed her hand on her dance partner’s shoulder. “Let’s go.”

He snatched up her hand like there was a fire and pushed through the crowd. At the edge of the entrance to the alcove, she wanted to look back to see if Marcus was watching, but she resisted the urge. This was about a fun night for her, not him. He could kiss her ass. He had made demands of her and then ignored her as soon as she gave in to him.

The alcove was tighter than she imagined. One soft chair furnished it, and the delicate walls forced those occupying the space to be pressed up against each other or risk destroying it.

Laramie towered above her, and her lips brushed his wide chest. With lust in his eyes, he reached a hand up to touch her hair. Inches from her head, he cried out and, with wide eyes, drew back. "I didn't know!"

She frowned. "Didn't know what?"

"I was out of town!" he shrieked.

Feeling like this guy might not be all there, Tameca considered scooting sideways to the exit. Strong, thick fingers tore the cobwebs away before she could move. She stared in horror at Marcus's angry face.

"Get lost!" he snarled at Laramie. The man didn't ask questions. He bolted, and at the intense look Marcus displayed, she wished she could have joined him. Marcus encircled her waist and hauled her out. All eyes, including the woman who had been on his arm earlier and who was now pouting, were on them as they moved across the room.

Once outside the room, she jerked out of his hold. "You didn't have to rip in there like I was your girlfriend cheating on you, Marcus! And why did Laramie start acting crazy like that?"

He didn't answer. His eyes were so dark they looked black. He lifted a hand to her neck and pushed her as if in slow motion toward the wall. Pinned there, she gasped when he lined her body with his. "You still deny me, Tami? We're here on Halloween. I have little patience and a lot of . . ."

"A lot of what?"

He kissed her. He moved his mouth greedily over hers, sucked at her lips, dipped his tongue inside, and uttered angry growls. By the time he drew back, her lips were numb and there was a small cut in the corner. She didn't remember biting down and wouldn't have during a kiss.

Marcus took another step back and released her neck. He examined her outfit and chuckled. "A cat, of all things." His fingernail, sharp and long, cut through the strips of cloth that covered the V. The swell of her breasts was more pronounced. "That's better."

He guided her down the hall and into an office. Sniffing the air, Tameca hoped he hadn't just come from doing the blonde girl in here. He looked at her with a curious gaze then moved over to a counter where drinks were set up. As he dropped ice in two glasses, he kept his back to her. She took in the long, black cape and the black boots and remembered the all-black clothing he wore. It matched his natural coloring, but he wasn't vampirish-looking. The man had a bronze quality to his skin, maybe spent a good amount of time in the sun getting his color just right. She wondered what it would be like licking every part of that skin.

"Despite the noise, Laramie could hear me when I told him that you belong to me, that he would surely be killed by my own hands if he laid one finger on you," he explained.

Planting a hand on her hip, she struck a pose. “So, what are you all? Vampires or something?”

When he turned to face her with a raised eyebrow, he was holding drinks. He hadn’t asked her if she drank alcohol or, if so, what she was in the mood for. “Or something.”

While she lifted the glass to her lips, she considered whether to throw a fit at his high-handed way. He seemed close to talking, so she let it go. The liquid burned going down and reminded her of why she didn’t drink often. “Care to explain?”

“We are one race, one family.”

“Impossible. I saw black guys out there. Unless they were just friends? Do you mean only some of you are brothers or what?”

“We’re all brothers and sisters, in a manner of speaking. We sometimes seek a mate outside our family.” He cast an accusatory look in her direction. “That has caused trouble more times than I can count. Outsiders who don’t understand our ways. But we must go as our fate leads. If it has chosen an outsider, we have no choice but to obey.”

She moved to a brown leather sofa, then sat down and put her drink on the table in front of it. “Funny, I had the distinct impression that you were the leader of your group, that you made the rules. I know all the others killed themselves to be sure they didn’t offend you.” She crossed her arms. “I thought this would be fun, Marcus, but Renee was right. This isn’t the place for me. Maybe I’m too . . . I don’t know, ordinary, I guess, for this type of thing. Can you have someone take me home?”

He sighed, threw off his cape, and then swiped away the fake blood from around his mouth, which was already smeared from their earlier kissing. She thought he would take out the sharp teeth, but he made no move to do it. A shiver ran over her body.

“Tami, I told you tonight, especially, I don’t have a lot of patience.” He glanced out the window at the moon and then back at her. “Tonight, I will have you.”

“Kiss my ass, Marcus.” She stood, not at all intimidated by him. Her patience had also run its course, and she walked toward the door.

With her hand on the doorknob and ready to walk out, she felt him press up behind her. “If that’s what you like. Actually, it’s what I like as well.” He ripped her tail off and tossed it away. She gasped.

With a palm flattened on the door at either side of her head, he gave her only a few inches of space. “Turn around, Tami, and take off your clothes.”

A million thoughts rampaged through her mind, none of which included ignoring his bold command.

Chapter Six

“I should be kinder, more patient with you,” he muttered against her neck as he trailed kisses along it. “Everything is heightened tonight, and I find your scent alone is driving me out of my head. Tami, let me fill you.”

She moaned. He pulled away the last shred of ruined fabric from her body, and she wondered just what she’d wear home later.

His hands shook as they moved along her form. “Kindness later. Your body now!”

He flipped her around to face him. She bit down hard on her lip and turned her head so she wouldn’t see *him* seeing *her* naked. She wanted to cross her arms over herself, but she clenched her hands at her sides instead.

“How can I stare at your body and taste it at the same time,” he said, seeming to wonder aloud. He ran his hands down the outsides of her thighs until he was on his knees. Without warning, he dipped his tongue between her legs to taste her juices. Long and broad, his tongue pushed a short way inside her, and she cried out. He drew back.

Changing his tactics, he nibbled along her thighs and squeezed her ass. She virtually mewed like the cat she pretended to be. Her body came alive under his lips and tongue. She lusted for so much more but tried to hold on to the little self-control she had left after one touch.

“Marcus,” she moaned.

He looked up at her with intense eyes that terrified her. Somehow she knew he wanted her to watch while he tucked his head between her legs again. His stiff tongue swiped at her bud. Her legs gave out.

He carried her with such ease to the middle of the carpeted floor and laid her down. “Finally,” he said, dropping to her side, “I get to have what I’ve dreamed about for years.”

She gasped. “Years? Not me.”

“You.” He cupped one of her breasts, lifted it toward his mouth and circled the pebbled nipple with his tongue. She arched her back to drive it closer. “Sweet chocolate.” He worked down her body and bit her belly just above her navel. “I’m going to eat all of you, Tami.”

Excited and terrified at the same time, she shook from head to toe. He bit her again, and the rumble rose in his throat. A micro orgasm shot up from her depths. She cried out, and he waited until it passed to continue his explorations.

Positioned over her snatch, he twisted his head to look into her eyes again and drew a deep breath. “Your scent. We have sensitive noses, can smell for miles. Tami, do you know that your scent blinds me with lust? I need . . .”

He demonstrated by thrusting her legs apart in a rough move, then by eating. This time, when he drove his tongue inside her, he didn't draw back at her scream. He held her down while she wriggled beneath him. The noise of his hunger drove her over the top. He sucked hard to gather her cream into his mouth, swallowed, then went back for more. Cruel and sweet torment rocked her when he parted her folds to give himself a better view and easier entrance. She screamed again.

"Marcus, it feels . . ." Pain and pleasure combined. He lifted one of her thighs and rolled her forward to his greedy mouth. He licked from the front to the back, nibbled and sucked her nether lips. Tears splashed down her cheeks as she came for the umpteenth time. Still, he hadn't entered her or removed his clothes. "Marcus, please," she begged. For what, she wasn't sure.

"I cannot enter you yet," he told her.

"Why? Don't you want to?"

"Woman, are you insane?" He sat up and leaned back so she could see the bulging mass in his pants. She imagined that he had nothing to be ashamed of if compared to the blond god. "Come here," he commanded. "See what I have for you."

She considered telling him that he didn't command her, but sort of liked it, to her shame. At least here in the bedroom, so to speak. As she rolled over to her knees, she licked her lips and wondered how he tasted. She had once nearly given a man a blow job when she was twenty, but out of nowhere, some guy had burst in on them; he yelled about the guy cheating on him. He had been just as shocked as she was, and by the time it was all over, she refused to believe he didn't know the man. Now that she looked back on it, she wondered whether Marcus had instigated the incident.

She placed a hand on Marcus's pants front, then paused. "Marcus? How long have you interfered with my love life?"

"The past doesn't matter, Tami." He rested his hand over hers and gave it a squeeze. His shaft twisted. "Open my pants."

She did and reached into his boxers to pull out a tool so long and massive it sent shivers down her spine. Suddenly hit with a need to sample him, she lowered her head and kissed the cap. He tangled his fingers in her hair, and she took hold of his rod. No screaming man charged into the room.

She took as many inches into her mouth as she could as she sucked. Marcus let out a shout and threw his head back. She pulled away. Along the base was a puckered vein, so she licked it, then moaned. Marcus trembled.

"Tami. Sweet Tami, I want to be inside you so badly."

His voice was tight, and she wondered if he was near to crying with his desire. She glanced up, but his eyes were dry. "Why don't we? I'm ready."

He shook his head. "Not yet. Lie down on your side." She complied but kept hold of his hard-on. Driving him out of his mind was enjoyable. But when he turned his body opposite, and pushed her legs apart, she wondered how she'd concentrate on him. Marcus didn't pause for a second. He scooped her by the buttocks, pulled her to his mouth, and began to feast again.

His staff, which she'd tucked back in between her lips, slipped out. She found it hard to breathe or think straight. Marcus ate almost violently. He shoved her toward his mouth. She thought she felt sharp teeth graze her tender folds. Despite that, she was coming again.

Marcus rolled on his back and dragged her on top of him. He stroked her thighs. She braced her knees on the floor and pumped his face. "Marcus! I-I can't please you if you. Ah! I'm coming!"

That fueled his hunger. He sucked her button into his mouth. Her head crashed down on his hard thigh, his shaft kept in a weak hold. The rippling orgasms took control of her body and wouldn't let go.

"Marcus," she begged. "I can't take it. I can't come again." He made a liar of her, but he finally released his cruel clasp. She slumped to the floor, spent. And yet he hadn't taken her virginity yet. How could it get much better?

"Tami?"

She moaned, not opening her eyes.

"Tami, sit up, baby. I need to talk to you." He tugged her to a sitting position and moved her onto his lap with her back to him. He was still hard as a rock, and it pressed into her back. "When we mate the first time, it must be in front of my family."

She jerked up from his lap and stood. "Are you crazy? I'm not having an audience. And this is just sex. We're not getting married or anything. What kind of strange rituals do you all practice?" She ranted and raved while he stood. He was completely calm as he removed every stitch of his clothing. "What are you doing, Marcus?" she screamed.

He looked too damn good. Tall, muscled, the plains of his body—all were designed to make her mouth water, her nipples harden, and cream gather between her legs. Where she had been too tired a moment before, she was hot to go at it with him now.

"Come here, Tami." He held out his arms. She gave him a cold look up and down his body, but it fell short in that it morphed to lust. "Tami?"

She drifted toward him.

He kissed her. She melted in his arms and rested her head on his shoulder. If she could become one with him, climb inside his body, she would. This wasn't just sex, but she was afraid to admit it—to herself and to him.

“You want me?” he asked.

She nodded into the space between his neck and shoulders.

“I must have you, Tami. Tonight.”

“Why?”

He lifted her chin to force her to face what he was going to say. “I have to travel, handle some family business. It will take a while. Months, maybe longer. After we have mated, you will go wherever I do.”

“Damn it, Marcus.” She frowned. “Why do you have to go back to that, bossing me around, acting like this isn’t the twenty-first century? Like I don’t have a choice about what I do and don’t do?”

His nails bit into her bare shoulders, and he shook her gently. “Tami! Listen to me. When we are one physically in front of my brothers, you will not *want* to be anywhere other than with me.”

Chapter Seven

The longest night of her life was Halloween night, a full moon. Marcus's brothers and sisters or however they were related to him were running about having sex with whatever person they convinced to come to their party. Or each other for all Tameca knew. And here she was now wrapped in Marcus's cape with Renee two feet away from her and shouting at Marcus.

The weirdest part was that she was sure more than once she'd seen Renee flash the same sharp teeth and grown-out fingernails that Marcus had had when he made love to her. Now the arrogant ass stood there half-dressed, all the while looking calm and collected as he listened to Renee rant.

Two of his men stood in the corner on watch. To Tameca's shock, Pat was wrapped around blond god's body like a second skin. She seemed to hang from his every word. She appeared to live just to have him kiss or stroke her. Her tiger outfit hung off one shoulder, was unzipped to her waist. The beautiful man's hand disappeared between the gap continuously, which made Tameca squeeze her legs together as she watched.

Every now and again, he looked up, seeming to feel her eyes on them. He'd smile and wink. They loved to watch and be watched, she thought, probably why Marcus wanted her to do it in front of them. It had nothing to do with sealing the deal or whatever he hinted at.

Tameca stood and hurried across to her friend. "Pat, get off him. You might not be ready for what it means to sleep with one of them." *Like I am?*

This whole thing had her mind in a spin. She felt like someone had slipped her something, because she actually accepted on some level that Marcus and the others were something more than human. The thought intrigued her.

The blond guy chuckled. "Don't worry. If every woman I slept with were sealed to me, I'd have a long line behind me. She is not my mate." He made sure Tameca was staring at him when he turned Pat's head up and kissed her. She looked drunk as she allowed him free rein of her body.

"What did you do to her?" she demanded. She tried to tug Pat away. He tightened his hold.

Pat brushed at her with little strength. "Stop, Tameca. I want him. I want him to bang me all night and all day forever." She grinned stupidly up at him. Blondie shrugged like it was his due.

"You can't do this. Please."

"Tameca, don't worry." He put up a hand to touch her cheek, then stopped and glanced at Marcus. She turned to find him watching. Blond God dropped his hand to his side but didn't look frightened as Laramie had. She had the feeling they were closest to each other, maybe real brothers. She knew almost nothing about them, and here she was in this predicament. She should get dressed and get the hell out of there, but she couldn't. To walk away from Marcus felt impossible to do. Was she under some sort of spell like Pat appeared to be?

Blond god interrupted her thoughts. “I will please her, yes. When your bonding is done. But don’t worry, I won’t leave her unsatisfied.”

So, he would be there, watching how Marcus pleased her. She frowned, angry and . . . excited. A room full of sexy, beautiful people who, for whatever reason, thought she was sexy, too. Maybe they were such sex fiends that all bodies were perfect in their eyes.

“What is your name?” she asked the man staring down at Pat.

“Corbin.” He hoisted Pat tighter against him. “Marcus,” he grumbled. “Please, solve this.”

Before Marcus could respond, Renee turned to her. “Tameca, let’s go. We’re going home. Pat, you can stay if you want.”

“I’m a grown woman, Renee. I want to—”

“You don’t know what you’re getting into. You will follow him, Tameca!” she shouted, suddenly near to tears. Tameca stared. Her sister couldn’t have been lovers with him, could she? *No, please!* She had dismissed it when the thought first came, but her sister was about to cry. Did she care for Marcus herself? Or maybe she knew he would travel and that Tameca would go with him.

“We won’t be gone forever, if I go.” She crossed the room to her sister and hugged her. “When are you going to let me be an adult, Renee? When I’m thirty?”

Renee wrapped her in a bear hug and kissed her. “Tameca, I’m one of them.” Her voice sent vibrations into Tameca’s cheek. Fearful of what her sister had just said, she focused on the sound of the words replaying in her mind rather than their meaning. Her sister pulled a tissue from a pocket and wiped her nose before she took Tameca’s hands.

Marcus almost bowled her over. “You will not take her from me. I’ve waited too long to find her.”

Renee rolled her eyes. “Relax. We’re going to the bathroom so I can explain to her what I should have years ago.” Her shoulders slumped when she turned back to Tameca. “I didn’t want you to choose the same path I did. I know the ache of having one of them for a mate—and the anguish of losing him. I thought that if I kept you away from Marcus, it would be fine. But he knew from the moment he first saw you. Out of respect for me, he didn’t push. I made him promise to leave you alone until I taught you, eased you into this.”

“But Renee didn’t tell you anything. She didn’t teach you a damn thing about our people, our ways,” Marcus snapped.

Tameca looked back and forth between them. “What are you talking about? You work for him. That’s it, isn’t it? Why would he show you any amount of respect other than that of employer-employee?” Tameca braced herself. “Did you two have an affair, and now he’s ready to move on to your younger sister?”

Renee looked like she was about to gag. “Spare me. No!” Her brown eyes darkened before she lowered her gaze to the floor. “I was his older brother’s mate. His name was Lucas.” She choked on the name, and tears flooded her eyes.

Tameca gathered her sister close. “He died? That’s why you won’t get close to anyone, why you go out with guys only for a good time, nothing more. Did losing him destroy you that much, Renee?”

Her sister nodded and pulled her toward the door. “I’ll tell you when we’re alone. Come on.”

“Wait.” Marcus stopped them again.

“Marcus, look, I said I’m not going to walk out with her. You and I both know I can’t get away from the family for long. They’re in my blood.” She turned to face Tameca. “Soon to be in hers, too.”

Tameca’s head began to spin. “W-What? My blood?”

Renee removed the cat ear comb from Tameca’s head and held it in trembling fingers. Tears rolled down her cheeks. “Yes. After tonight, there’s no turning back, so you must know what you’re dealing with.”

Marcus pulled Tameca into his arms. He opened the cape to slide his arms around her middle. Tameca pressed closer. He kissed her, then pushed her head to his shoulder. “Corbin can help her to see what this is about faster than just telling her. It’ll also help her to understand what and who we are, to embrace us—*me*.”

Tameca lifted her head. As she looked into Marcus’s eyes, she got the impression that her leaving him at this juncture would hurt him, but she didn’t know why. They had just met. She’d thought of sleeping with him only to get the V off her chest, not to be bonded. Yet, after touching him and having him kiss her, she actually craved the bond. It had to be magic or something to skew her judgment.

Tameca cast a glance at Corbin, who seemed more interested in how he could have sex with Pat while he waited for Marcus to bond. She wondered why he had to bond in the first place. There had been so many writhing bodies tonight she couldn’t have counted them all. From the blaring music still pumping from the ballroom, she was pretty sure the party was still going on. Marcus’s people were insatiable.

“Corbin!” Marcus called.

He looked up, sighed, and set Pat on her feet. Tameca caught a glimpse of his staff hanging out of his pants. Marcus turned her head to face him, and she remembered he kept saying she couldn’t have another man until after they had bonded. Did that mean she could afterward? Did that mean he’d be sleeping around, too? These were questions she had better

get clear before she made any decision. If she fell in love with Marcus, that kind of lifestyle would only mean heartache. Maybe that's why Renee seemed so wounded.

Marcus snapped his fingers for one of the two guards to come to him. Oddly, when he twirled Pat into the man's arms and that man nibbled at her ear, she was hooked to him instead.

Tameca gaped, her mouth falling open. Marcus liked to nibble her ears. "That's your spell?" she croaked. "A bite on the ear?"

Corbin chuckled. "No, it's a stress reliever."

"What?"

"We . . . bite. A delicate little flower like yourself and your friend could never endure that unless we were bonding. So, to ease the ache to bite, we nibble." He shrugged. "Now, then." He slapped a hand down on her head. "One mind-meld coming up."

She shrieked, and he laughed.

"Kidding. Just kidding."

Chapter Eight

In the same wooded area, before the lake, Tameca slipped her shoes off and waded into the cool water. The moon watched over her, almost as if she were its child. And if she were honest with herself, she would admit that she felt its pull but had no idea how to answer.

A footstep behind her caught her attention. She turned to find Marcus standing there. Her teeth chattered although she hadn't been cold a minute before. He held out his hands, and she drifted toward him. When his fingertips brushed her sides, a flurry of sound filled the night, as if choreographed. Wolves howled at the moon in the distance. She shivered.

"What's happening?" she whispered.

"A wedding."

With eyes wide, she stared up at him. "Not ours?"

He laughed. "No, not ours. This"—he gestured to their surroundings—"isn't real. Not anymore. This night is from many years ago. Come on. Let me show you."

They worked their way through the woods. Marcus was no longer frenzied with getting between her legs. He was a gentleman, holding branches away from her face as they passed. Soon, the trees gave way to a clearance where wolves were arranged in a circle. Two wolves occupied the middle.

While she watched in fascination, the bigger animal transformed into a man. He held out his hand much like Marcus had done, down by the lake. The other animal she assumed was a female began to change, and Tameca bit down on her tongue as she discovered who it was. *Renee!*

"But I don't understand." She glanced up at Marcus.

He placed a finger over her lips. "Shh, just watch, baby."

The man, with brownish black hair that was unruly and frizzy, grinned down at Renee. "Tonight, I vow to take my mate as my own and seal our union in front of you all, our family." Only when he kissed Renee and lowered her to the ground did Tameca realize they were buck naked.

She squeaked and turned her back. "Marcus, I am not watching my sister get it on with that guy. Suffice it to say, they became mates. Get me out of here. And where did he go? Did he run off with someone else? Because I noticed you all like to sleep around." She tried for flippant, but it fell flat.

Marcus kissed her neck, then nibbled her earlobe. She would have pulled away, but with his arms he wrapped her close to him, not letting go. "Tameca, that man is not some random lover. He is your father."

“What?” She jerked free. “Oh, hell, no! I’m not having anything to do with people who think incest is all fine and good! Get your hands off me!” She jabbed him in the stomach and ran back the way they had come, only to crash headlong into someone else. The impact landed her on her ass.

She looked up. Renee stood fully dressed, and she stared in the direction of the couple, who were still in the throes of sex. Tameca pressed her hand to her mouth. She would never forgive any of them for exposing her to this horror.

Renee finally dragged her gaze from the couple and crouched down in front of Tameca. She reached out to touch her head, but Tameca smacked her hand aside. “Don’t touch me. Take me out of this dream. I just want to go home.”

“Tameca—”

“I don’t want to hear it! I’m not going to mate with Marcus. He can go straight to hell, and you can join him.” She was up and running then. She rushed through the woods as fast as she could. The odd thing about it was that she ran faster than she had in the past. Fallen logs were nothing to spring over, and darting left and right around trees posed no challenge.

She sniffed the air and picked up several wolves close by. *Sniffed? What the hell?* This dream was getting out of hand if she was exhibiting the wolves’ characteristics. She had never been able to run fast. According to a succession of phys ed teachers during her school years, she wasn’t built for it.

They had all been wrong, she decided as she sprinted harder. Not yet breaking a sweat or winded, she figured she could run forever—until Renee sprung out in front of her. Tameca braked fast, pitched forward, and rolled a few times among the dead leaves. She scraped her cheek and bumped her head before coming to a stop.

Above her, Renee’s nostrils flared. She grinned, displaying sharp teeth, the canines longer than the rest. “If you will stop running, Ms. Jump-to-Conclusions, you will find that the truth is . . . I am not your sister, but your mother. Lucas and I had only one child before he was killed. You.”

“M-Mother?” Tameca sat up slowly. “But you said our parents were killed in an accident years ago. You said—”

“I know what I said. What I said and did was for your protection.”

Renee knelt down and brushed Tameca’s hair from her forehead. This time, she didn’t move out of reach, as she remembered that Lucas had the same uncontrollable hair. Her father. She had actually seen him. She wanted to go back and get a closer look at him.

“I want to know everything,” she demanded. “This time I’ll listen. I won’t run. Are you werewolves or something?”

Renee shook her head. “No, we’re a race of people who can shape-shift into wolves. It’s been that way as far back as we can trace our lineage, which is quite far.” She stood. “Come on. I will show you more.”

When Tameca stood, it was instantly daylight. She jumped at the sunshine, warm on her skin, and glanced over at Renee. “That is too freaky.”

Her sister—*her mother*—laughed. “We have a few gifts. This isn’t real, not now anyway. All that you see is a memory planted in your mind while we’re all still at Marcus’s mansion. This is how our home looks, or did look before it was destroyed.”

They walked back the way they had run. “Destroyed? By whom?”

“Those that don’t understand us, who want to study us and learn some way of becoming like us.” She shrugged. “There have been many over the years, different governments, different individuals. One of them killed your father, and I ran with you, determined to live a normal life until . . .”

“Until what?”

“Until you turned twenty-five, and then you would not age like normal humans. You would live much longer. That’s why when I moved to our present location, I decided to be your sister. If I were your sister, no one would suspect me looking like I was only slightly older. I wanted so much for you to have a normal life, Tameca.”

They cleared the trees for the second time. Now the area was a flurry of activity, people coming and going. Cute little houses dotted the lane. At the far edge of the small town, people without a stitch on transformed into wolves and disappeared into the forest.

“Wow, this place is amazing,” Tameca commented. “It’s like a private little community.”

“It was. Now, we live scattered over several cities and countries, keeping hidden, trying to live normal lives. The hard part is that at a certain age, a male will find his mate and claim her.”

Tameca swallowed. “Like Marcus found me.”

She nodded. “Yes, he found you two years ago, picked up your scent from Canada, if you can believe it. I like to think it’s a spiritual awakening, something inside that leads your intended to you. And then when he’s closer, he catches your scent.”

Tameca’s eyes were so wide they hurt. “He approached you, asking about me?”

Renee ran a hand over her forehead. When it dropped to her sides again, tears ran down her face. “Yes. I asked him to wait until you turned twenty-five and until I could tell you the truth. But how would I? I’ve lied about who we are all this time. I knew what it would mean for you to mate with Marcus, that you would leave me.”

“I won’t. Um . . . Ma . . . don’t worry. I’m not going to leave you.” Tameca hugged her, and Renee cried harder hearing her for the first time call her *Ma*. “Besides, Marcus’s mansion wasn’t that far from us. And it looks like he has plenty of rooms. You can move in.”

“Marcus bought that house until it was time to reveal who we are. He lives in Europe. He told you he would travel, but he meant he would go back home and take you with him. Your place will be at his side.”

Tameca frowned. “I would love to visit Europe, but not live there. My life is here. Marcus and I can discuss it like equals and . . .” She turned at the rustle of trees behind her. Marcus stood and waited. This whole thing was both weird and familiar at the same time. She remembered what her mother had told her. When she bonded with Marcus, she would go where he went. Deep inside, she knew, if Marcus did not consider her feelings about staying in America, she would still go with him, like it or not. She wanted to tell him where to go, but when he raised his hand, she went to him.

“Where is the evidence that you can’t resist me like I can’t resist you?” she demanded. “Why is this all one-sided?”

“Baby.” He kissed her lips and lingered, as if to breathe in her essence. The knowledge that he seemed to savor it gave her tingles. “I traveled across the world looking for you. I would do it again and for the rest of my life if I had to. As I said, your existence tempts me. Tami, I need you. Mate with me.”

“Y-Yes. Yes, I will.”

Chapter Nine

Tameca stood just outside the doors leading to the room where she and Marcus would mate. She had already seen inside earlier. The room was a virtual bordello, decked with silk and satin in shades of crimson and white. Marcus didn't stick with the old ways of mating in the woods, somewhere in the darkness.

That thought made moisture break out on her forehead and her hands shake. She had clenched them at her sides, had rubbed them along Marcus's cape, and had run them through her hair. Nothing helped. Her legs threatened to give out before she stepped through the doorway.

Marcus had said she must be a virgin for him, but Renee disputed the claim. She hadn't been. Knowing her mate was controlling to the point of not allowing her to share another man's bed before they came together almost made her walk away. But the torment in his eyes. The uncertainty she saw there now as he stood waiting came through to her befuddled mind.

What would he do if she left, right now, just walked out the door and never came back? Would he come after her, force her to mate with him? Would he try to seduce her or threaten to kill any man she dated? Her mother had said Marcus picked up her scent after he had entered the States. Was there anywhere she could hide from him? She didn't think so. This was her life, and it felt like she didn't have a choice.

Sensual music played, and the family all sat around on pillows, their attention trained on Tameca and Marcus. She knew the ritual was for her to go to him and wait for him to make a speech about choosing her, but fear rooted her to the spot.

Marcus strode out of the circle to meet her at the door. He cupped her face in his palms and tilted her head to look him in the eyes. "Stay with me, Tami. Even though I don't deserve you. Please stay. We did this all wrong . . . *I* . . . did this all wrong." He slipped a hand in hers and led her out of the room amid protests and her mother's call. They were disrupting the ritual. He ignored them all. "If you want, we can take it slower. I will wait. This ceremony will not take place until you are sure, until all of your questions are answered."

She breathed in his scent, taking comfort in it. "But the night. It's perfect. Halloween, the blue moon. We're not werewolves, but I feel something special in the moon. I feel like I want to howl at it." A tremor threaded her laugh.

He nodded. The gentle pressure of his hand at her lower back encouraged her to rest in his arms. "The moon is special for us. We take our mate on the night of the full moon. The blue moon, rarer still, makes our joining more powerful, but we don't have to do it tonight, Tami."

"No, I want to." She ran her hand down his taut abdomen. "This goes beyond all that I thought I wanted, to have sex with you, to lose my virginity. But I've never felt anything so right. Marcus, if I wanted to live in the U.S. instead of Europe, what would you say to that?"

“I would say you must follow me, Tami. That’s how we have lived for thousands of years.”

She slumped, curled her shoulders toward her chest, and wrapped her arms across her belly.

“And then, I would say, I choose to live in America.” He grinned. She thumped his chest and took his hand to lead him into the room. He hesitated. “Are you sure?”

“Never more.”

* * * *

“I choose Tameca Corrigan to be my mate,” Marcus announced before them all.

She forced down the lump in her throat when he parted her robe and let it fall to the floor. Several sharp intakes of breath made her shut her eyes so she couldn’t see the disgust they must be feeling at her plump body. But Marcus’s reaction, his touch, drove all thoughts of the watchers from her mind.

His teeth grazed her neck while he pulled her into a tight embrace. At the moment of penetration, he would bite her to seal her to him forever. Her direction in life would take a radical turn at that moment, but she had learned in the hall and now here, so would his. Her mother had lost sight of what the coupling meant. She remembered the pain of loss, the drive to please her lover, but forgot that her lover was just as bound to her.

Tameca ran her fingers along Marcus’s face, and she saw him shudder. She traced the lines of his back, stroked his ass, and ran her nails down the length of his thighs. Power surged through her. She sank to her knees to take hold of his shaft. Glancing up at him, she licked his tight head and took it into her mouth. He growled.

“You’re mine,” she told him. “All mine. After we are made one, you will not have another woman. Ever!”

Anger flared in his eyes, and he clamped his teeth together, but he didn’t deny her claim. She took him deep into her throat, pressed down, and sucked hard. His knees buckled. Tameca took his full length into her mouth and pulled back. His roar was followed by several others in the room. Still she didn’t give up her control. Squeezing and stroking the tip of his shaft, she licked his balls.

He gasped. “Tami!”

“Mine!” she shouted, looking around for the first time at the women in the room. Every one of them drew back. Her teeth sharpened just as she had seen in Marcus, her mother, and the others. She felt the change inside, fire consuming her body, but she resisted it. They would be lovers in the full sense of the word while she was fully human. Afterward, there would be plenty of time to give in to the beast.

Marcus jerked when she went back to sucking him. She ran the tip of her tongue around his hood, while she watched for his reaction. His eyes were black and narrowed. A rumble started in his chest. She bared her teeth, and when he pushed her back, she chuckled.

She stretched her arms above her head, then relaxed on the silk sheets and spread her legs. He lowered himself to aim his rod at her wet treasure. The frenzied cries around them escalated. Marcus eased inside her. He was too big. He'd never fit. She cried out, and he stroked her cheek while uttering soothing words.

Slowly, his engorged member filled her to capacity. At once, she wanted more and wanted him to stop. His slow strokes built the fire inside her, made her passage clench tight around him. She climbed to an orgasm greater than her fingers had ever taken her toward. Marcus glided in and out, and she bucked beneath him.

"Marcus!" She turned her face into his palm still on her cheek.

"It's okay, baby," he soothed her. As he leaned down, she realized he had delayed his bite to give her time. Now that the pain had let up and the pleasure had threatened to consume her, he felt she was ready.

His teeth sank into her neck an instant before the orgasm rocked her body. Her nails grew out, and she clawed his back and arched to push her hips hard against him. He ground deep and fast. She howled her release, and he met it with his gushing, hot seed.

Epilogue

Tameca woke to sunlight beaming in the window and Marcus sleeping at her side. She grinned down at him like a lovesick idiot and then scrambled from the bed to brush, use mouthwash, and floss before he woke up.

As she teased the hairs on his chest, she marveled over how perfect his body was, so hard and well toned. How could a man like this be satisfied with just her? Yet, as she thought of that, she felt the never-ending stir of desire in her belly. Since their coupling—or was it since a sense of awakening had happened to her?—she had lusted for sex way too often. She only hoped it would settle down soon.

“Are you going to stare at me all morning, Tami?” he asked with his eyes still closed.

She jumped. “No, just for another half hour.”

He rolled over and pulled her close. “Mmm, you smell minty.”

“I wanted fresh breath for when you woke up, but your breath could give me tighter curls.” She laughed, threw her arms around his neck, and rested her head on his chest.

He grumbled but didn’t seem to care too much about her comment.

“I have a problem, Marcus.”

“Already?”

“It’s sex.”

He leaned back to see her face. “You’re not happy with the sex?” She almost laughed at the way his nostrils flared like he had been highly insulted. She imagined women all over the world would have pleaded with him to take them to bed again if he had treated them as he had her for much of last night. And therein lay the problem.

“I love the sex. That’s not the problem.” She wiggled out of his hold and stood by the window looking out. Endless trees surrounded Marcus’s property so she figured no one could see in, but one of the men from the party last night happened to be strolling by. In the light of day, exposing herself didn’t seem as easy. Maybe the moon had more of an influence than she had thought.

Marcus appeared to agree. He blocked the man’s view of her when he spotted his brother outside. “Talk to me, Tami.” He lifted her chin.

“Last night, I was bold. I threatened the women, letting it be known that you belonged only to me. But I remember you saying that until we mated, I couldn’t be with another man. Does that mean you and I can now that we have? Because—”

“You will not have another man!” he snapped. “If I am not good enough, then I will try harder to please you.”

Her pulse raced. “So, the same goes for you, right? I mean, you won’t lie with another woman? I know you slept with quite a few over the years. I hesitated about mating with you for that reason. I don’t want to be hurt, Marcus. Y-You have the ability to destroy me, I think.”

“I have no need of anyone other than you.” He gestured to her body. “Why would I? As my mate, you will have a sexual appetite that matches mine.

The silly grin she’d sported while watching him sleep spread over her face.

“Speaking of which,” he continued. “I’m feeling a bit peckish.”

She burst out laughing and took hold of his growing erection. “I see.” She gave his hard-on a good stroking and soon felt the return of her power over him. Someone had certainly lied. All she needed to do was drive Marcus out of his mind with desire, and he would give her whatever she wanted. “Marcus?”

“Hmm?” He grunted with his eyes closed. A frown turned his lips when she paused in her caress. “Don’t stop, Tami.”

“Are you listening, Marcus?”

He grunted again.

“I want you to hear this, because it’s important. You should note, baby, if you dare stray, I will cut this off and toss it in the lake. The stupid woman who is foolish enough to touch you will be worse off. Got it?”

His eyes glowed with anger, no doubt knowing she had discovered his weakness, and it was her. “Yes, I got it. Now, please your lover.”

The End

About the Author

Tressie Lockwood has always loved books, and she enjoys writing about heroines who are overcoming the trials of life. She writes straight from her heart, reaching out to those who find it hard to be completely themselves no matter what anyone else thinks. She hopes her readers will enjoy her short stories. Visit Tressie on the web at www.freewebs.com/tresslock.