



FLESA BLACK

WOLF RAIN

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Flesa Black

Dedication

To my husband, a living encyclopedia of little-known facts, who is patient enough to explain why physics really does have a place in a story.

To my partners in crime, who were willing to read, shred and still made me feel competent.

To Tiberius, foot warmer, ribbon eater, laptop-computer lover and writing familiar. You are missed.

Chapter One

It was raining. But then it was always raining. Watery light spilled out from the gray clouds, casting silvery shadows along the tall buildings and sidewalk. Puddles smacked against the soles of her black tactical boots, sloshing the grungy liquid over the rounded tips. A quick breeze ruffled her hair and she pulled her black trench coat farther around her body. Even spring in England was cool, though nowhere as harsh as the winters. Only thirty years before, there had been sunlight, moments of bright rays that warmed a person's body. A trip to the beach meant heavy sunscreen. People could picnic under shady trees or even out in the open instead of under rain-blocking canopies. But now life was about hurrying through the days when humans were safe, and surviving the nights when monsters roamed the streets.

In the distance, Big Ben rang its deep, sedate chimes five times. She had an hour before she had to be inside, securing her flat, checking the windows, making sure everything was dead-bolted and padlocked. She also liked to give herself plenty of time for the soothing routine of brewing tea and putting on the television to watch the prerecorded shows. Shows calculated to keep the populace calm during the night. No one, not even studios or radio stations, would dare to work past moonrise.

She was turning the corner, her eyes searching the growing shadows, when she saw movement in the periphery of her vision. If she hadn't been vigilant, she would have missed it. She moved quickly, dodging to the left and up, avoiding the body that flung itself at her. She immediately grabbed the palm-sized spray can she always carried in her pocket, yanking it up to point it at the quivering animal who stared and growled.

"Leave off, you bastard. Go prey on a bunny rabbit before I cause you permanent damage," she warned with terse words.

The wolf snapped his teeth and snarled, edging closer. She knew better than to back down. These creatures enjoyed the chase, the stalking of their prey making them more violent. She knew this alleyway, too, was familiar with every corner and deep garbage trough. She had a better chance here, where she instinctively knew her surroundings.

“You think this will just sting?” She waved the red canister, cradling it firmly in her hand. “It’ll blind you. It might even make you sterile. Tuck your tail between your legs and go away.”

The animal shook his head as if to dislodge her words, his dark brown coat gleaming with specks of water. She took a deliberate step back, knowing she would have a garbage canister to her right. There were two ways out of this alley: straight ahead and around a sharp right bend, and to her left, where she would end up back on the main street. Not that the main street would do her any good—most people would ignore her pleas out of self-preservation.

She leaned to the right, saw the wolf’s paws move in that direction and immediately took a fighting stance. If she could force him to attack, then she would be able to spray him. Even a small amount of wolfsbane would cause him pain. While he was distracted, she could make her getaway. But first, she had to make him pounce.

“You want fresh meat, is that it? Or do you want the taste of a sweet-smelling human woman instead of a female of the furry variety? Not that any woman would willingly lay down for you, mind you. I can definitely see why you’d have to force—”

That was all it took. He was so riled that only a few words had him springing forwards. She took immediate action, holding her ground as she aimed the spray where his face would soon be. Once he was in the air, his teeth gnashing close to her throat, she pushed the red button and lunged back. The creature fell to the ground, howling and writhing in pain. She didn’t stop to enjoy her triumph. She began running to the back of the alley, mentally mapping the turns that would take her towards her flat.

She had barely gone five feet before she heard more growling. She came to a complete stop, nearly toppling forwards under the momentum of her pace. She swallowed

and willed her breathing to slow, carefully focusing on the noise as she waited for the sound again. She didn't have to wait long.

There it was, the growling, but it wasn't just one lone sound. There were several layers to it, as if...

They came out of the dark, their eyes shining and their heads bent as they glared at her. A pack of them, four in all, were stalking towards her, deadly intent in every move they made. They inched forwards stealthily, their padded feet muffled against the hard asphalt. She couldn't take them all. She would maybe get one shot off before the others were on her. She tried not to panic, instead relying on her father's lifelong teachings. Find the alpha. Take him down. The others would still attack, but one might stay behind to protect the fallen leader. The rest wouldn't be nearly as fast or as strong, and there might be a chance...

She took a deep breath and silently demanded her muscles to be steady. She knew what to do to give herself at least some slim chance of survival. And if she was going to die, she sure as hell was going down fighting. She searched the wolves that were only a few feet away, zeroing in on the white-haired animal as the alpha. He was slightly larger, just a fraction of an inch in front of the other creatures. He would be the first to pounce, and the others would follow. He was her target.

She took her stance again, bracing her legs slightly apart, gripping the wolfsbane in her fist. The world began moving in slow motion as the leader crouched slightly, the muscles in his legs tightening. She narrowed her eyes and waited—and nearly gasped when the wolf was thrown to the other side of the alley, his thick body smacking against the brick wall.

The others immediately turned and began barking and snarling, racing towards whatever had taken down the alpha. She stood for a few beats, blinking as she stared at the fallen creature. Blood was slowly seeping out of his side, matting the white fur with its scarlet color as the jagged corner of a cracked rib stuck through the pliant flesh. The Shifter's head was turned at an awkward angle, his eyes open and unseeing, his tongue lolling from between his sharp teeth. *Dead*, she thought, and was stunned. Her logical

mind told her to run, to use the distraction to get the hell away from the Shifters. But the other part of her brain was filled with blinding curiosity, a curiosity that overrode every other thought. Suddenly she, too, was running, following where the other wolves had gone. She had to see what had done this.

She stopped abruptly a few feet into the side alley, staring in amazement as another wolf was flung past her, landing like a rag doll on the hard, wet ground. There was a shadow in the mouth of the alleyway, a dark visage that looked strangely like a man. She watched, mesmerized, as he pushed another wolf away then kicked at the fourth. They weren't down, though—she could still hear the dual growling of the furious creatures.

They bounded at the same time, launching themselves at the stranger with more strength than grace. He didn't so much as flinch when they jumped. He simply opened his arms wide, waited a split second and crushed their skulls together. They fell to the asphalt with a muted thud, splashing into a puddle.

She didn't know what to do, what to say, and she wasn't sure if she had the words anyway. It wasn't possible—at least it wasn't supposed to be possible. A human taking on a pack of werewolves, it was too much like an urban legend. Managing to escape them, certainly, but actually taking them down... Impossible. To her knowledge it had never been done, though her father had conjectured about how it might be possible.

“You should go home.”

His voice was deep, slightly sharp, the gravel in his tone strangely soothing and electrifying all at the same time.

She couldn't stop the snap of her words as she pocketed her spray. “That's where I was headed. I certainly wasn't going clubbing at this time of day.”

She could have sworn she heard a chuckle before he replied. “You should let your boyfriend walk you everywhere.”

“I don't have a boyfriend.” She stared at him a moment, trying to decide if he'd just given her a horribly cheesy pick-up line, or if he was making assumptions. From his expression, she decided he wasn't trying to scope her out. “Besides, I've seen most

grown men scream and run when they're confronted with Shifters. I could do without the hysterics."

"True, but two are less likely to be attacked than one."

"And one shouldn't even be attacked at five in the afternoon. They shouldn't be shifting until moonrise."

There was a soft whoosh of air as the shadow shifted his weight. "You have a good point. They shouldn't be able to... Come on, I'll walk you home."

He turned and took a step into the watery light of day, pausing as he waited for her. She stared at his wide shoulders and decided his offer had to be one of the most interesting proposals she'd ever had. She wondered if he ever thought of hiring himself out as a bodyguard. She knew she'd be one of the first in line to pay for his services.

"You shouldn't walk home alone," he repeated, his back still to her.

Sighing, she shrugged and made her way out of the alley, carefully stepping over the lifeless bodies of the wolves. She knew that in the next hour, their tissue would begin to break down and their bodies would shift back to human form, leaving them naked and mangled. There had been a time when she'd pitied them, but she had been very young then.

In the soft light, she could easily see the muscled physique and proudly held body of her rescuer. His dark brown hair was worn in a severe crew cut, a look that hadn't been popular in the civilian sector for years. She noted his urban camouflage, from his broad shoulders all the way to his large feet, and felt suspicion crawl up her spine. There were two guns strapped to his side, and she was sure each was filled with wolfsbane bullets. If the bullet itself didn't kill the animal, then the concentrated liquid at its core would poison the blood as well as cause excruciating agony. Only certain government-sanctioned agencies were allowed to carry such things, though she knew civilians had ways of purchasing the bullets underground.

When she finally reached the stranger, she stopped directly in front of him, determined to see the face of the man who had saved her life. Government or not, she had

to concede she owed him more than she could ever repay. What she saw when she finally laid her eyes on him sent her back a quick step.

He was gorgeous. There was no way around it. This man was a fine specimen of the male species. From behind she could see that he was well muscled, but a nice body did not an interesting face make. And his face was more than interesting, it was enthralling.

He wasn't pretty—far from it. His eyes, a golden copper, were topped with heavy eyebrows and surprisingly thick lashes. His cheekbones were broad and sharp, his nose slightly off kilter, as if it had been broken and never properly set. His jaw was hard and angled in what looked to be a permanently stubborn state, the flesh covered with rough stubble. What kept him from looking too much like an old poster for an adrenaline-laced movie was the scar. The lacerations must have been deep, leaving three jagged lines from just below his left eye to just under his jaw. She could tell they were old; the skin was white with age, the scars gently raised with no obvious signs of new healing. He could have easily had them worked on. With technology and a good surgeon, they would have been nearly imperceptible. She wondered what they meant, what sort of memory was attached to them, since he had kept the marks rather than have them removed.

He stared down at her, his gaze searching her face, and she had the strangest feeling that he was sizing her up, as well. She tilted her head and let him have his look before she spoke.

“Thank you,” she said softly. “Most people wouldn't have—your arm!”

Blood was trickling down his heavy biceps, following a wild path down to his fingertips. She grabbed the ragged material of his sleeve, carefully lifting it out of the way to examine the torn flesh along his deltoid.

“I suppose you're Florence Nightingale?”

The amusement in his proper English voice sent a thick thrill along her veins. A dark, heavy sensation settled at the juncture of her thighs as her stomach did a sudden somersault. Desire, she realized with a startled jolt. It was quick and sure and undeniable. She had never had such an immediate, physical reaction to a man. It was as unnerving as it was fascinating.

Carefully keeping her words brisk, she continued to ignore his stare and concentrated on his injury. “No, but I do have a first-aid kit at home. Since you seem to be taking me there anyway, I’ll patch you up. It’s the least I could do.”

She didn’t hear a reply, but assumed he nodded. She reluctantly let go of his arm, unsure why she wanted to keep touching it...to keep touching him. It was the adrenaline, she decided, that was what the sudden attraction came down to. She’d been attacked and nearly killed. It made sense that she wanted, and probably needed, human contact. And who better than the man who’d stepped in to save the day. A man who shouldn’t have been able to do what he did. A walking legend.

“Which way...?”

She knew he was asking her name. In the past, she had been very careful who she gave it to. She supposed her first name would do for now. She doubted he’d be around long enough to ask her surname. She cleared her throat and took a deep breath.

“Diana. This way...?”

Turnabout was fair play, she figured.

There was only a slight hesitation before he answered, “Harm, Harm Asher.”

If he thought that would encourage her to give her last name he was going to be sorely disappointed. She gave a curt nod and turned on her heel, absently rubbing her fingers together as the heat of his blood penetrated the soft tips. Somehow, his name fit his persona. Maybe that old saying was true about your personality shaping to fit your name. Or maybe it was that a mother knew her child as it grew in her womb, understood who and what the baby was before they were born. Either way, she doubted she would have a chance to question this man about his heritage. Once she had him patched up, she was sure he would be on his way.

Chapter Two

He liked her. He didn't know how it had happened because he usually didn't care for civilians, but it had. He'd heard her in the alleyway threatening a werewolf in a cool, menacing voice, and had run in to help. He had been shocked to see her take the animal down with such steely grace. But he'd known what she hadn't. The wolf had been with a pack. The creature had probably been the weakest one, and so they'd sent him out to scout for prey. Harm had felt the others and had known she wouldn't make it home alive. After finding a spot far enough back to lure them away from the woman, he had turned, only to see her standing her ground, eyeing the alpha. The girl had guts, he had to give her that, and bollocks of steel. Or would that be ovaries?

Either way, she'd used her head. She'd known not to run immediately. She'd known to pick out the pack leader to incapacitate first. And she'd also pointed out, even in what had to have been a state of shock, that the Shifters shouldn't have been attacking at five o'clock. They were changing sooner, damn it. The gene was beginning to mutate.

"Here we are."

Diana's voice played like a heady drug over his body, the sensation coiling in his groin. Another anomaly, but one he could answer simply enough—she was an attractive, unattached female who had looked at him with hot eyes not more than five minutes before.

He shoved his hands into his pockets and followed her up the steps of an older brick building, stopping a hair's breath behind her as she punched in her access code and swiped her key. He caught himself inhaling her scent, a sweet fragrance mixed with a deep musky aroma, and nearly sighed in disgust. Okay, he'd admit she was a fit bird. Her black hair was thick and flyaway, cut up high in the back and falling to just below her jaw in the front. It made a man itch to taste her neck, to stroke the delicate skin and

muscles with his tongue. Her face was oval shaped, her blue eyes gently upturned, her small nose pert, her cheekbones high. She had a beauty mark just above her plump top lip, a small flaw that wasn't so much a defect as a temptation. Her face was naked, clean of makeup or any adornment. He hadn't even seen earrings winking from underneath her hair. He liked the idea of a bare lobe ready for his teeth to nip at. Even her accent, plainly American, did a wild number on his tingling crotch.

“This is me.”

He shook his head, realizing he'd been trailing behind her without knowing. That wasn't good. That type of break in his concentration could cost lives. Still, when she unlocked her door he found himself stepping inside behind her, his gaze scanning the place she called home.

She shrugged out of her coat as she flipped the light switch. With a swift flick of her wrist, she tossed her coat over the back of her couch, an efficient move he appreciated.

“Let me grab the first-aid kit.”

He stood, carefully unhooking his gun belt as he took in his surroundings. The flat was a sort of strange organized chaos. The walls were lined with bookshelves, all the way around the living room, to his left into the dining room, past the small kitchen and down the hallway. Books were crammed against each other with very little breathing space, their spines blending into one long, jagged line of various colors. Even the coffee table was strewn with open tomes and scrawled-in notebooks. The furniture was well used but clean. At one time, the set would have been expensive. The leather sofa and loveseat almost took up the entire living room, with a small television propped on a short wooden filing cabinet completing the decor. He was sure that if he looked inside that cabinet it would be stuffed with paperwork.

Shaking his head, he locked the door as he watched Diana make her way past the kitchen, the fluorescent light spilling through the open archway illuminating her path. He turned and his eyes landed on the scratched-up dining room set, a light wooden number that had seen years of constant use. The large window on the far wall behind the table was covered with mesh burglar bars, as was the smaller window in the kitchen and the

four that ringed the living room. He shouldn't have been surprised she'd created such a secure bolt-hole, considering the way she'd defended herself in the alley.

“Come back here and let me take care of that wound.”

He didn't need to reply to her demand—after all, this was the only reason he'd agreed to come into her flat. He followed behind her down a short hallway, going into a surprisingly large loo on the right-hand side. She closed the white toilet lid and patted it with her hand.

“Have a seat,” she said with a slow smile.

Heat raced to mix and swell in his loins. He felt moisture gather behind his teeth and fought the urge to lap at her upturned mouth. Tightening his mouth, he grabbed at his control and sat, shifting as best he could to accommodate his stiff crotch. He watched while she popped open the large white box, methodically laying out bottles, tubes, tape and gauze. Her efficiency shone here, too. He studied her small hands, staring when they moved to pour alcohol on a diminutive white square of cotton.

She moved her eyes to assess his injury, heating his skin underneath her perusal. “This is going to hurt.”

She gave him the cursory warning just before she dabbed at the bite mark. He felt the slight sting, knew that if he'd been normal it would have burned like hell, and he would have bellowed and hissed and cursed. At least she hadn't lied about the pain.

He stayed silent as she cleaned him up, sterilizing the wound before wiping away the dried blood. She had experience with this, he realized with sudden clarity, then had to wonder exactly how and where she'd learned...and who she'd patched up. A feral curl of jealousy sprang up to claw at his belly and he worked to shove it down. There was no place for passion here.

“Sorry, I don't have any superhero bandages.” She tilted her head, her lips lifting into another half smile.

He had to do something to ease the tension. Even if she couldn't feel the air vibrating, he bloody well could. Whether it was the adrenaline from the fight or the

waves of her arousing scent, the fact was his entire body was in sudden dire need of the woman beside him. A woman he didn't know. A woman who didn't know him.

“What, you aren't going to kiss it and make it better?” His voice came out more strained than he'd hoped.

His sarcastic comment only gained him a raised eyebrow. He waited for her to move back, or to make a snarky comment in return, or even to slap him. Anything but stay this close—close enough that all he had to do was lower his head for his mouth to be against her bare arm.

“Do you think it would help?”

Her voice was thick, wavering with a slight tremble, two small signals another man wouldn't have noticed. But he did. And his entire body went onto high, painful alert. It was insane—*he* was insane. Attraction was one thing, but this quickening was something completely different. He couldn't stay. He had to leave. Staying wouldn't just be wrong, it would be dangerous.

Then he opened his mouth to respond. “I don't know. No one's ever tried.”

Her head swiveled around, her blue eyes filled with an odd look of sympathy and desire, and Harm knew there was no going back. He watched as she lowered her head and was helpless as her mouth came closer and her arm pressed against him. She hesitated for a split second, long enough to let him know she was considering, long enough to torture him beyond thought. Then her lips were brushing his, the soft texture teasing as she tasted him. He responded in kind, just a small nip, just a little sample of the plump flesh.

Mine. The word exploded in his head the same instant his blood combusted. He couldn't stop his reaction, couldn't stop standing and lunging for her, bringing her completely into his arms. He cradled her against his chest, anchoring her between his legs. His tongue reached out to lap against her lips, craving more of her taste. She complied with a moan, her mouth opening as she met him thrust for thrust. He felt her arms tangle around his neck, felt her hips rock against his hard cock.

He needed her. The thought should have shocked him, but it didn't. He fisted his hand in her hair, holding her while they attacked each other's mouths. It wasn't enough,

could never be enough. His fingers itched to feel her smooth, naked skin underneath them. Harm turned, taking her with him as he aimed their bodies for the bathroom door.

She pulled away long enough to say, “Across the hall.”

He didn’t need any further prompting. He turned and walked them into the gathering darkness of a small room, his eyes easily adjusting to the dimness. The bed wasn’t hard to find. It was a messy cacophony of covers and pillows that stood in the center of the room. He maneuvered them closer, stopping just as her legs bumped the mattress.

His throat was raw, his body scorching from the inside out. “I have to...Diana...”

“Yes...oh, please...”

The breathy words sent licks of desire up from his groin to singe any control he might have had. He pushed her backward, smiling with satisfaction as she bounced on the bed with a startled gasp. He didn’t linger long—his boiling blood wouldn’t let him. His hands seemed to have a mind of their own as they worked, tossing off her boots, ripping away soft cotton and smooth denim from her body. Moments later, she was naked, her beautiful flesh glowing in the muted light from the hallway.

Mine. Again the word ricocheted through him, heating his lust to a near fever pitch. Then she was holding out her arms for him, silently asking for what he was desperate to give her. He pulled at his own clothing as he watched her, tearing the seams of his shirt in his hurry.

Slowly, he laid his body on top of hers, pressing himself against her and absorbing her trembling. She was a perfect fit, her curves molding into him, her heated skin yielding in a way that made his entire system stutter.

“Ah, Harm, this feels...”

“I know.” His voice was a low growl, his need a sharp blade that sliced into his belly and loins.

He devoured her mouth again, his tongue mating with hers as his hands skimmed over her bare flesh. He cupped her breasts, squeezed and kneaded them, moaning when the velvety mounds spilled over his fingertips. Her nipples were hard peaks pressing into his palms, begging for his attention. He wasn’t about to ignore them.

He tore his lips from hers, laying kisses along her jaw and down her throat. He paused to inhale her scent, absorbing the thickening fragrance that had been tempting him from the minute she'd come close to him. Then he was nuzzling across her collarbone, his lips grazing along her slick flesh. She writhed underneath him, sending hot jolts along his nerves that painfully thickened his shaft.

“God, you feel incredibly good,” he murmured.

She groaned and dug her fingers into his shoulders, holding onto him so tightly that he wasn't sure where he started and she began. He pulled one hard nipple between his lips and sucked gently while his hands continued to squeeze her breasts. She gasped and her body bowed, her thighs widening in invitation. He moved his lips up her breasts, over her throat, finally landing on her delicious mouth. Cradling her face in his palms, he kissed her savagely, holding her still for his attack. She didn't fight his assault, instead tangling with his tongue with just as much determination. Without thought, he thrust forwards, the tip of his cock grazing her soft thatch of hair. Her heat was incredible. The feel of it snaked through that one brief contact to tangle in his racing blood. He had to have her. There was no question, no hesitation. He just knew he had to claim her.

“Taste you...have to taste you...” His words were harsh and muffled against her flesh.

“Yours, I'm all yours.”

Her voice was barely audible, but he heard her and his heart stumbled and sped. Yes, she was his...his...

He nipped and licked his way down her neck, her chest, her ribs, then finally across her stomach, all the way to the juncture of her thighs. Her aroma was incredible, hot and sweet and too enticing to move away from. He slipped his tongue along her swollen folds, reveling in her sudden, strangled scream, savoring her unique flavor.

He tasted her again and again, soft licks that had her sobbing and twisting in desire. He needed it, needed her response, needed her body's longing, needed everything she was doing. He darted in, drew out her flavor, then delved deep once more. She rocked her

hips, keeping time with his tongue's rhythm as her gasps of pleasure poured through the darkening room.

Her reaction was beautiful, filling him with quicksilver passion, pushing him to give her even more. His tongue reached up, finding the hardened flesh of her clit. He teased it, flicking it with light licks as she yelled and panted. She was close, he could feel it, and he was desperate to take her over the edge.

Continuing the fevered assault with his tongue, he brought his fingers to her wet opening, sliding one inside of her with quick ease. That was all it took for her body to let go. Her scream echoed off the walls, her wild cries cinching his loins tighter. She squeezed his finger rhythmically as she pressed against his mouth. His tongue stayed on her even as her muscles began to relax, going from teasing darts to soothing swipes, pulling her essence into his mouth. The taste of her was driving him mad as it added more layers of heat to his need.

But she wasn't quiet beneath him. Her hands pulled at him, urging him up and over her, and he didn't deny her. He was heavy, his shaft fuller than he could ever remember it being, and the heady pain mixed with his lust. His found her eyes with his, saw the glazed desire there and knew that she was feeling exactly what he was.

She lifted her legs, encircling his waist with care, her creamy thighs and nimble calves hooking behind his back. He butted against her core and drew in a sharp breath as he watched her, mesmerized when she bit her bottom lip. He entered her with a slow thrust, growling as her slick walls engulfed his shaft with intense heat. He stretched her inch by inch, gritting his teeth while she gave a throaty, protracted moan.

She took his entire length, arching into him as he gave a final push and seated himself inside of her. He felt her quaking, the gentle ripples clutching him, forcing him to hold still or lose himself altogether. He wasn't sure how long he stayed still, his eyes closed, his body hard as he swayed on the brink. He was acutely aware of her, and so he knew the instant her hips gave a slight dip. He didn't need any further cues.

He pulled away, his cock slipping through her engorged lips, then plunged back inside, groaning at the welcoming warmth and slight friction. He drew out, thrust in,

setting a pace that was wild and mindless. He kept his hands curled firmly around her hipbones as she moved with him, holding onto her to ensure she wouldn't disappear. It was too surreal, too fiery, his need too obsessive for any of it to be real. And yet, he could feel her driving against him, smell her aroused scent, taste her sweetness on his lips.

“Say my name.” He hadn't known he needed it until he'd made the demand. “Say my name.”

Her eyes fluttered open and the passion he saw there captivated him. “Harm...Harm...”

That was all it took for his climax to tighten his body. Quickly, he angled her hips, bringing her swollen core down, stroking her completely. He held on, determined to feel her orgasm take over.

“Let me see you come, Diana.”

His order was met immediately. Her body arched and her muscles tightened around him. Her screams ricocheted around the small room, the crescendo rising as Harm's climax slammed into him. His voice mingled with hers as his head jerked back and he yelled his satisfaction. For endless seconds, he was suspended in complete pleasure, the harsh world forgotten, his own identity obliterated as he let himself go.

It wasn't until he'd finally collapsed beside Diana and pulled her sweat-covered body into his own that realization dawned. He was in trouble. Deep, deep trouble. And he didn't see any way out of it.

Diana was floating in a vivid dream, all warm colors and liquid sensations. A small part of her mind tugged her towards reality, but her body was relaxed and felt almost boneless. She had the most amazing sensation of a warm body cupping her protectively. It felt complete and right and perfect to be lying where she was. She gave a small wiggle of her hips and felt a contented purr rumble in her throat.

A heated craving began to curl in her stomach, a muted, distant desire that was nameless in her hazy sleep state. The small niggling that had been whispering in the back

of her head eased its way to the forefront; and still she pushed it away, too at ease to examine anything that might disturb her.

She felt the body behind her shift, the soft rustling of the sheets a gentle sound in the quiet room. The hard body against her back moved, a subtle alteration in the planes of muscles against her sensitized skin. His warm, gentle lips brushed against her cheek, once, twice, before he slid them across to her ear. She heard him inhale and snuggled deeper into her pillow, reveling in the ticklish sensation his breath created.

A moment later, his wet, hot tongue licked just behind her lobe, sending a hot spear of lust skittering along her veins to twist between her legs. Her body was instantly alive, the thin cobwebs of thoughts shredding like wet tissue in her mind.

“I want you, Diana.” The raw whisper was a hot flame that twined along her bones and pulled a strangled moan from her throat.

He nipped her neck, his sharp teeth surprising and erotic. She gasped when a hard shaft pushed against her bottom, the pulsing flesh insistent. She wiggled against it as desire rolled through her, need rising up so quickly she didn't have time to analyze or wonder about it.

The man behind her ran his calloused palm along her hip, slowly moving across her thigh before slipping his fingers along her throbbing slit. She rocked against his fingers, riding them as she bit back a groan.

He moved his warm mouth, slowly working his way along her neck, nuzzling, licking and taking delicate nips of her flesh. She felt her skin prickle with bumps and her nipples harden painfully. As the tingling in her breasts traveled to blend with the sensual waves at the juncture of her thighs, he reached his hand around the side of her body to cup her breast. He kneaded it with seductive care, compressing with his calloused palm while he spread his fingers enough to allow her nipple to poke through. He squeezed her breast then closed his fingers, pinching the peaked tip. Scorching heat spiraled in out-of-control currents, setting her body on fire with achingly pleasurable sensations. He trailed his hot lips down from her neck and nipped her soft shoulder. Her body shuttered and a

deep moan escaped her throat as her body bowed in pleasure. She was hot, her entire system on fire from his touch.

Her mind tugged her up again, but she stubbornly refused awareness. If it was a dream, she was happy to stay here. But it was too incredible, too intense, for it to be only a fantasy. Her eyes fluttered, opening a fraction of an inch for a quick moment. Then one thick finger slid inside of her and she slammed her lids shut, squeezing them closed as she absorbed the waves of desire. She rode his hand with jerky hips, her breath coming in short, hard spurts as he continued to kiss her shoulders and back. The peak felt close, yet not close enough, and she sped the pace to meet it. But too soon, he was pulling away, leaving her teetering on the edge. She made a sound of protest as he moved his hand from her wet lips.

“Shh, I won’t let you suffer for long,” the dark voice promised.

Gently, he pressed his strong hand between her shoulder blades, easing her slightly forwards so that she was still on her side, but bent at the waist. Diana’s passion-drugged mind swirled with colors and sensations, sensations that blazed and seared like a tangled firestorm.

He slid the rounded tip of his shaft between her legs and pressed it against her sodden opening. She clawed at the sheets, biting her lip as she pushed into him. She needed him inside her, needed to be filled with his heavy shaft. He began slipping into her, his fingers plucking at her nipples while he slid between her swollen walls. He eased inside, inch by heavy inch, satisfying one need while ratcheting up her yearning, causing her to sob with writhing desire.

He seated himself slowly, pausing when she gasped. He waited until she began moving, then complied with the easy rhythm she set. He pumped in and out, in and out, one hand pulling at her nipple, the other digging into her hipbone. She burned everywhere his skin touched hers, hot patches that shimmered and curled into tight, blazing knots.

She felt her orgasm contracting inside, stretching her with a vicious need she’d never experienced. It was just out of her reach, the glow of it erupting every time he slid into

her. Then suddenly he was gone, his downstroke pulling him out. She cried out in protest, her bottom wriggling backward in silent demand.

The deep voice tried to calm her again. “Just let me.... I’ll come back. I promise.”

She tried not to cry out when his warmth disappeared. She heard the scraping of her drawers, wondered what he could be doing, then sighed when his body was against hers once more.

“I knew I’d find what I needed,” he said, his words filled with a smile. “I want to give you what you want. Let me. Trust me to.”

His request was a sensual aphrodisiac, twining around her like dark silk. Wrapped in his words, in her need, in the moment, she couldn’t say no.

“Yes.” Her whispered voice reverberated through the room, momentarily clearing the fog of desire from her mind.

When his thick voice moaned in her ear she was gone again, dragged into the vortex of passion. He gently flipped her from her side onto her stomach, his hands roaming each inch of exposed skin he could touch. She began to push up on her hands and knees, but his palm held her firmly at the small of her back. She was confused for a moment, but his hand played with her bottom, skimming along the flesh and sending shivers up her spine.

She felt the slick lubricated head of his cock slide between her cheeks and gasped. Oh, yes, she thought, and shimmied closer. She didn’t question how he’d known she enjoyed being taken like this. All she knew was that she was going to die if he didn’t do exactly what he was promising.

He eased into her, his hot shaft rasping the delicate flesh. He opened her wider than she’d ever been, the pleasure and pain shockingly erotic. When he was fully inside, she let out a broken moan, fighting the almost undeniable urge to scream through the wild desire that had ensnared her.

He moved, slowly at first, as if he were letting her adjust to his size. But, oh God, she didn’t need him to be so careful. She needed him to hurry, to give and take and push her into the orgasm that was teasing her.

She heard him curse and hiss, and just as she'd wanted, his speed increased. She went with him, her hips bucking between him and the mattress. Her tender nipples impaled the crinkled sheets beneath her, and even that was a startling pleasure.

When she thought that she might die from his attentions, his fingers were there, pressed between her sopping folds, softly petting her painful clit.

“Oh, dear God!”

Her cry was loud even to her own ears, but there was nothing that could hold it back. Her body tensed and bowed as her orgasm exploded, shattering her from the inside out. She shot upwards suspended as she heard the man behind her yell his own pleasure. Then she was tumbling down, floating in warm water as her exhausted mind began to slip into sleep.

He carefully turned her back to her side, her body drawn against the incredible solid heat of a man. She felt a tender touch against her cheek and sighed with happiness. Snuggling closer, she wrapped her arm across his stomach and drifted on a hazy fog.

Something inside of her flared for a startling moment, igniting a small part of her heart that she'd forgotten was there. Somehow, she thought she should be panicking. She should be scared. She should be pulling back and examining exactly what had happened and why. And what it all meant to her.

But she couldn't bring herself to roll away from the man holding her. Breaking the spell he'd cast felt like the greatest sin she could commit. And so she burrowed even closer and let sleep drag her under into the unknown depths of dreams.

Chapter Three

Diana awoke slowly, her languorous limbs holding her down as the soft morning light played across her closed eyes. Before she thought better of it, a smile began spreading across her lips, pulling at her cheeks. Strange, since she hadn't had much to smile about for most of her life. Something wonderful had happened, she thought, but she couldn't quite remember what it had been. She'd been walking home...the wolves... She wrinkled her brow as her mind conjured up the scene. The man, Harm, had been there, then had walked her home. He'd been injured, a bite on his arm, so she'd bandaged—

She sat bolt upright in bed as shocking realization zinged along her nerves. She'd actually taken a virtual stranger to bed, and had experienced the true meaning of multi-orgasmic. She was only grateful she took bi-monthly birth-control medication, because she definitely hadn't been thinking about safe sex last night.

She covered her mouth, holding in a startled giggle. She'd had the best sex of her entire life, and she liked to think he'd enjoyed it, too. With a strange sense of foreboding, she turned her head to stare down at the space beside her. When she saw that it was empty an odd sense of dread settled around her. Dread? No, it couldn't be. Why would she be afraid that he'd left?

Then she remembered their odd connection, the way she'd felt when she'd stared into his eyes, the way he'd made her feel when he'd touched her. It had been completely right, completely natural, to make love with him.

Shaking her head, she climbed out of bed and winced at her sore muscles. No one had ever exhausted her body this way—but then, she'd never been with a man who'd been as demanding the third time around as he'd been the first. Stretching carefully, she let her gaze wander over the room as she lifted her slick peach robe from the footboard. Both her clothes and his were missing from the floor. Either he'd picked up before he'd

left, or he was more freakish than she'd believed and had taken her clothes with him. Both thoughts were too strange for her to consider.

Coffee, she decided. Her brain simply wasn't going to work without it. A hurried glance at the clock told her it was almost seven. She had plenty of time to get ready for her day off. She had a lot to do. She knew she should be glad Harm was gone. She had to close up her storage space and make plans—plans that only she was privy to. If she had a man like Harm hanging around, he'd insist on helping her, and then... Well, she didn't have to worry about that. He was gone, after all.

Determinedly pushing away her disappointment, Diana stumbled out of her bedroom and into the kitchen. She stopped dead in her tracks when she smelled freshly brewed Arabica wafting through the small space. Slowly, she turned around, afraid but excited by who she might find.

There he was, standing in front of one of the bookcases in the dining area, his back to her. She swallowed spastically, her eyes scanning his broad shoulders and lean torso. Was it possible for him to look even better today than he had the evening before?

“To my little Hunter’.” His quiet voice tore through the silence, making her jump.

She could only shake her head, her sleep-heavy mind confused. “Wh—what?”

He turned, his copper eyes intense as he studied her. “Everyone thought he was talking about a son. We all assumed that Hunter was the name of a little boy. But it wasn't, was it?”

She blinked as she tried to process exactly what he was trying to say. Her muscles tightened in quick defense as realization began to dawn. “I don't know what you're talking about.”

Harm carefully closed the well-worn book before making his way to the kitchen pass-through. A book, she knew, that had a more personal inscription penned to her from her father just under the printed dedication. He watched her, keeping her rooted to the tiled floor as he slipped the hardback onto the counter's smooth surface. She checked the sudden need to take a step back, instead curling her hands into fists.

“Bollocks. Don't lie. *You* are Dr. Gerry Allen's hunter.”

She turned away, forcing her hands to remain steady as she reached for a coffee cup.
“Who?”

“It was quite ingenious, actually.” His voice was softer now, the tone soothing.
“Your mail says you’re Diana Galen. Diana, the goddess of the hunt. You changed your last name, used his first initial, dropped an L. It was very well thought out.”

“I—I don’t know what you mean.”

“Your father knew how controversial his research was, so he was careful never to tell anyone about his family. He kept you and your mother well hidden. The only thing anyone knew was that he and his wife had a child, but he managed to keep your gender a secret. His single slip was that one dedication in his first book, to his Hunter. People have been searching for you for years, and here you are, hiding in plain sight. No one ever thought to look in Europe, let alone in a city. And no one ever considered that you were a female.”

The carafe clinked against the enamel of the dark green mug as she tried to remain calm. “That’s quite an imagination you have.”

Suddenly he was behind her, his hands resting on the counter, holding her without actually touching her. His breath caressed her ear as he leaned in closer. “Your eyes give you away, Diana. They’re your father’s eyes. And your chin, it’s a bit smaller, maybe more delicate, but it’s a near replica of Dr. Allen’s. It wouldn’t take much for me to get a DNA test. In a couple of hours, I can prove who you are. By tonight the whole world would know.”

Oh, God, he was right. How could she have let her idiot hormones obliterate all her common sense? She should have sent him home. She should have never even let him up the stoop. She’d always been scrupulously careful...

A sudden suspicion skittered up her spine, drawing a chill along her bones. “Wait, how did you... Did you suspect something before...”

“No.” The one word was short, soft and concise. He followed it by laying a gentle kiss on her neck. “All I saw was a pretty woman with nerves of steel. To be honest, if I’d thought you were Dr. Allen’s daughter...”

She was afraid to ask, but she had to know. “If you’d thought I was his daughter...?”

“I wouldn’t have slept with you. No, that’s not true.” He let out a frustrated sigh and she felt his nose nuzzle her ear. “I couldn’t have stopped what happened. But I would have taken it slower. I would have...”

Her mouth lifted slightly as wry amusement slipped in underneath her fear. “Courted me?”

He chuckled softly. “Something like that. And I would have told you who *I* was.”

The fear surfaced again, drowning out the growing glow he’d created. “And who are you, Harm? I know you aren’t in a pack, or you would have changed last night. I can only assume you’re with the government.”

The silence that followed was answer enough. She made a disgusted noise and pushed her way out of his near embrace. Crossing her arms over her stomach, she strode into the living room and began to pace.

“I suppose you want to take me to some research lab, is that it?” She flung the question out but didn’t wait for an answer. “Everyone thinks he used me as an experiment, that he pumped me full of untried medications and experimental drugs. Well, he didn’t. Believe it or not, my father loved me. He wouldn’t have ever done something like that.”

She paused to stare at him and saw that his shrewd gaze had narrowed. “No, he didn’t experiment on you...but he left you his experiments, didn’t he? You know exactly what he was doing. In fact, I’ll bet you helped him when you were old enough.”

Shock sapped the wind from her sails, bringing her to a grinding halt. “I’m a courier, Harm.”

“By need or by choice?”

She tilted her chin up and refused to reply. Dear Lord, had she been that transparent? How could this man have figured her out in a matter of hours? She couldn’t let on that he was treading down the path she’d tried to keep blocked. There was too much that she absolutely couldn’t allow to fall into just anyone’s hands.

He took slow, sure steps towards her and she held her breath, waiting. When he was within arm's reach, he stopped, held her steady with his eyes and pulled her against his chest. She didn't want to melt into him, didn't want to give in to the strange need, but she did. With a sigh, she leaned against him, listening to the steady beat of his heart. He gathered her closer, one large palm smoothing up and down her back.

"Sweetheart, I'm not the enemy. When your father was alive, the last thing he could have done was go to the government. They cocked up by using an experimental agent to force rain, and they would have done anything to keep the truth away from the public. Diana, I'm going to tell you something, and I want you to listen without running away."

He paused, obviously waiting for her consent. She nodded. "You're right. I'm with the government, but not how you think. A few years back a woman, Millicent Wright, began putting together specific people for a task force. There aren't many of us, just a handful, but we've been very effective in tracking pack movements and taking out the high-level alphas."

Diana lifted her head to look at his scars. She traced the raised lines with tender fingertips. "You were attacked."

His jaw tightened and ticked as he stared down at her. "I was trying to save my brother. He'd invited them into our home. They were childhood friends and he didn't know... I managed to take out three of them before the STF stormed in. Once I'd recovered, Millicent offered me a position, and I accepted."

Something he'd said earlier niggled in her mind. "You fit the profile of who she was looking for."

"Yeah, I did."

She thought of the way he'd taken out the Shifters so easily and the truth struck her, sure and hard and fast. "So my father was right. The chemicals they used to lace the clouds didn't just trigger the full shifting gene in the humans that had them. They also triggered the partial genes in a few that carried those."

His eyes flashed and the skin under his scars paled. "Partial...that's exactly what they call us. I have some of the DNA markers of a Shifter, but not all."

“Which means you’re...more. Better sight, hearing, smelling, recuperation, reaction time, strength. It makes sense.” She let her hands press against his chest, curling into the material of his abused T-shirt to reassure him. “Did you believe I’d think less of you?”

“I didn’t know,” he confessed softly. “And I don’t know why I care, but I do. I don’t ever want to scare you, Diana. There’re a lot of things I wish I could do for you right now. Mostly, I wish I could’ve waited to let you tell me who you are in your own time, but I couldn’t. The fact is, what you know could be the key to survival for mankind, and I can’t and I won’t walk away from that. I have the feeling that you wouldn’t walk, either... At least not now, not after you’ve seen the wolves shift before they should have. And you can’t run from this—or from us.” He held his hands still, the heat of his palms seeping into her skin. “I want you to come with me. You should meet Millicent.”

Before fear could set in, Harm’s gaze was intent on her again, silently asking for her trust. Somehow she understood the unspoken truth. He would never hurt her. He would die protecting her. He couldn’t know that he was presenting her with an opportunity she needed, and that his protection would only make giving them her secret easier.

“All right,” she conceded. “But there’s somewhere we need to stop first.”

Chapter Four

Harm watched her from the corner of his eye as he maneuvered the vehicle between the tall metal storage units. He'd been studying her since they'd left her flat, touching her as often as he could. He wasn't able to stop himself from feeling her skin, imprinting himself on her as she had him. She hadn't seemed to mind, instead leaning against him as they'd sat in the black SUV. He'd have been happy to have driven around the city all day, using the time to learn more about the woman who made him feel more than he'd ever thought possible. A complicated woman who had slipped underneath his skin before he'd even kissed her.

But they didn't have the luxury that most others did. In that second, he wished for something he'd never truly had—he wished for a normal life. Sighing, he tried to concentrate on the narrow drive. He decided this must be where she kept all of her father's paperwork, locked away from prying eyes. Keeping the research out of her home was a smart move, especially considering the danger it could have put her in.

"The next unit on the right."

He eased on the brakes as he turned to study her again, noting the way her expression had tensed. "Diana, you're doing the right thing. Millicent won't—"

"I know," she said, trying for a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes. "I just.... This is important, Harm. And it's been mine for so long that it's hard to share it."

He could feel the apprehension rolling from her body and laid a soothing hand over hers. How could he explain that he understood when he didn't? How could he add more pressure to her when he could already see the strain?

"I knew I would have to give all of this to someone soon. There really isn't a choice. But still..."

He simply nodded and waited, finding it easier to stretch his patience for Diana than he'd ever been able to for anyone else. When she turned unsure eyes to him, he felt his heart constrict.

She wet her lips and took a deep breath. "I suppose it's time."

But he didn't let her slide out. Instead, he slipped his hand behind her head and pulled her into him for a gentle kiss. He felt her tremble as some of her tension slowly eased under the tender caress.

"It will be all right, I promise," he told her softly.

She gave him a tremulous smile before opening the door and climbing down. He fought the impossible urge to tuck her back into the SUV and drive away, to save her from himself and the entire bloody world.

By the time he joined her, Diana had unlocked the flimsy door of a small unit. She turned to look over her shoulder, holding his gaze with hers for a long moment before she stepped into the semi-dark of the building. His hackles were already rising before she flipped on the light. What he saw stunned him to immobility.

"It's a laboratory," he rasped.

She gave a jerky nod before moving towards the long table at the back of the room. "I had to do my work somewhere."

His muscles tightened as he slanted his eyes. "Your work?"

"Yes...my work. Actually, my father's work. I inherited it."

Harm's eyes scanned the dim area and he barely bit back a growl. She had banker's boxes stacked along the walls, bulging with papers and files. The desk to his right was scattered with documents and teeth-scarred pencils, the small reading lamp on its corner topped with a shade that was askew. A tall, old-fashioned chalkboard had been rolled in to stand on his left. Its surface was strewn with scrunched up numbers and letters, all written at a slight downwards angle. A small icebox had been set up just beside it, a distinct hum telling him that she'd managed to hack into an electrical current. But the most ominous of all was the table at the far end of the area. It held a myriad of bottles and tubes, a Bunsen burner fueled by a nearby tank and several Petri dishes. All he could

think was that she only had the two small pop-out windows behind her for ventilation. The fire extinguisher was a damn bloody trinket that didn't have as much power as his piss.

“I have something that I need to show you.”

He clamped down on the desire to shake her, but just barely. Instead, he nodded and watched as she moved to open the refrigerator. A few seconds later, she was holding up a large, clear bottle, the red-tinted liquid inside sloshing against the sides. He felt his stomach muscles constrict as the muscles along his bones and the nerves circling his spine tightened and tingled. The scent of the red liquid seeped through the glass, the smell of it slightly sickening to his sensitive nose.

His reaction must have shown on his face, because when she spoke her voice was low and soft. “It works. It reverses the damage without harming the human genes. It's the antidote, Harm.”

“Wh-what?”

She held the bottle out towards him and lifted an eyebrow. “It's the cure. Don't worry, it won't hurt you. I tested it on crossed blood. What was it you said they called you? Partial?”

He swallowed back his reaction as he watched her. “Yes.”

Her lips lifted in a small smile. “I decided to work on some mixed strands, just in case my father was right. I'm glad I did. The human genes that were bonded to the partial Shifter anomalies were actually protected. Even if I poured this full strength over your head, it wouldn't affect you.”

Harm felt his nerves go taut as he fought the wild surges that were raging through his blood. “You did this...here...alone.”

“My father was an excellent teacher.”

He shook his head and tried to sort through what she'd told him. “An excellent teacher?”

Hesitantly, she put the container down on the table. “He knew he couldn't send me to school, not after he'd published his paper, and especially not after he began spreading his

information through the underground. We had to keep our identities a secret. My dad homeschooled me, made sure I could defend myself by taking me to karate classes, kickboxing, track... No matter where we moved, we looked and acted like a perfectly normal father and daughter.”

“And the whole time he was grooming you to take over.” He could hear the anger in his voice but couldn’t control it.

She gave him a curious look and wrinkled her brow. “Who else would he trust with his work, Harm?”

“Did you ever play dress-up, Diana?”

“Excuse me?”

“Sleepovers? Overnight camps? Damn it, Diana, were you ever a *kid*?”

Her mouth fell open, held for a moment, then clicked closed. “What the hell are you talking about?”

He ground his teeth together and flexed his hands into fists. He looked around the room again as he tried to regain his composure, but it only fanned the flames of his fury. Somewhere in the back of his mind he knew there was no logical reason to be this angry. He knew he was acting like a right asshole, but he couldn’t seem to stop it.

“Does it have to stay cold?”

Her face became a mask of confusion. “Does what have to stay cold?”

“The antidote,” he ground out. “The bleeding antidote. Does it have to stay cold?”

“No.”

“Good.”

He grabbed her around the wrist and pulled her around with a gentle tug. “Get it secured.”

She gave him a weary look but nodded before she used extreme care to tuck the bottle into a soft, padded container. Once he was sure she had the liquid packed away to her satisfaction, he took her hand and pulled her out of the building.

“But...wait, the paperwork.... I have to lock—”

He stopped abruptly, keeping his back to her while she secured the door. The second he heard the click of the lock, he was pulling her again, dragging her to the SUV. He was grateful she didn't speak. He wasn't quite sure what would come out of his mouth if she dared to say a word.

He drove with deliberate ease, pushing his temper as far down as he could. The haze of red that played along the edges of his sight never eased, though. He wasn't sure of their destination when he'd slid behind the wheel, but as he made the hard right turn towards his flat their direction seemed natural.

He pulled into an open space and switched off the motor, the sudden stillness allowing the heavy silence to settle around him.

“Millicent Wright?”

Harm turned to look at Diana and found her gazing up at the brick building. “No. This is my place.”

Her head jerked around, her blue eyes wide with questions. It was badly done of him. If he weren't so brassed off he might have told her where they were driving. As it was, he was too busy fighting the desire for violence to be soothing.

She didn't speak when he came around the truck and opened her door, picking the serum up from her lap. She was still silent when he motioned her up the walk and unlocked the security door.

She finally spoke when they reached his door. “I don't understand.”

“You will.”

He opened the door and gave her a gentle push inside, watching as she took in her surroundings. His utilitarian flat was a far cry from her cozy one. There were no books crammed in corners, no age-worn, comfortable couch. He had necessities and little else. It had never bothered him until today, until he'd spent time with Diana. Biting back an annoyed sigh, he unhooked his gun belt, balancing it carefully in one hand as he slid the serum onto the seat of the leather couch.

She eyed his small living space before turning to him. “I thought there'd be camouflage.”

“Don’t joke,” he gritted out.

She cocked her hip and stared at him, pursing her lips. “Okay, I don’t know what your problem is, Harm, but we don’t have time for this.”

“There’s time. We’ll make the bloody time.”

“Harm—”

He brought his mouth down on hers, hard and fast, cutting off her protest with effective precision. He felt her shock, though her soft lips responded to him. When she began to melt into him, he stepped away.

“Diana, be quiet.”

She blinked up at him, her gaze filled with puzzlement. He saw her mouth tremble, as if she wanted to say something, but she tucked her lips together and held the words to herself.

He turned and took two steps away, inhaling deeply as he battled back his fierce rage before he exploded. “Bloody hell, do you have any idea, *any* idea, how off your head...in a small room...no security...by yourself...damn it, Diana...”

He tightened his jaw and spun on his heel, his body reverberating with fury and fear. The fury he could deal with, but the level of fear weighing on his chest was something he wasn’t accustomed to. Worse yet, the fear was mingled with something deep, something he couldn’t quite name. It created a vortex that was coming dangerously close to swallowing him whole.

He slammed his fingers through his hair and tried to keep his voice level. “What the hell do you think would have happened if a Shifter found you out there? What if they had found out what you were doing? Who you are? You could have been killed.”

“But I wasn’t—”

He cut her excuse short with a hard wave of his hand. “All those bloody chemicals around open flames and hacked electricity. The whole damned place could have gone up!”

“It didn’t!” Her temper flared into her face, darkening her cheeks and eyes. “Just where the hell was I supposed to go, Harm? What, do you think I should have walked into a laboratory, announced who I was and taken over a corner spot?”

“You should have come to me.”

“I didn’t know you.”

A part of his mind registered the sensible remark. The other part, the one that was taking control, felt anything but reasonable. “You’re a headcase if you thought setting up shop in a self-storage unit was a brilliant idea.”

Her eyes narrowed as she took a slow, deep breath. “You’re the one with a screw loose, Harm. We have to get to someone who can distribute the antidote. We can hash all of this out later.”

She turned and he knew she was leaving. He couldn’t let her go, not yet, not until she understood. Understood what, he wasn’t sure. He only knew she had to stay. His hand moved so quickly he didn’t know he was reaching for her until his fingers closed around her wrist.

She turned her head and her gaze skimmed down to where he held her. “What are you doing?”

How could he explain something to her he didn’t quite grasp himself? Instead of replying, he pulled her behind him through the living room and into his bedroom. Tossing his weapon belt across the nearby chair, he maneuvered her towards the bed. He didn’t pause as he slipped the handcuffs from his pocket and snapped one end onto Diana’s free wrist and the other onto the post of the wooden headboard.

“What the hell are you doing?”

“I’m making sure you don’t walk out until I’m done.” He gently pushed her back until her bottom bounced down on the mattress.

He studied her, watching for any sign that she might be frightened. No matter how angry he was, he intended to live up to his promise never to scare her. But he didn’t see fear. He saw frustration, confusion and, shimmering beneath it all, concern for him. That more than anything helped to calm his raw nerves.

“I understand that your childhood was...different, and I understand why it had to be. But you’re an adult, and you had to have known that what you were doing was dangerous. Bloody hell, Diana, you had to know that if you’d died...if you’d been killed...” Dark emotions roiled underneath his skin, bubbling in his blood. When she would have interrupted, he held up a hand. “You have to give me the chance to settle down. You have to—”

But nothing was going to ease his tangled feelings, not with the macabre scenes that were playing through his head. He had the sudden urge to touch her, to feel her warm skin underneath his hands, to hear her sigh and moan. To convince himself she was safe and whole and his.

His mouth crashed into hers, devouring, taking, demanding a response. If there had been hesitation, if she had pulled away even a fraction, he might have stopped. But she fell into the kiss, following where he led, clinging to him with her free hand.

He climbed into the bed with her, straddling her hips as he eased her back. He held her mouth with his as their tongues battled in sensual tangles. He wanted more, wanted her to bend to him, wanted to prove to her that he could be trusted, that he was the only one that could make her complete.

He pulled back for a moment and stared down at her, taking in her flushed skin and her swollen lips. When he met her eyes, he held her gaze, asking her silently to trust him, to let him give her everything that was reverberating through his body. The flame of surprise that flared inside of him was only eclipsed by the spark of desire, and he knew he had her.

Leaning over, he pulled his spare set of handcuffs from the top of his side table. He held her eyes with his as he slowly lifted her hand from his shoulder and shackled it to the headboard.

She didn’t protest. Instead she gave him a look that nearly melted his control. He took her mouth again, savoring her taste with hectic swipes of his tongue. His blood was pounding, deafening him as his cock pressed against the zipper of his jeans. The memory

of her tight walls, of the scorching moisture that had engulfed him, constricted his testicles and drove him harder.

His hands skimmed under her shirt, pushing it up, gliding up her ribs. He paused at her breasts, his fingers playing along the slick material of her bra. She wriggled her body, enticing him with her curves as she moved. He cupped her breasts, kneading the delicate flesh, groaning when he felt her nipples harden against his palms.

She bit his bottom lip, hard, and he felt the thrill electrify his nerves. His lips slid from her mouth, following the flow of her blood to the racing pulse just under her jaw. He scraped his teeth along the delicate flesh, pushing into her when her hips jerked upwards.

His hands ripped at her bra, pulling the thin cups down over her soft skin. He wanted more, needed more, and as she bowed into him, he knew she was feeling the same blistering desire. He heard her strain against the metal restraints and reveled in her heated gasp.

“Do you like this, Diana? Do you like me touching you?”

“Y—yes,” she replied breathlessly.

“I’m the only one who can make you feel this. I’m the only one who can give you what you want.”

She let out a short, high gasp in response. He felt the tension tighten the muscles of her stomach and trailed his hand down her trembling torso. She pulled at the cuffs again. Her body shivered and her voice rose on a whimper. The shockingly erotic sound nearly made him come.

He latched onto one protruding nipple, sucking harshly. Her taste here was different from the creamy sweetness of her neck. It was subtle, alluring in texture and scent. And yet it wasn’t enough. He had the terrifying thought that it would never be enough.

He absorbed her warmth with his hands as they wandered down her slick flesh, sliding between her fragile skin and the worn denim of her jeans. Her body writhed underneath his, her rounded curves pressing and pushing into him.

He let go of her only long enough to rip his shirt over his head and toss it aside. He laid over her again and the wild pleasure of her skin against his tore at his control. His fingers dug into her hips as he shoved the hard ridge of his cock against her heated crevice. She pressed her hips up into him, beginning the mock act of sex. Even through her jeans, he could feel her heat.

He didn't want to wait, couldn't wait if his life depended on it. He jerked at her pants, yanking them down quickly as he heard her gasp. Her boots... Her boots were in his way. Growling, he pulled his small military commando knife from the back of his belt, and reached down to cut her shoestrings.

"Have extra.... Later..." he muttered harshly.

With an efficient jerk, he threw her jeans to the ground, her high-cut cotton panties cradled inside the denim. He paused to look down at her, his gaze taking in her breasts that pooled over her bra, the rapid rise and fall of her rib cage and the trembling of her thighs. The springy curls at her apex were sodden with her moisture, her aroma wafting up to tease his senses.

He leaned down and took her mouth again, enjoying the way she attacked him. He let her lead for a moment, then took the power back. Pressing against her shoulders, he eased her away, taking in her heated expression, her flushed cheeks, her swollen lips. He watched the blue irises of her eyes flare, saw the excitement and desire spark and glow. No, he wasn't doing anything she didn't want. The thought that she would let him take control, that she knew he would give her what she wanted, sent throbbing lust through his loins.

His eyes stayed on hers as he watched her sensual struggle. She pulled at the cuffs, as if she wanted to touch him. Her face filled with annoyance, then with a wild passion that made him want to skip preliminaries and slam into her.

He stood and deliberately kicked off his own boots, then peeled off his jeans. He saw her swallow spastically. The scent of her arousal thickened the air. His shaft twitched and he had to bite down his urge to groan.

“I’m going to take you and you’re going to scream for me. I’m going to make you beg me for an orgasm. Do you want that? Do you want me to ride you until you come around me?”

She nodded at him, her features set in stunned excitement.

“No, you have to tell me. If you don’t tell me, I can’t touch you.”

She snaked out her tongue to wet her lips as she took a deep breath. “Yes. Yes, that’s what I want.”

He didn’t need any more encouragement. He eased down on top of her, letting out a long, silent sigh when his skin slid over hers. But he didn’t stay still for long—it was impossible to be still when her flesh was temptingly bare.

He laid his mouth over her nipples, licking and sucking at the hard peaks. He heard the rattle of the handcuffs blend in with her moan, savored the surge of lust that raced down to his heavy cock. Her body moved, her back curving up as she pushed her breasts closer to his mouth.

But her scent was pulling him down, drawing him past her ribs, over her belly button and to her swollen slit. He hovered over her, anticipating her flavor, drawing out her desire in his hesitation. She lifted her hips to him, asking for his touch with more eloquence than any words could have.

“Tell me. Tell me what you want.”

“Your mouth,” she gasped. “Please. Please...”

The pleading in her voice was shocking and enticing, enough so that he reached his tongue out to swipe at her lips. She hissed her pleasure and his shaft jumped in reaction. He moved faster, lapping at the moisture that had gathered along her slit.

Her hips lifted involuntarily, moving with his mouth. He felt her clit harden as he tongued the pulsing nub and he knew she was close. She pushed into him, begging for more, but instead of complying, he slowed his pace and eased back.

She growled in frustration and yanked at the handcuffs. “No...no, please, don’t stop.”

“I want to be inside of you when you come. I want to feel every little ripple.”

Her glazed eyes widened as her mouth formed an amazed O. He slid between her creamy thighs, felt her heat seeping from her engorged slit on to the head of his laden cock. He ran his hands up her legs in long, slow strokes, then lifted them to rest her ankles on his shoulders. She stared at him, her eyes intense, her breathing jagged, as she waited.

He rammed into her, a hard joining that forced a gasp from her and a moan from him. Her walls were inflamed, slick with excitement, scorching with arousal. She held him tightly, the pulsing of her blood pounding against his thick shaft. He gritted his teeth against the need to ravage her, grabbing at his spiraling control when her bottom suddenly lifted and fell.

“You want more, is that it? You want it like this?”

He thrust into her, pulled away, shoved back inside. The noises coming from her throat were hot and heavy, shredding his discipline. He plunged harder, faster, riding her with a wildness he’d never experienced before.

He gripped her hips with hard fingers, shoving in full, solid strokes. She was so slippery his motions were almost frictionless, making the rippling of her inner walls an even more powerful sensation.

Her voice was rising, going higher, sending a raw quake through his body. He gazed down at her, his vision blurred with passion. He saw her hands above her, secured to his bedposts, and felt his testicles tighten. He watched her glazed eyes flash and he saw the pure excitement, the silent, staggering message of need and acceptance. He slammed harder, quickening the pace, and watched her fingers curl against the cuffs. She tilted her head back as her mouth fell open, her entire body quivering underneath him.

“Harm!”

She tightened around him with sudden, devastating effect, squeezing in rhythmic waves. He let go as she orgasmed, growling through his tight throat as his world shrank to one small, glaring point. Then he was exploding, the small point expanding, the edges ragged, until it shattered and seared through his blood.

He wasn't sure how long he held her, absorbing her aftershocks as his body cooled. He quietly undid the handcuffs, rubbing the red marks on her wrists with gentle fingers.

"How do you know what I want without even asking me?"

He smiled at her question, not sure how to reply. If he were honest, he would admit to her that he didn't know. That he simply knew without any prompting. It was a scary idea, and one he didn't want to analyze at the moment.

"I read your body," he told her instead. "And you have a wonderful body to read."

She laughed, the sound muted as she leaned up to give him a tender kiss. "I suppose you read brail."

"I suppose so." He gave her a broad smile before he pulled her into a tight hug.

"I hate to ruin the mood—"

"I know, I know. We have other pressing matters we need to deal with."

When she spoke again, there was hesitation in her voice. "Harm, this is.... After everything..."

He placed a finger across her lips and shook his head. "We'll have time after we see Millicent." He looked out the window and saw that the sun had moved farther across the sky. "If I could I'd stay here in bed with you all night."

"But you can't," she concluded in a quiet voice. She let out a long sigh as she sat up. "I suppose we need to find our clothes. Where exactly did my underwear end up?"

He felt his lips tip into a crooked smile as he watched her crawl across his legs to stare down at the floor. "Somewhere down there. You know, I never finished telling you—"

"Uh-uh." She turned to give him a mischievous grin. "Someone just told me we were running out of time. And that someone was right."

Shaking his head, Harm pushed at her bottom, dislodging his legs from underneath her. Once he'd introduced her to Millicent and had her in a secure place, he was going to give her hell. But for now, he was too placid from their encounter to push an argument.

Reaching out, he smacked her bare bottom. "I'll go get my extra set of bootlaces for you."

She sent him a quizzical look and he smiled back.

“I wasn’t patient enough to untie your boots, so I cut the strings.”

He left the room chuckling, her gasp echoing behind him.

Chapter Five

Harm kept his eyes on her as he slid the door to the warehouse open. She looked completely satiated, and much too pleased with herself. Her eyes were bright, sparkling with fulfillment. He couldn't deny the deep fissure of pure male satisfaction that warmed his ego. His mind paused at the surprising feeling. He'd never had such a strong reaction to a woman before. It was hard to believe that he'd met her less than twenty-four hours before. Harder still to imagine what would have happened, what he would be feeling, if he hadn't been patrolling that particular area yesterday. Or what would have happened if Diana had continued to work on her own.

The memory of the small storage unit stoked the flame of anger that had been carefully banked. But what truly shook him was the underlying coating of terror. Terror for her. Terror for the situation she'd deliberately created.

"Bloody hell, Diana, don't you know what could have happened to you while you were working in that...that...hazard zone you call a lab?"

She gave a little sigh, as if she had been waiting for a lecture and had no patience for it. Slowly, she studied the small warehouse, refusing to look at him. "But nothing did."

He bit back a growl and pulled her against him, his arm snaking underneath her backpack. "You were working with chemicals and flames in a poorly ventilated rental shed."

"I believe you pointed that out before." Her gaze lighted on him for a moment before flitting away. "But I found the cure."

"You could have been killed."

"But I wasn't. Harm, you have to—"

"Mornin' Harman."

His head whipped around at the sound of the new voice. Jack was sauntering from around the stand of lockers, toweling his dark hair dry. He watched as the other man eyed Diana and he deliberately tightened his hold on her.

“A tad early for you, isn’t it, Harm?”

Jack sent him a megawatt smile, the one that usually had women tripping over themselves. It had been amusing before, but today it was downright irritating.

Harm tried not to sneer when he replied. “Taking showers at work now? Did you forget to pay your bill and have your water service turned off?”

Jack chuckled and shook his head. “Got in late, fell asleep on the bench. Millicent kicked me awake and told me to go shower—said I was ripe.”

“Is she in her office?”

Jack’s gaze slid over Diana again, but once his eyes were back on him, Harm glared a warning. “Yeah, she’s closeted with some posh bloke, been in there for a bit. Not sure who it is. I only managed to see his back for a split second before he slammed the door closed. I was about to go for some—”

“Takeaway,” Harm concluded. “Why don’t you pick up some extra?”

The other man’s eyebrows shot up and he gave a careless shrug. “Sod off, Jack, but be sure to bring me a fry-up when you crawl back,” Jack said in a jovial imitation of Harm’s voice.

He tossed his towel in the general direction of the lockers and dug the keys from his pocket. Without another word, Jack meandered out the front door, closing it quietly behind him.

Diana moved away and Harm barely checked the impulse to drag her back. “I guess I have to wait a little longer to meet your Millicent Wright.”

“Hopefully not too—”

The door across the way opened, the small glass pane rattling with momentum. Harm could only stare at the gray-haired man in the long dark coat who exited. He hadn’t seen another vehicle outside, and he certainly hadn’t seen any bodyguards. Wherever the car and men had been hidden, it had been done well.

“What was Prime Minister Clarke doing here?” Diana whispered.

“Probably brassing Millicent off,” he whispered back. “Come on.”

He took her hand and led her across the room, giving a perfunctory knock before stepping into the office. Millicent looked up, her dark skin flushed, her black eyes sparking. For all of that, she was still coolly presented in her skirt suit and coiled hair.

“Harman, I didn’t think you’d be in until later.”

He could hear the fire in her voice and was sorry for it. “We needed to talk to you.”

She scanned Diana with annoyed eyes but her delicate features remained impassive. “First I have to deal with that...eejit coming in here with his brilliant suggestions about how this unit should be run. Now you break the standards and bring in a civilian. I know you don’t always play by the rules, but I didn’t think you’d gone gormless.”

“She’s not a civilian. Millicent Wright, meet Diana Allen, Doctor Gerry Allen’s daughter.”

That had her attention. She stared at Diana again, this time with raging curiosity in her eyes.

“I thought you were a boy.”

Diana gave a wry chuckle. “I get that a lot.”

Millicent’s gaze swung back to him, her lips pursed in consternation. “Where did you find her? How long has she been in London? Is she willing to cooperate?”

“Could you not talk about me like I wasn’t in the room?”

Millicent was quiet for a moment before she inclined her head. “Where have you been?”

“I’ve traveled, but a few years ago decided to settle in London. I figured I’d be harder to find in plain sight. And before you ask, no, I’m not a walking experiment. My father wouldn’t have done that.”

Harm touched her arm, silently interrupting her. He knew she didn’t want to be rushed, but he had a gut feeling that they were running out of time. There was nothing for it but to get down to brass tacks and admit the whole truth, for all their sakes.

“Diana’s continued what the doctor started. She has the cure.”

Millicent's dark eyes went wide as she stared at him with speculation. "You're joking. Scientists have been working for years—"

"But they haven't had Dr. Allen's notes or his compounds. Diana has. She was also raised in his lab."

Millicent stood unmoving as she put two and two together. "Why haven't you come forwards before now?"

"My father didn't want his work destroyed, and frankly I didn't want to be buried under the jail because I knew too much."

"Then there are the Shifters," Harm reminded them both. "They'd kill anyone who could change them."

"Do you have the antidote with you?"

Diana gave a slow nod before sliding the backpack from her shoulder with care. "I'm not giving it to you."

"What?" Millicent leaned across the oak desk, her face set in steely lines. "After what your father devoted his life to, after what we've all had to live through, you're refusing to help?"

Diana pulled the black pack closer to her chest. "I didn't say that. I might have to trust you with my identity, but that doesn't mean I'm trusting anyone but me with this serum."

"But how do we even know that it will work?"

"Because *I* know it will."

"And how do you know that, Ms. Allen?"

Diana lifted her eyebrow and narrowed her gaze. "Let's just say that the red vials in the back of my refrigerator aren't ketchup."

Harm felt the hackles on his neck rise as he turned to her. "Bloody hell woman, don't you ever think about your safety?"

"I didn't exactly tackle any wolves to stick them. But being the delivery person for a research lab does have its...perks."

He gave a disgusted sigh and shook his head. Diana must have made her father daft when she was a child.

“We need that compound,” Millicent said, her tone stiff and implacable.

“You have it, right here in my hands. It’s perfect. It won’t affect Partial or untainted humans. It shouldn’t kill the Shifters, either, just destroy the mutation.” Diana’s body straightened and he could feel the waves of determination pouring from her. “We need each other, Ms. Wright. I have the cure but need a way to seed it over the city. You have the means to do that, but need the cure.”

Harm waited, knowing how caustic his supervisor could be when she was angry. But instead of the smooth set down he’d expected he was surprised when Millicent’s mouth trembled and lifted.

“I like you, Ms. Allen. I probably shouldn’t, but I do.” She let out a long breath and sank down in her abused leather chair. “You have an excellent point. Now, how do you plan to make this happen?”

“I assumed you’d want this done just as quickly and efficiently as I do. I’m ready to go up right now.”

Harm’s brow knitted as he took a small step towards Diana. “This is dangerous, you have to know that. I can go up and seed—”

She gave him a soft smile and touched his scarred cheek with her fingertips. “I *have* to do it, Harm. My dad started this, and it’s up to me to finish it.”

“Ms. Allen, I agree with you,” Millicent put in. “Let’s make a deal, shall we? You give me a sample of the serum for my people to test today, and if it’s everything you say it is, then we can replicate—”

“There’s more than enough of the antidote with me,” Diana interrupted. “It’s potent. You’d only need a few drops mixed with water for it to be effective. With the amount I have in this backpack, you can cure the whole of England. I’ve also included the notes and the actual written formula for distribution to other countries. A few quick faxes and other governments can have this replicated in a day.”

Millicent's face was flush with excitement. The anticipation was rolling off of her in bright, almost tangible currents. "All of England?"

"Even the remote hamlets, though the bulk of the Shifters have moved to the cities."

"The cure is that easy to recreate?"

Diana's mouth turned up in a self-deprecating smile. "It's very easy, which is why no one has figured it out before now. Simplicity wasn't something any scientist anticipated when it came to the Shifters."

The air in the room was still for a moment as his supervisor considered the other woman. "All right, I can have a small amount couriered over to the lab, have it analyzed... You're sure it will only affect the full Shifters?"

"Yes. I realize your trusting me is hard, especially since you don't know me. But trust goes both ways, Ms. Wright."

She slit her eyes, but Millicent nodded her head. "Agreed. We'll have our scientists test it on the blood they have, and if it works—if it works, you'll go up tonight, Ms. Allen."

Harm whipped around to stare at Millicent. "Wait, don't you have to get special permission, fill out forms?"

She tilted her head as her gaze shrewdly searched his face. "No. By now I thought you'd figured that out."

"But she's a civilian."

"Not anymore, she isn't. Ms. Allen has just been recruited."

"Millicent, you can't do this!"

"I can, and I have. Ms. Allen would you please give Harman and me a moment?"

He turned to give Diana what he hoped was an encouraging look. She finally ducked her head and slipped out of the office, but he was sure she wouldn't move far from the door.

"Harm, you can't let your personal feelings interfere with the job. And don't feed me tosh, I'm not blind. This girl is important to what we've been working towards. We need her."

He knew she was right, but he couldn't stop the inexplicable need to protect Diana any more than he could explain it. She was *his*, and he wouldn't let anything happen to her.

"I'll go up with her."

Millicent lifted one arched eyebrow. "I suppose you'll hijack the plane if I say no. All right, you'll go up with her and Jack. But I want you back down here just as soon as she's done. I know she says that it won't hurt Shifters, but there's no way to know exactly how they'll react to the agent."

"I'll be back as soon as we're done and Diana is safe."

She shook her head as she let out a long breath. "I never thought I'd see it. Harman Asher is arse over tit for a woman."

He didn't have the energy to argue. "I don't know how it happened."

"You don't know? Your genes are triggered. On a base level you know your mate. I'm only gobsmacked it's taken you this long to sniff her out."

He couldn't stop his smile as an electric thrill shimmered along his bones. Something inside clicked, lighting corners he'd forgotten were there. It all made sense now, all of his reactions, his driving need to have her, to put his mark on her. His mate...

"You'd better go prepare Ms. Allen for her trip. And Harm, I expect all three of you back safe in this warehouse tonight."

Chapter Six

Diana stood in the tiled shower cube, her head filled with possibilities. Tonight everything she'd worked for would come to fruition. She should be ecstatic, but something inside of her felt...hollow. Once this was done, what would she do? She was too poor to retire and too young to give up her dreams. But her entire life had been focused on her father's work. She'd let everything else fall by the wayside without even a whimper of complaint.

Once the serum was released over the city and the rest of the world followed suit, everything would change. Almost anything would be possible. It was a terrifying prospect.

She was sticking her soapy head under the water when she heard the shower curtain being pulled aside. There was no need for her to open her eyes. He had known she needed comfort and had come to give it.

He ran his strong hands over her hair, rinsing the shampoo out with gentle caresses. She took a small, deliberate step back, bringing her bottom flush with his hard member, and heard him suck in a deep breath. He brushed his lips along the column of her throat then across her shoulder, sending tremors of delight along her nerve endings. Her head fell back against his chest, his hard muscles a stark contrast to the soft water. He nuzzled her ear, his tongue softly stroking her lobe.

"You are so beautiful, Diana. I can't stop touching you." The deep rasp of his voice was a potent aphrodisiac.

"I don't want you to stop."

He groaned, a deep sound that resonated in his chest. He skimmed his palms over her ribs, traveling up her moist skin as she arched back and wrapped her arms around his neck. Splaying his fingers over the tender skin of her breasts, he carefully grasped them

in his firm hands. She dug her nails into his hair, urging him to move, desperate for the erotic feelings he created. She was rewarded when he pinched her erect nipples between his knuckles, pulling slowly against her water-slick flesh. Heat speared down her body, gathering in a tight ball at her core.

“Harm...”

“Soon, I promise.”

He gave her shoulder a small bite, the thrill of it wild and hot. There was no thought now as he smoothed his hands down her torso, his rough skin scraping her sensitized flesh. She felt moisture slicking her throbbing folds and was desperate for him to relieve her almost intolerable need. Then he was there, cupping her in his hot palm. She wriggled, her body begging for more, but he only squeezed and kneaded her.

A small gasp of longing rolled from her lips and he chuckled against her shoulder. A moment later, he slipped one thick finger between her walls, slowly pressing up and inside. She groaned, her hips giving an involuntary jerk. He encouraged her with measured movements and slipped in another finger to stretch her farther. She pushed into his hand, filling herself with his fingers while the feel of his rigid cock against her backside drove her mad. She wanted him, wanted everything he could give her, and wanted to give back to him. And in the giving, draw out her own desire.

She slipped out of his arms and turned, laying her mouth against his. Nipping his bottom lip, she pressed her curves into him, cradling his shaft against her warm flesh. His hold tightened and she could feel his body shake against hers.

“I haven’t had a chance to taste you.”

His eyes blazed wildly as he squeezed her hips with unsteady hands. She didn’t wait for a verbal response, but fell to her knees. The heated water rained down on her back like an erotic benediction. Smiling with her sexual power, she wrapped tender fingers around Harm’s thick cock. It was hot and long, the texture like velvet over titanium. She stroked his erect flesh, mesmerized by the feel, absorbed in watching his shaft jump and throb against her palm.

She lowered her head with unhurried movements, her eyes on his cock as she came down. She finally brought him between her lips, gently licking at his hardened muscle. She pulled him in, sliding down until she had engulfed him. She held him there for a moment, listening to his rough growl of pleasure. She peeked up at him and saw that he was watching her with scorching eyes. Her heart tripped and her swollen center began to pulsate in painful vibrations.

Driven by her desire, she let her inhibitions drift away and devoured him. The sounds he made, the taste of his cock against her tongue, the shudders that racked his body, all drove her on. There was pleasure for both of them, she thought, and set a deep, steady rhythm that ripped ragged sounds of passion from her throat.

She was enjoying herself, her attention absorbed in what she was doing, forgetting where she was. There was a tugging in her hair, an annoying pull that didn't register at first. The haze cleared for a moment and she realized it was Harm dragging her. She readily let go of her pleasurable concentration, allowing him to take the lead, however momentary.

"I want to be inside you when I come," he told her.

He didn't give her time to answer. He captured her mouth with his, shoving his tongue past her lips to mate and tangle with hers. He turned them, bringing her back against the heat-moistened tile of the shower stall. He slipped his hands down to her bottom and grasped her. He lifted her with a quick movement and she went with him, instinctively wrapping her legs around his waist.

He slid between her walls in one fluid movement, filling her so completely that she gasped with it. He ravaged her mouth, kissing her into mindlessness as he began moving. She lifted and fell, lifted and fell, keeping the tempo that he set. It was a frantic thing, this mating, each move done without thought or planning. He dipped her hips, his shaft stroking just the right spot, and she felt her fragile reality splinter. Her orgasm rolled just underneath her skin, heightening each sensation and making her heavy with need.

His hips began to rock with a faster, mind-shattering pace, slamming into her before drawing away. Her release danced along the edge, teasing her before pirouetting out of

reach. But Harm wouldn't be denied and, even after his short time with her, he knew how to get what he wanted.

Leaning down, he sucked one hard nipple into his mouth. The world contracted to a minute speck of magical light, the warm rays of it heating her. Then everything exploded, sending shards of brilliant light cascading down behind her closed lids. Her body curled and bowed as her orgasm rocked through her, her fingers digging into Harm's shoulders as he buried his face in her neck and cried out his release.

She stood for endless moments, floating back to reality. When her thighs gave a shaky tremble, he unwound her legs from his waist, careful with her languid limbs while her feet slid down to the tiled floor.

She held on to him, letting the warm water coat her sweaty skin as she laid openmouthed kisses across his chest. "My God, you are the most incredible man."

"I aim to please," he teased in a badly executed American accent.

"I can't believe you slipped in here. What if someone had heard us?"

He leaned away from her, pushing her wet hair out of her eyes with gentle fingers. "That's not a problem. We're alone for now. Jack won't be back for another half hour, and Millicent is busy on the phone. The others won't be in until after Millicent contacts them."

"Hmm." She gave a small sigh and cuddled against his chest. "I suppose you came in to warn me about what could happen when we go up tonight."

"But it wouldn't do any good. You are one damn stubborn woman. I can't help but wonder if your father had this much trouble with your mother." She could hear the humor in his voice and smiled as he continued. "Still, I'll be going up with you and Jack, just in case."

"And I suppose I could argue with you about that, but you're just as stubborn as I am."

"Maybe more." He stroked her back, and though his strokes were smooth and delicate, she could hear the steel underlying his next words. "Diana, once this is all over, I want you to move in with me."

She should have been shocked, or afraid or amused. She should have been any number of things, but what she felt was a strange sense of completeness. His tone told her he was expecting some sort of a fight, but it was one that he wasn't going to get from her. Knowing he was prepared to argue with her just to get what he wanted—just to get her—brought a spurt of joy that bled into her words.

“Okay, but you'd better have room for all my books.”

She smiled against his chest as she waited in the stunned silence. Then he caressed her with hands so tender that she thought she might weep with it.

“We'll be good, I swear. I want this. I want...I want you.”

She leaned back and stared up at the incredible man who was holding her. In less than twenty-four hours he'd changed her life, and something inside was telling her that the change was exactly what she'd been waiting for.

“I want you, too. I want everything you do, everything we'll do together, and I know it'll be good.”

He gave her a crooked smile before dropping a soft kiss on her lips. “We'd better get moving, Ms. Allen. Millicent might get suspicious if we aren't dressed by the time the lab calls with their results.”

Diana grinned, reveling in the hope that was blooming inside her chest. “Suspicious? I think she'd nail both our asses to the wall for fraternizing on government property.”

Harm chuckled in appreciation. “Then we definitely ought to get dressed. You don't want to see Millicent Wright on the verbal warpath. She's scary.”

Jack slipped into Millicent's office, his gaze raking over the impeccable woman behind the neat desk. Her eyes found his immediately, and she gave him an absent nod as she continued her phone conversation.

“Yes, sir. Of course we intend to be careful. No, I do not think we need any more assistance. Yes, we will contact you as soon as we've released the serum.” She paused

and her dark eyes narrowed. "I would prefer not to be present when you speak to the press, sir. Thank you. Of course. Yes. I will, sir. Goodbye."

She sighed quietly and Jack couldn't help but chuckle. He put a warm Styrofoam cup of coffee on her desk as a peace offering while he slid into the chair across from her.

"The Prime Minister?" he asked with a smile.

Millicent rolled her eyes and nodded. "Damn nob, doesn't know when to stop. I swear the man campaigns in his sleep."

"You wanted to see me. I'm assuming it's about the woman." Jack tilted his head towards the door and lifted his eyebrows.

She watched him speculatively as she took a sip of coffee. "You are much too observant, but since this will involve you, I suppose I should tell you you're right."

"Do I need a bevvy for this?"

A small smile played along her pretty lips. "No, you'll need to be sober." She paused and stared at him, as if she was impressing how important this was. "We have the cure."

Complete shock held him to his seat. He could hear his heart roaring in his ears. "Gobshite."

"That young lady is Diana Allen."

"That totty is...? But I thought..."

"She was a boy, yes, so did we all." Millicent stood, leaving her coffee behind as she went to stare out her grungy window. "She's been working on a serum for Shifters. So far our scientists have confirmed that it works brilliantly."

"Fuck me," he managed, dazed.

"We should have conclusive results in the next hour." She turned her gaze back to him and he could see what others rarely did. Concern, hope, fear and the weight of a world she had to protect. "We can stop the madness."

Jack stood slowly, his legs slightly shaky as he moved towards her. "Mills, are they positive?"

She nodded slowly and he could see her outer shell crumbling. "Close enough, and I believe Ms. Allen. All we'll need to do is release it over the city. Once we've proven it's

effective the other countries will fall in line. I've already cleared the way for you to take Harm and Diana up tonight, just before sunset."

"When the Shifters are coming out."

"It will be the most effective..."

He waited as she stood quietly, giving her a moment to gather her thoughts. When he saw the first tear he couldn't stop himself. He pulled her into his arms and cradled her against his chest.

"This is what we've been waiting for, Mills."

She nodded against his chest but didn't pull away. "You shouldn't be seeing me like this. I'm your superior."

"You're also my friend. The things we've been through together, the things I've watched you deal with..."

She gave a shuddering sigh and took a step back, giving him a wobbly smile. "But tears, for God's sake. I don't care for anyone seeing me this afraid."

"Relieved, more like. Look, Mills, we haven't exactly been sitting on our arses watching the telly for the past few years. We both know this could mean a new world. No more hunting the baddies at night. No more hush-hush funerals. Bloody hell, we could both be wasters for a year if we wanted, nipping out to the pub for a pint or two every night instead of tracking Shifters."

She smoothed her hair back, a sure sign she was gaining that rigid control of hers again. "Just don't expect me to come get you out of a fix if you're caught for public drunkenness."

He gave her a mockingly innocent look and pressed his palm against his heart. "Me? Public drunkenness?"

He watched her lips twitch a moment before she waved him out of her office. "Go, get ready to fly you barmpot."

Pleased to see Millicent amused, Jack gave a quick nod and headed for the door, the twin thrills of freedom and relief riding his heels.

Chapter Seven

Harm gazed out at the airfield as the constant drizzle beaded on his shirt. The filtered light of the sun was slowly ebbing away as nighttime began to close in. They'd have to take off soon to spray the red-streaked skies, the closer to when the Shifters came out the better. Millicent had been pleased that the serum, dubbed Alupenite, was what Diana had promised. She'd wanted more time to study it, but they all knew that the gene was mutating, and Alupenite might become obsolete sooner rather than later.

"Beautiful day to fly," Jack said from beside him.

Harm smiled and buffeted the other man on his shoulder. "Any day's a good day to fly according to you. You're happier with your arse in the pilot seat than you are shagging in a bed."

"Ah, but shagging in the pilot seat...absolute perfection."

Diana gave a quick laugh as she huddled closer into her black raincoat. "You've had sex in the pilot's chair?"

"And you haven't?" Jack gave her a sly wink before striding towards the large airplane. "Speaking of a pilot's seat, I'm going to kick the interloper out. The plane should be warmed up by now."

Harm studied the woman beside him, noting the tight skin over her cheekbones and her deliberately slow breathing. "You're going to be all right, love."

She turned her eyes to him and he could see the anxiety in their blue depths. "I know. It's just...this is it. This is what my father worked for. This is what *I've* been working for."

"You still have this unit. Once Millicent brings you in, you have a home for life."

"I'm not worried about my career."

He reached over and ran a comforting hand down her back. “Everything else will fall into place. You’ll have time to figure out what you want, without having to be afraid of who’s around you.”

Her lips tipped up as she laid her palm over his heart. “And I’ll have you.”

“You’ll definitely have me,” he assured her. “Come on, let’s—”

His hackles rose as a sudden chill trickled down his spine. Quickly, he pushed Diana behind his back and turned to look towards the hanger. He saw the movements in the shadows just before the wolves appeared, their fangs bared as feral growls filled the air. There were twelve, a full pack.

“Get on the plane.”

He felt Diana stiffen behind him. “Harm—”

“Do what you have to do, and I’ll be here when you come back.”

“Is this a bad time to tell you I think I love you?”

Her words were soft but packed enough punch to take his breath. “You can say that any time you want, sweetheart. Now, get on the plane.”

He felt her fingers brush the small of his back before he heard her booted feet smack against the asphalt. Once he was sure she was safely inside, the world disappeared, narrowing down to the Shifters. He listened, his hearing intent as he made sure there weren’t others hiding.

The first few moved with quick grace, bounding at him in tandem as he whipped his guns up. He fired in rapid succession, grim but satisfied as four fell to the ground. Two more charged and Harm let out another volley of bullets. One fell immediately, while the other dodged and continued coming. Harm fired twice more, this time hitting the Shifter’s chest and head.

The other six were more cautious as they advanced, the fur on their backs raised and their ears pinned back. There was no time to reload. They would attack the minute he dropped the empty clip. He abandoned the guns and spread his fingers, loosening the tendons as he waited for the next assault.

The attack came from the left side. He heard a body moving through the air before he saw it. Reaching out with his hand, he grabbed the scruff of the wolf's neck and twisted the animal around. Harm slammed the animal down, clearing his grip just in time to catch the snapping muzzle of another Shifter. He used the momentum of the wolf's body and continued its wide arch, spinning the opposite way. He heard the Shifter's neck snap and dropped the body, stepping forwards to keep his balance.

The other wolves divided slowly, creating a semicircle around him. His gaze focused on the alpha in the middle, watching its muscles twitch. He didn't flinch when he felt a wolf tackle his back. He jerked one of the animal's forelegs over, dislodging the fangs from his shoulder as he flipped the Shifter around. The moment the wolf was on the ground Harm brought his booted foot down on the animal's head, listening as the skull splintered.

The remaining wolves sent up loud howls, but the noise was lost to Harm. He kept his attention focused and ready for the next attack. He didn't have to wait long.

A Shifter pounced from the right, snaring his arm in his teeth. Harm pivoted sideways and clamped the wolf's jaw closed, securing him so he couldn't let go or move. When he felt a new set of hard fangs sink into his leg, the frigid pain disappeared underneath his adrenaline. He glanced down and found another Shifter clinging to him. Harm began to swing one into the other, stopping short when the last wolf sprang towards him.

He changed tactics quickly, dropping down on his free leg and ripping the Shifter from his arm. He swung the snarling animal up just in time for the alpha's teeth to tear at the Shifter's belly.

He shoved the dead wolf away and punched the animal clamped to his leg. Caught off-guard, the Shifter yelped and let go, giving Harm the chance to grab his tail and whip him through the air. He flung the wolf's body at the charging alpha, listening to the slick thunk of the animal's head as it smacked into the hard ground.

Then there was only the white wolf, whose dark eyes were narrow and intent. Straightening his body, Harm returned the alpha's gaze. The moment the Shifter's

muscles tensed, Harm was ready. As the animal launched itself at Harm's chest, Harm dropped to his knees and leaned backward, his palms smacking the hard tarmac. In that split second, he felt it, the hard, serrated stone underneath his right hand. He yanked it up, holding it steady as it sliced through the wolf's belly in a jagged line. He heard the alpha fall, heard its harsh breathing and knew he had dealt a decisive blow.

Slowly, Harm stood and walked to where the alpha lay, stepping over dead bodies as he tracked his own blood across the black asphalt. He looked down at the wolf and wasn't surprised to see the animal shifting back into a man. This was what they'd known was coming. This was proof that the Shifter's were advancing to change at will.

"You think you've stopped us?"

The voice was sticky with blood and bile, a sure sign that he wasn't going to be able to heal.

"I've killed your pack."

The blond haired man gave a vicious smile and laughed. "There's still one more."

Harm wheeled around, expecting another attack, but nothing was there. Again the Shifter laughed, the sound catching on a wet cough.

"He's not here, Partial."

He turned back and glared down at the man. "Where is he?"

The alpha's eyes moved up to stare at the sky...to stare where the airplane had gone. A loud, rending growl ripped through the air. Harm didn't realize he was making the noise until his hand was inside the Shifter's throat, his fingers hot and wet as he gripped the other man's windpipe. Instinctually he yanked, pulling the inside of the Shifter's throat out through the slick flesh. His fist was still holding the gory organs as he stared up into the horizon.

Diana and Jack were in the air, alone with a Shifter. He took a precious few seconds to stifle the need to scream, then turned to run back inside in hope of radioing the two to warn them.

Diana climbed into the airplane and hit the large red button to close the ramp. She didn't dare look back as she rushed towards the front. Harm would be fine. He had to be. Her mind automatically began working as her father had taught her. She scanned the cargo area, noted the fixed tanks that held the Alupenite mixtures, measured the space and mapped out the placing of straps and controls. It was a comforting process that soothed her.

Taking a deep breath, she moved the rest of the way into the cockpit, hurrying to climb the two steps that brought her flush with Jack.

"There was a pack on the tarmac. Harm...Harm said to take off."

He gave a quick nod of acknowledgement. "Well, come on in, darling, and keep me company."

She stopped long enough to stare at the dark haired man in amazement. "Harm's trying to keep Shifters off of us, and you feel the need to be glib?"

He didn't look at her as he began taxing down the runway. "It's what gets us all through the night, Diana. Either you laugh or you go daft. Harm is good, very good. He's one I don't worry about."

Harm... She tried not to picture what was happening out on the tarmac. He would be fine. She kept repeating that like a mantra as the engines roared dully and they lifted into the air.

"We should be in place soon." Jack turned, giving her a surprisingly solemn look. "Are you ready for your destiny?"

"Is anyone ever really ready?"

He didn't reply, only lifted an eyebrow then turned back to maneuver the plane through the gray clouds. "We might hit some turbulence. Just stay buckled in."

She was cinching the belt when she heard a distinct metal click. Instinctively, Diana unfastened her strap and tensed her muscles for attack.

"I can't let you do this."

She didn't bother to see who was behind them. She lunged up, swinging her leg in a round kick. Her heel connected with the gun just as the man fired, sending it skittering

underneath Jack's feet. Diana didn't pause as she continued her turn, slamming the door shut and locking it against their attacker. It only took a few seconds for her to register the sounds of alarms and the caustic smell of electrical fires.

"Jack?"

"Bloody damn nob! Son of a bitch!" He was holding his left shoulder, blood seeping through his tightly closed fingers. "Bleeding dickhead PM Clarke!"

"Jack...what?" She stared at him, fighting back shock.

"Clarke! Clarke just shot me!" The plane gave a sharp jerk and he hurried to steady it. "I'll pop his head right off!"

"No, you won't." She took her coat off and pressed it against his wound. "I'm a smart woman, Jack, but I can't fly a plane. We came up here to distribute the damn Alupenite, and that's what we're going to do."

A large crash banged the door, first one and then another. It was a hard pounding that shook the metal around them.

"There's no help for it." Diana reached down and jerked Jack's gun from his belt. "He's back there with the tanks. There's no telling what he might do. I'm going to have to deal with him."

He stared at her for a moment, looking as if he wanted to argue. Finally, he let out a long sigh. "If you get hurt Harm is going to have my arse. I'm very attached to my arse, Diana."

"I'll keep that in mind."

She took a fortifying breath, focusing on what she had to do. There was no way around a confrontation. They couldn't risk a slip-up now that they were this close.

Aiming at the door, she waited until there was another bang against the metal. The moment he hit she squeezed off a round. Silence hung for an endless moment and she had a quick spurt of hope that she'd incapacitated him. She opened the door inch by slow inch, searching for a dead or injured body. She was surprised to find that the cargo area seemed empty.

Easing out, she held the gun in a secure grip, sweeping the space before closing the cockpit door. He had to be here, he couldn't have just disappeared.

That's when she heard it, the faint growl from above her. He was on the damn ceiling. She ran forwards, but it was too late. His feet smacked her, shoving her hard enough to bring her to her knees and send the gun dancing across the metal floor. She jumped up, whirled around to look at him and swallowed a gasp of disbelief.

He was a man...but he wasn't. His facial features were still human-like, but were harsher and extended. The green irises of his eyes were expanded, his pupils bright black. Good Lord, he'd managed to hold himself in between. Even if she shot him, she doubted the wolfsbane would have any effect. She'd have to be precise and place the bullets where they'd do the most damage.

"You seem surprised to see me," he said with a sharp grin.

She balanced herself against the vibrations of the plane, taking care to hold her position steady. She was ready when he pounced, quickly pushing back against his heavy weight. She felt his fingers tear at her shirt and knew that he'd ripped her skin. Her knee came up hard and fast, but he twisted and her blow landed on the inside of his thigh instead of his balls.

He shoved her back, banging her head against the metal. Her ears were still ringing when he lunged again. She crouched and rolled away, heard him smack against the wall and hoped he was injured. Unsure if he was stunned, she jumped back to her feet, her vision clearing from the blow to her head.

She saw Clarke positioned like a marathon runner at the starting line, his gaze on her. He charged with deft speed and she barely had enough time to shift to the right. She felt his fingers pull the flesh from her ribs and gasped.

"Sweet blood."

She turned to see him lick the red liquid from his knuckles and sneer. The muscles in her legs bunched and coiled as she leapt across to kick him in his jaw. He twisted backward, his thick body spinning for a moment. She saw an opening and didn't hesitate,

switching targets to immediately kick his knee and knock his solid leg out from under him.

He hit the metal floor with a resounding thwack, but bounded up in one efficient move. Diana's eyes scanned the cargo area, her gaze finally landing on the gun that was only a few feet away. Her mind raced frantically as she tried to create a new plan. She needed a distraction, something that would give her the few seconds she needed to reach the weapon.

"Why are you doing this?" she asked, edging towards the gun.

He gave a low chuckle as he wiped the back of his hand across his broken lip. "Only someone naive would ask that. Power, you daft girl. The power to exploit, to blackmail, to keep people in check. Do you think I could have become prime minister without a few broken bodies left in my wake? And I'm not about to give my position up now, not when I'm about to declare martial law. I can't have you taking my God and government-given power. Besides, if there aren't any Shifters, there wouldn't be any reason for me to take complete control of this little island, now would there?"

"You're insane."

"I'm practical."

She lunged for the weapon but his reflexes were much faster. He grabbed the back of her neck and flung her away, sending her to other side of the cargo area. She hit the floor and her bones jarred with pain, the jolt dazing her for a moment. She struggled to her feet, thinking for a next move.

The plane went into a sudden dip, the drastic loss of altitude and resulting hard shiver of the metallic body sending both of them down. Diana forced her mind not to panic as she remembered everything she'd seen when she'd stepped onto the plane. The ramp control...it was directly above her.

With a few quick twists Diana wrapped her left arm in a sturdy cargo strap and smacked the red button with her free hand. The ramp door began its gradual descent, depressurizing the bay for a few crucial moments. The wind was sucking her body, pulling her down, but the strap held her in place. She watched as Clarke crouched low,

his feet holding steady against the vicious gust. He took one cumbersome step forwards, then another, and she knew that she might be in trouble.

There was a hard bump against the aluminum shell, then the plane pitched nose down. Clarke lost his balance as she held onto the strap with a death grip, sending up a silent prayer for intercession. Then, like a miracle, the gun slid along her thigh. She grabbed it, lifted it and aimed the barrel directly at Clarke's chest. She fired and the impact sent him back along the ramp. She pulled the trigger again, again, again, each time forcing him closer to the edge of the ramp. She gritted her teeth when she saw his heels hit the bottom of the door. She pulled the trigger one last time... *Click*.

The sound was like the ricochet of a cannon shot. She was out of bullets and almost out of time as the air pressure equalized inside the cargo bay. Her mind whirled with images of the area, images that showed her only one possibility.

Clarke's voice carried loudly over the wail of the wind. "You didn't really think you could beat me, did you, little girl? You don't have enough fire in your belly to murder someone."

She reached up and grabbed the innocuous object fastened just below the controls. "Funny you should say fire."

She hurled the red extinguisher at Clarke, watching as the blunt end smacked him cleanly in the chest. It was just enough to send him over the edge and hurtling through the air. She stared at the empty ramp, relief pouring through her as her heart hammered in wild, staccato beats. It was too bad she wouldn't be able to watch Clarke hit the earth below.

With a tired sigh, Diana closed the ramp again, and in the sudden stillness heard the hiss of the Alupenite being deployed. Laying her aching head back with infinite care, she closed her eyes and let the sound drown out the throbbing pain of her body.

Epilogue

Diana stood in the bedroom she shared with Harm and stared at herself in the cheval mirror. She was shocked by the elegant person who gazed back. Millicent's image appeared behind her, her classical features lit with a smile.

"You look smashing, Diana."

She grinned back in the mirror and ran her hands down the cool white satin of her strapless gown. "I'm still having trouble believing all of this."

The older woman eased up to adjust one of the miniature white roses that adorned Diana's hair. "What's so hard to believe? That Harman loves you? That you'll be the first bride to have a nighttime wedding in nearly thirty years? That you're working in an elite government experimental lab? Or that your bruises have finally faded?"

"All of it, I suppose." She bit her bottom lip and turned, the scalloped edges of her dress swishing around her toes. "I can't believe it's only been three months, and here I am getting married."

Millicent lifted one graceful eyebrow as she laid comforting hands on her shoulders. "Harm knew you were supposed to be his straight off, which didn't surprise me. But I think you knew he was meant to be yours, too."

She felt her lips tip up as a full smile spread across her mouth. "Maybe I did."

"I'm shocked he's waited this long to put a ring on your finger. Speaking of which, he's already rung four times. He's getting impatient."

"Then I guess we'd better go. It wouldn't do to keep the new S.A.S. commander waiting. I could have an invasion force battering down my door."

Millicent's chuckles followed her out of the bedroom, lending a light air to the townhouse—no, terrace, Diana corrected herself with a soft laugh. She needed to use the proper terms now that the government had declared her an honorary British citizen.

Gazing out at the darkening landscape, she felt a small pang of regret. If only her father had been alive to witness everything that had happened. The world was slowly returning to normal. Those who had been Shifters were integrating back into society smoothly, and the government was making sure they had all the help they needed. But more than knowing his formula had worked, her father would have been happy to see her with her new life, a life that held joy now instead of fear.

“I love you, Dad. Thank you,” she whispered softly.

Quietly wiping away an errant tear, Diana took the bouquet of purple irises and white roses from the bed to hurry down the stairs towards her future.

About the Author

To learn more about Flesa Black, please visit www.flesablack.com/main.htm. Send an email to Flesa at flesa@flesablack.com.

She's the only mate he wants. But love isn't on the menu.

What's a Ghoul To Do?

© 2008 *Mardi Ballou*

Lilith P. Graves needs to get a life. A social life. This shouldn't be a problem, since she's partnered with her best friend in the "Fangly, My Dear" dating service. Problem is, she keeps falling for the wrong guys, and they don't get more wrong than the super-hot alpha Rafe Graywolf.

With the history of bad blood between her kind and his, the message is clear: Vegetarian demi-ghouls need not apply.

Obedying the call of duty, Rafe took the role of alpha at a rough time for the pack. For the sake of stability, the elders insist he find a mate. *Now*. A dating service isn't normally his cut of steak, but he has little time—or choice.

But Lilith...now there's a choice morsel he could sink his teeth into. Too bad they're on opposite ends of the ghoul-werewolf social spectrum. Not to mention the food chain...

Enjoy the following excerpt for: What's a Ghoul To Do?

She was going out with Rafe Graywolf. Even if it was only to conduct an intake interview, she could almost consider it a date.

His grin came slow and easy. "I take that as a 'yes'. Lilith, as you're doing me the favor here, where would you like to eat?"

Huh. She couldn't see Rafe going for Vinnie's Veggie Garden or any of her usual haunts. Weres went for red meat, cooked rare. Stifling her usual "ewww" at that prospect, Lilith reviewed a roster of possibilities. No way could she endure a steakhouse. Then it struck her. She had to be upfront with him about not only what kind of food she ate, but who she was. "Before we go any further, I need to tell you some things about me."

A wicked grin lit up his face. "From the expression on your face, I'd expect you to confess to being a serial axe murderer or something along those lines."

At the moment, she'd prefer that identity to the one she was about to reveal. "I'm a vegetarian."

He cocked a brow. "So you won't ask to sample my barely singed filet. Can't say I understand why anyone would want to be a vegetarian, but I like a bit of mystery in women. Is that it? Are you ready to go?"

If only. "One more thing. The reason why I'm vegetarian. You see, I'm a demi-ghoul, on my dad's side. If I weren't a strict vegetarian—"

That rattled his cool. Lilith could see the precise moment when the truth of her identity registered—the moment he jolted back in his seat. What a moment for her empath skills to kick in. On the other hand, it wasn't like this had never happened before—or wouldn't happen again. Lilith held her head up and locked eyes with Rafe. She loved her family, both branches. Any guy who set a speed running record in his sprint away from her wasn't worth—

"That's a new one for me, Lilith. Anything else you want to mention?"

He wasn't running. She straightened her shoulders. "I'm also an empath from Mom's side of the family."

"Great. Then you realize I've got to eat pronto or I'll get crabby."

Her mind scrambled to come up with the perfect place to satisfy their needs. "Italian or Mex?"

"Italian," he snapped back.

"Cassio's?"

"In North Beach? Sounds great."

"But what about the elders waiting in the outer office?"

He looked at his watch and made a face. "They'll have to get their own dinner. I'll let them know. Ready to go?"

Rafe whipped out his cell, had a quick conversation with an elder and then phoned for a reservation. Before she could think of anything else to hold them up, they were out the door.

Seeing Lilith shuffle the lettuce, olives and cheese cubes of her vegetarian antipasto around her plate, Rafe figured she wasn't very hungry. At least she seemed to enjoy the excellent sourdough bread and Chianti. He, on the other hand, practically inhaled his steak and pasta.

He wondered what was bothering her. Lilith was an intriguing mixture of shy and sophisticated. *Sophisticated* wasn't hard to come by in San Francisco, but Rafe met very few people he'd consider shy. He liked that about her. He also liked the way he felt near her. Warm. Hot. She appeared to have no idea how damn sexy she was. He wanted to nuzzle the porcelain skin of her long, delicate neck. She brought out a mix of lust and protectiveness unlike any he'd ever felt. Pleasurable as these emotions could be, he also sensed he should be on his guard with her. Lilith P. Graves had him experiencing emotions very new to him. Most of all, though, she turned him on. He wanted to brush the blond curls back from her ivory cheeks and kiss the path they traced.

She'd cleared a spot on the crowded table for her papers and pen. "Before we have dessert, I thought we could get these questions out of the way."

He nodded to her still almost-full plate. "You didn't eat much. Didn't you like the antipasto? Do you want to order something else?"

"Busted. Now you know my guilty secret. I loaded up on the bread. It's my weakness and they just kept replenishing our basket. I couldn't resist." She smiled.

Talk about not being able to resist. The animal in him wanted to reach across the table and grab her, lay her down and ravish her. Of course, he had his inner animal well under control now. It wouldn't do to frighten her off, send her screaming into the night when she saw the power of his lust unleashed. His cock, fully erect for what felt like days, throbbed. He knew in very precise terms what he wanted for dessert.

Right now, though, he had to divert his blood supply from his erection back to the head on his shoulders.

"What is the physical description of your ideal woman?"

"*You*," he whispered so softly, she almost didn't hear. "I like beautiful women." She shouldn't have needed the words to know what he felt, but her empath skills had deserted her just when she needed them most.

She rolled her eyes. “Can you be more specific. Eye color, hair color—that sort of thing?”

He grinned. “Let’s see. Curly blond hair, down to about where you have it.” He pointed to her. She gripped the pen with such focus, he wanted to slip it from between her fingers and suck on each one. “Big blue eyes that are true windows to the woman’s soul. When I look in her eyes, I want to read her soul.”

That netted him a look before she wrote.

“What about body type?”

“Female,” he growled.

“Short, tall, willowy, more rounded—”

“Stand up so I can see.”

Wonderful blush. She turned so red, he’d have sworn her blush must extend from the roots of her naturally blond hair clear down to her toenails.

“Rafe, get real. You have to stop kidding around, or we’ll be here all night.”

He lounged back in his seat. “You have other appointments?”

She turned away. “It’s not that. I promised Dominique I’d get you to focus. The sooner we can get the forms done, the sooner we can input your responses and start finding matches for you.”

“You’re the exact image of my perfect woman. To answer your questions, just describe yourself. You’re what I want, physically, socially and whatever other ‘ly’ you’re looking for.”

She pursed her gorgeous full lips. “Look, Rafe. It’s not that I’m not flattered. Heck, what woman wouldn’t be? We can’t forget, though, this isn’t about us flirting and playing around. I understand where you’re coming from about choosing a mate and I’ve agreed to help. Still, we at Fangly, My Dear have made a commitment to locate suitable candidates for you, even if you end up rejecting them all. We want the candidates to seem feasible. Please, cooperate.”

“I am, Lilith. I want to go out with you. From where I’m sitting, you’re the exact image of my perfect date, even if I didn’t get your name from a dating service. Will you go out with me?” Though Rafe realized Lilith’s family background made her unsuitable

to be his life mate, and that his pack would never accept her in that role, he couldn't deny how attracted he was to her. He wanted her more each moment they spent together, even if she was a demi-ghoul. He had to be with her or he'd spend the rest of his life sure he'd missed out on something major.

She blushed even harder and batted her eyelashes. "This is so unprofessional. Not at all what I had in mind when I agreed to have dinner with you for your intake."

He waved away her objections. "Are you hiding behind your professional persona to say no?"

"God, no."

An animal rights activist is about to get a crash course in werewolves. One she may not survive.

Savage Retribution

© 2008 Lexxie Couper

Lone Irish werewolf Declan O'Connell has lost everything—his family, his clan, even his freedom—to his arch-rival, Nathan Epoc. The head of an underground werewolf clan and a brilliant scientist, Epoc plans to use Declan to create a super-wolf, a creature capable of shifting the balance of power in the lycanthrope world. But Epoc's plans are about to be thwarted

Regan Thomas, a determined animal rights activist, rescues what she thinks is an ordinary wolf from his notorious animal testing facility in Sydney, Australia. She gets more than she bargained for when the wolf turns into an extremely hunky, extremely naked man who immediately drags her into a world where the clash between two opposing werewolf clans could spell the end of humankind.

Declan has survived without a clan for more years than he cares to remember, but sexy Regan stirs up all his fierce, alpha-wolf instincts. Now Declan has one last chance at revenge. But can he keep Regan alive, and resist the overwhelming attraction between them, long enough to stop Epoc?

Summer in Australia has never been this hot...or this dangerous.

Enjoy the following excerpt for: Savage Retribution

Regan's heart hammered.

The wolf lay on its side, taking up most of her old sofa, its eyes closed, its rib cage rising and falling with rapid, shallow breaths. Dry blood smattered the grey fur on its neck, cracked and thick like black mud. The cushions of her sofa bowed and compressed under the animal's massive bulk and, as she had in the lab, Regan wondered what species it was. None she was familiar with.

How can that be?

She frowned. She was at least passingly familiar with just about every species in existence—she had to be in her line of work. How could she not—

The wolf whined again, softer, weaker, and Regan's puzzlement vanished.

In a heartbeat she crossed the room and crouched by the wounded animal, skimming her hands over its body. A wave of awe rolled through the cold worry knotted in her chest. It was unwell. Its limbs trembled and each breath seemed weaker than the last, yet its feral strength was undeniable. She'd thought it a creature of primitive power back in Epoc's lab but now, here in her room with its corded muscles under her examining fingers, its *mana* seemed almost tangible. "What genus are you, my friend?" she whispered, running her hands over steely quadriceps much bigger and longer than any wolf species she knew. Quadriceps turned to femur, femur to pelvic bone.

Regan frowned, confusion squirming in her gut. The animal's pelvis felt wrong, like some sick bastard with a Doctor Moreau complex had taken to it with a bone grinder in an attempt to reshape it into a human hipbone. "What *have* they been doing to you, mate?" she murmured, tracing the distorted bone. "My God, how can you even walk?"

She moved her hands up the wolf's spine, counting vertebrae, looking for wounds or injuries. Curiosity ate at her concern. Where had the creature come from? Wolves were not native to Australia and as far as she knew, the only ones in the country were those housed in zoos and animal enclosures. For this lone wolf to be in Epoc's lab...?

Imported illegally, perhaps?

But from where?

Her seeking fingers slid through a patch of wet fur low on the wolf's rib cage and Regan stilled her investigation. She parted the animal's dense coat, looking for... "There it is."

Fresh blood, bright red and warm on her fingers, seeped from a ragged hole puncturing the wolf's side. Regan prodded the surrounding flesh gently, worrying the bullet may be embedded in bone beneath. She'd have to get the animal to Rick. Whether the bullet was there or not, the wound needed to be—

The wolf whined. Low. Almost human.

“I’m sorry, mate,” Regan soothed, removing her fingers from its rib cage. Chewing on her bottom lip, she smoothed her palms over its scapular and down first one foreleg and then the other. Both rippled with muscle and once again, uneasy wonderment wriggled in Regan’s stomach. The humerus seemed too close to human in structure to be possible. She ran her hands over it and it seemed to shift. Grow longer. Straighter.

Regan scrubbed the back of her hand against her eyes. She must be sleep deprived. Bones didn’t change structure. With a slight shake of her head, she went back to her examination. As soon as she was convinced the animal could be moved, she’d call Rick. He’d give his left nut to help her out, any excuse to try and impress her into his bed. But quite frankly, she had no hope of moving the animal herself, even if it would fit in her car.

Another whine whispered on the air, so soft Regan almost missed it. “Not much longer, my mysterious friend,” she whispered, letting her hands settle on the wolf’s rib cage again, careful to avoid its wound. Its coat felt like fine velvet under her palms and for a dreamlike moment, she felt like pressing her face to the animal’s side. She leant forward, sliding her hands to its shoulder joint in search of wounds unseen and her bare nipples brushed against the wolf’s chest, flesh to fur. Soft. Cool. So much more than she’d expected. So much more than any animal species she knew.

What type of wolf are you?

She returned her attention to the wolf’s body. With the exception of the bullet wound, it seemed physically uninjured, but who knew *what* Epoc’s scientists had been doing to it. She smoothed her hands over the silken fur, a distant more detached part of her mind admiring the wolf’s superb biomechanical construct. It was a creature evolved for one purpose only—to kill—yet its beauty was undeniable. Strength, menace and deadly purpose all combined in the majestic somehow romantic form of—

The thigh muscle below her palm shifted, elongated, and Regan stumbled backward, landing flat on her bare butt with an ignominious thud. She stared at the massive, powerful and utterly lupine form. Watched it contort. Shudder.

The dense fur rippled, each strand seemingly alive with its own energy. The back legs grew long, straight. Thick, corded thigh muscles formed on bones no longer short and crooked. “What the...” Regan’s stunned whisper barely left her lips.

Another shudder wracked the wolf’s contorting form. Another. And another. Its fur grew thin, retracting into the flesh beneath, disappearing with each violent convulsion until its coat no longer existed and instead...

Regan’s heart froze and she stared at the naked man laying full-length on her sofa.

The naked, trembling, gasping man laying full-length on her sofa.

Looking at her.

“What the *hell?*”

The man’s eyes—the angry color of a stormy winter’s sky—flicked over her face. Like oiled smoke, he was on his feet, hard, lean body coiling, pale flesh glistening with a faint sheen of sweat in the sun-filled room. Regan stared at him. Speechless. Unable to move.

Shaggy ink black hair fell across his forehead, brushed straight eyebrows of the same color, cheekbones high and angular. Smooth, curved pecs cut down to a hairless torso sculpted in muscle. Nothing detracted from the perfection of his body, not even the mean scar slashing his pale skin from navel to groin. Regan traced the ragged white line with her eye, her stomach clenching as it disappeared into a thick thatch of black pubic hair just above—

Oh, my God! He’s huge!

A sharp intake of breath jerked her gaze back up to his face, in time to see nostrils flaring on a nose almost too long, almost too large. Those stormy eyes held hers. Kept her naked ass on the carpet. Frozen.

Compelling.

The word fluttered through her head, disconnected and surreal and with it came a tight throb, low in the pit of her stomach. A clenching, warm beat between her thighs.

Damn, Woman! Have you lost your mind?

She sucked in her own swift breath, tasting his sweat on the air. “Who...” She began.

Those grey eyes flickered. Grew wild. Dangerous. “You’re in a lotta trouble, love,” he growled, a soft brogue lacing the foreboding words seconds before every muscle in his perfect body coiled and he leapt.

At her.

He slammed into her, flattening her to the floor. Back, shoulders, skull. Bright pain spiked through her head, cold and hot at the same time, and she cried out. Strong, long-fingered hands clamped around her wrists, pinning them to the floor beside her head with a grip so fierce her brother would have been jealous. Regan squealed, glaring up into grey, burning eyes. “Get off me, you bastard!” She bucked—all too aware of the muscled body pressed to hers. The *naked* body.

Fair Dinkum, Woman! Only seconds earlier he was a wolf! Wake up!

A hot breath feathered her face, ruffled her hair and she bucked again. This was no dream. *He* was no dream. “Get off me, you freak!”

Grey eyes flashed, all the more intense for the thick, black lashes framing them. “I’m no freak, lady.”

The words flowed from well-defined lips, the soft Irish accent she’d heard earlier cut with anger. Long, corded legs battled hers, pinned them to the floor with a brutal strength. His knees shoved at hers, spreading her thighs wide until her lower body was completely trapped by his.

A rock-hard pressure nudged at the soft lips of her sex and Regan sucked in a sharp breath. Oh no, he was aroused!

Aren’t you?

Hot, terrified shame tore through her. Yes. She was. “Get off me!” she screamed, thrashing underneath him in desperate fury. “Get off me! Get off me! Get off me!”

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