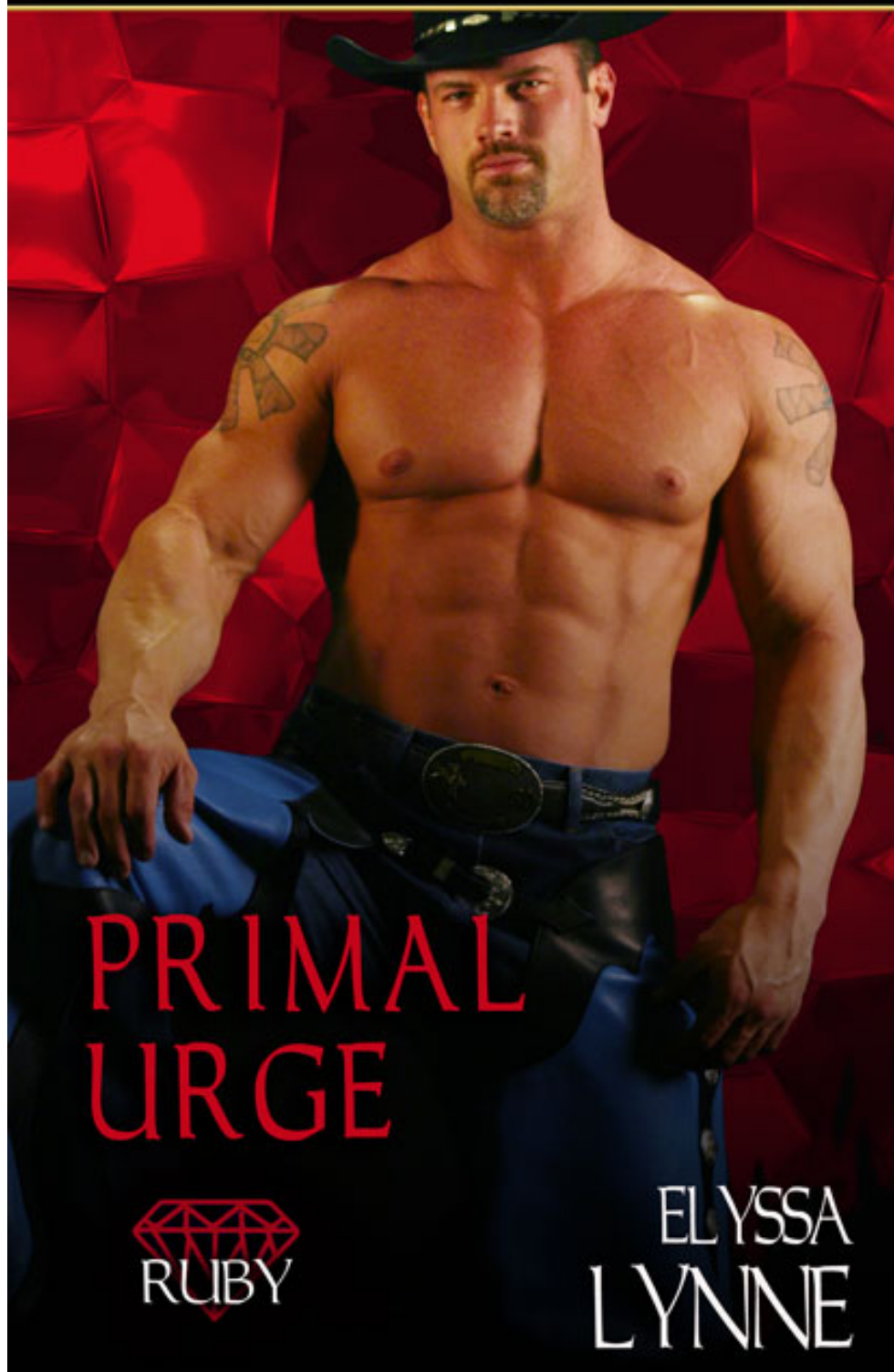


ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



# PRIMAL URGE



ELYSSA  
LYNNE

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



[www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com)

Primal Urge

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# ***PRIMAL URGE***

**Elyssa Lynne**

## *Dedication*

To all of us who dare to take risks to achieve our dreams. May we always succeed — and may they be everything we've hoped for.

## Chapter One

Marya sat back on her heels and pointed her collecting knife at the very large tortoiseshell cat that had just settled itself on the burdock she tried to cut. "You didn't have to come with me, you know."

The cat stared at her, unblinking.

Marya shook her head. "You know I have to gather these leaves tonight." The first night of the full moon. If she didn't find enough of the plant now she'd have to wait another month and at the moment she had too little on hand to last her that long. "Move, Tamsin."

Only the orange and white tip of Tamsin's tail twitched.

*Honestly. Cats.* "What's wrong?" she demanded. "You and Rumpson," she nodded toward the tiger-striped manx who stared fixedly into the trees that surrounded the clearing, "helped me to locate and mark this very plant this afternoon. So why won't you let me cut it now?"

Tamsin opened her mouth in a silent meow.

Marya frowned. Normally the cats helped in all her spell and herb crafting. What bothered them tonight? She scooped Tamsin aside, sliced off three of the leaves and placed them in the reed basket she had only finished weaving the previous full moon. She inched forward about a foot across the damp forest moss and selected three more leaves from the next burdock.

Tamsin hissed and Rumpson added a low growl.

Marya raised her head, alert now. This was more than just ordinary cat contrariness. And the warnings of a witch's cats should not be ignored.

She bit her lip. She needed more burdock. Not to mention she didn't have nearly enough spearmint at her cottage to finish the ointment for old Mr. Wainwright. And she'd meant to find a bit of mallow root to put in the cough syrup for the Barrows' baby girl, poor thing.

She glanced at the cats. They didn't move. Not so much as the flick of a tail or the quiver of a whisker. Whatever disturbed them remained at a sufficient distance or they'd be nipping at her until she returned home with them. Satisfied for the moment, she rose, peering through the darkness. It might be the first night of the full moon but little light penetrated the dense forest canopy. Now where...

*Ah.* She spotted the marker that indicated another of the herbs she sought. With care she picked her way across the clearing, wincing every few steps. She ought to be accustomed by now to padding barefoot around the twig- and rock-strewn ground in pursuit of the magical and healing plants. But no, not her. She'd been here just over a year now and she had yet to return from one of these expeditions without at least a few bruises and scratches.

She knelt again, cut the few leaves and regretted she couldn't take more. The cats' uneasiness reached her now too. In fact —

The thought broke off and she straightened, reaching out with her senses. No noises reached her, none of the normal forest sounds except for the gentle rushing of the river in its rocky bed just beyond the trees. The soft hooting of the owl had silenced as had the voices of the frogs from the nearby pond. Even the crickets had ceased their cheerful chirping. And Tamsin and Rumpson hunkered down. Their sudden yowling cut through the unnatural stillness of the night.

A rush of heat flooded through Marya's body despite the early spring chill. She clutched her shawl to her as her heart beat faster. Her next breath was shallow, almost a rasp. But she wasn't afraid. She was...excited. Eager. Anticipating.

As horny as hell.

A tickling sensation began in her clit, spreading down through her cleft, across her thighs and upward into her groin. Her breasts felt heavy and her nipples tightened into hard buds, scratching against the linen of her long-sleeved chemise. Moisture pooled between her legs and a low moan of yearning escaped her.

She looked around, her desire unbearable. What was happening to her? Was someone trying to cast a spell on her? It shouldn't work. She kept herself warded against the influence of others. Yet this lust was so powerful it went beyond anything she'd ever experienced. It was primal, as real and as demanding as the need to eat and drink to stay alive.

She abandoned her collection basket and knife and stood, looking around, desperate to find the source of this raging, craving ache that pulsed through her body. Someone earthy and virile and pure male watched her with this same ravenous need. Wanting her. And she wanted him, whoever he was.

*There.* She could sense the direction now, where he gazed at her with such hunger. She pushed through the low-lying ferns and the scratchy gorse bushes, past the rocks and trees, at last breaking into the familiar clearing beside the river. Over the tumbling waters loomed the huge flat-topped boulder where she often sat to commune with the squirrels and badgers and other creatures of the wood who brought her news.

And he—or it—was there. A large shape crouched on the top, dark and gleaming in the moonlight. Too big to be the wolf it appeared, more the size of a very large man down on all fours.

Another wave of desire flooded over her, leaving her knees weak, her breasts hungering for a lover's touch, her pussy weeping with the need for a hard cock to fill it. She met the unblinking gaze of those golden eyes and froze, lost in a morass of passion and terror.

A werewolf.

He would take her. She had no power to stop him.

And her body craved this so badly it hurt.

The creature lunged from the rock, straight at her. She couldn't move, couldn't escape. He held her enthralled. Captured. In a moment his fangs would rip out her throat and it would be orgasmic, a completion of her being in her death. She stared into those glorious golden lupine eyes and spread her arms in welcome as the werewolf landed on her chest.

For one moment she embraced the soft dark fur and then it changed beneath her touch, becoming flesh. She staggered back from the impact, lost her balance and fell to the ground. The wolf—the man—landed on top of her, his mouth latching onto her throat. But she didn't feel the bite of fangs. Teeth sank into her flesh to be replaced the next moment by a tongue, then lips.

His weight pinned her where she lay. She wriggled her hips, trying to escape the sharp edge of a rock that dug into her back. That pressed the hardened length of his cock against her thighs.

"I'm me?" The man—the werewolf—sounded dazed, confused. He shifted his hands to either side of her and pushed himself up to gaze down, his expression of bewilderment fading into a hunger that equaled her own. "Oh gods." The words came out a cross between a prayer and an expression of awe. "But...how?"

"I don't know." And at this moment she didn't care. "Fuck me," she begged. She burned so hot she didn't think she could bear it a second longer.

He hesitated, staring down at her and by the shimmering light of the moon she could see confusion, fear, longing—and lust—all mirrored in his amber lupine eyes. His face, all planes and angles, softened now by a downy fuzz that lingered from his transformation, hovered only inches from her own. Thick dark hair waved about his shoulders and stubble followed the line of his jaw and chin. Just the sight of it sent a shiver of yearning through her. She touched it, savoring the roughness. Her other hand found the hard, lean muscle of his bare arm and shoulder before stealing behind his neck to pull his mouth down to hers. It tasted so sweet. Had she expected wolf breath?



A quiver of laughter began inside her only to turn into a tremble of craving as the need pulsed hotter and stronger between her legs. He returned her kiss with a desperation that left her gasping. His hand tangled in her thick braid then followed its long length past her waist to her hips. His tongue darted along her throat then across her collarbone to the loose linen chemise gathered beneath the laced woolen corselet. He tugged at the leather tie, his hands clumsy, almost paws.

Her own fingers trembling, she helped to loosen it. She dragged the garment over her head and tossed it aside then pulled off her chemise as well. For a long moment he gazed at her full breasts then he grasped them, one in each hand, and pressed them together. His thumbs found her nipples and he rubbed gently then rotated them. He ducked his head and took one into his mouth.

"Yes!" she cried out with the building ecstasy. She cradled his head, holding him close, not wanting him to stop yet needing so much more.

"Over." His voice sounded harsh, guttural, as he disentangled himself from her. "Quickly. On your hands and knees."

She scrambled to comply. This was frenzied, crazy. *He's a werewolf, for the gods' sake.* She should stop this but a passion unlike anything she'd ever experienced or even imagined gripped her. Her clit throbbed and her pussy ached for him to plunge into it.

He threw her long skirt over her back and pressed close against her. The hard length of his cock pushed against her rear, into her cleft, into — She gasped as it thrust deep within her tunnel. He filled her so completely, so perfectly, she felt near to fainting with the ecstasy of it. *Oh gods this is heaven.*

He leaned over her back and his teeth grasped the base of her neck as if he sought to hold himself in place. She moaned. *How erotic can this get?* His weight bore her down but if she moved, if she protested, he might withdraw and that she couldn't bear. Instead she shoved her hips back, tilting them upward, and cried out at the new wave of sensation.

He released her neck. "Oh my love."

His words were so soft she barely heard them, barely recognized that they could come from a werewolf's mouth. His hands caressed along her ribs, over her stomach until they found her breasts. He traced circles around the mounds then cupped them as he pulled back, sliding almost completely out of her before thrusting inside once more. He pinched the hardened tips, drawing another moan from her. Her senses seemed on the verge of exploding but she didn't want this to end. *How can anything this insane be so right?*

She had expected him to take her hard and fast then run off howling into the night. She'd never expected such sweetness, such gentleness. Such tenderness.

She cried out in protest as he withdrew again but almost at once he plunged even deeper within then set up a slow tormenting rhythm that had her whimpering in delight. He released one of her breasts and trailed his finger down the centerline of her body until it encountered her waistband. He fumbled with her skirt for a moment, then his hand came up beneath it to dip the finger into her navel, in and out, in and out, in time with the thrusts of his cock. Then he continued that teasing, trailing touch lower until he reached her mound then lower still to her clit.

Marya gasped and her hips dipped downward to capture more pressure on that bundle of nerves then up again to welcome his pounding shaft once more. She had never felt so wild, so ecstatic, so alive. He increased the rhythm, pounding now, a groan escaping him. She shut her eyes as tension coiled in her depths, tightening, focusing her attention, closing out every other perception until nothing existed except the white hot urgency that built within her. Faster, tighter, unbearable— It exploded inside her in spasm after spasm after spasm, escaping with a cry she couldn't contain.

"Oh love, oh love, oh love." The man's arm wrapped around her stomach as he plunged one last time, shooting his seed inside her. He arched into her and the deep reverberating howl of a wolf tore from his throat. For one moment he clung to her. Then, "Run," he gasped. "Get away from me. Run as fast as you can to shelter and bolt your door against me. I can't hold this shape much longer."

The agony in his voice galvanized her, replacing the lassitude that had crept over her muscles with a heart-wrenching fear. *My lover – a werewolf.*

He pulled out of her and she scrambled to her feet and bolted for the woods, abandoning her clothes, abandoning him, abandoning the joy she had experienced only moments before. Behind her she heard an agonized groan that transformed into a snarling growl. Oh hells, he'd be after her in a moment, not the man who had whispered words of sweet awe but the wolf, the monster, maddened now by post-coital excitement.

And he would no longer be even remotely human. He would be all beast now, a hunter. A killer.

Her feet pounded over the twigs and rocks, past where she had dropped her knife and collection basket, along the path that led to the cottage that had summoned her a bare year before. She could hear the crashing through the underbrush as the giant wolf pursued her. And then she could see a light, the oil lamp she'd left burning on her table in the low stone structure, the one large room where she slept and cooked and prepared her potions and remedies and spells.

Her breath came in short gasps, her sides hurt from the exertion. She could hear no sounds behind her now but she didn't need to. She could feel the predator gaining on her, coming closer with every leap. Only steps away...

A tingling sensation raced along her skin as she passed through the protective wards she had placed around the cottage. She had no idea how effective they would be against a werewolf. She stumbled, caught her balance and reached the door that opened at her touch. A witch needed no locks. Not normally at least. But as she slammed it behind her she reached for the heavy wooden bolt and slid it into place. Scant moments passed then the low snarling reached her as the werewolf paced before the door. She waited, barely breathing, her hands and forehead pressed against the all-too-thin panel that separated them. At last the growls faded as the beast prowled away into the moonlit night.

She sank onto a chair, her shuddering breaths loud in the stillness of her haven.  
*Dear gods, what just happened?*

She realized she was shivering and rose unsteadily. Her feet hurt. Running helter-skelter barefoot through a dark forest wasn't the brightest of ideas, not if one wanted to be able to walk the next day. Wincing, she made her way to the cupboard where she stored her few clothes. Her shawl? No, she'd been wearing it. It must be with her chemise and corselet, strewn across the new grass beside the wide brook. With hands that trembled she unfastened the drawstring at her waist and allowed her long woolen skirt to crumple to the floor. She pulled out her nightgown and dragged it over her head.

Tamsin, Rumpson and Larkin, a gray and white tom, blinked reproving eyes at her from the comforts of her bed. At least they were all safely indoors. How they managed that she had never been certain. Closed doors never seemed to get in their way.

"Did you know he was out there?" she demanded.

Rumpson stretched. Tamsin flicked her tail. Larkin, who had remained at home, merely looked innocent.

A scratching sound came from the vicinity of one of the side windows. She spun to face it. Was that a dark lupine head pressing against the glass? Or was it her imagination?

*Werewolves.* She shuddered. She knew so little about them. She certainly hadn't known they could instill their victims with a passion so intense it drove all else from their minds. And she hadn't known they could change, even in the direct light of the full moon, back to human shape.

How had that happened? Just so he could fuck her?

"Do any of you know about werewolves?" she demanded.

Larkin jumped to the braided rug that lay beside the bed then padded to the far side of the room to one of the shelves of books. He sat back on his haunches and opened his mouth in a silent but pointed meow.

Marya eyed the numerous journals penned by the four previous inhabitants of the cottage. "I don't suppose you can tell me which ones to look in?"

Larkin flicked his tail and strolled back to the bed.

Marya sighed. She was on her own. But she would undoubtedly find something about werewolves in these diaries. Witches had lived in this place for almost two hundred and fifty years and each one had kept meticulous notes on her potions and remedies, on the ailments she treated for the villagers, on her spells and amulets and talismans. And on her research. When Marya had felt the summons of the cottage and arrived to take up the responsibilities of village witch after the death of her predecessor, she had browsed through a few of these books. She had learned what to expect, what to do, how to handle the people who had fallen under her care. She had learned what it truly meant to be a witch. And now she hoped she would learn about werewolves.

She began with the earliest volume and scanned the pages, the entries sometimes neat, sometimes hurried, sometimes spotted by ink or stained by potions or ointments. The first recordings, concerning the building and sanctifying of the cottage, she had read with fascination on more than one occasion. Now she skimmed hurriedly through, searching for any reference to the subject that had become so urgent to her. In the third volume she discovered the first mention of what the writer termed "the moon curse" and settled down to read in earnest. When she rose to fetch the next volume she built up the fire she had banked for the night, filled the kettle and set it to boil.

The information in the ninth notebook caused her to start taking notes as her second mug of peppermint tea cooled on the table before her.

## **Chapter Two**

Guerrin groaned, consciousness returning all too soon as far as he was concerned. His head throbbed. He clutched it, taking deep breaths, forcing a relaxation on himself that both his mind and body fought against. He felt...odd. Well, that was normal on the morning after a full moon. He always ached all over from the strain put on his muscles from shape shifting. But this was different.

Hells, why couldn't he retain some semblance of himself while he was in wolf form? If only he could have some control over his behavior, over what he did and where he went. It was probably just as well that no memories could imprint themselves on his human mind while in werewolf form. He wouldn't want to know what the beast that had become part of him did on these long nights.

Only this time was different. This time something tugged in his memories.

And at his cock.

He clenched his jaw as the revolting possibilities flooded his mind. Had he encountered a bitch in heat? The werewolf wouldn't have hesitated to avail himself of a quick fuck. And then he would probably have savaged the poor female.

He stretched to ease his sore back. He was lying in a spinney on a patch of bracken. He stood and shivered in the chill morning air. Where was he? And could he get back to where he had stashed his pack—and his clothes—without being seen?

His stomach rumbled, announcing his hunger. Did that mean he hadn't killed and eaten last night? He hoped so. But early spring was not the best time to scavenge a meal from the forest. The berries were still nothing but blossoms and the nuts had months to go before they would fall. And he had deliberately tramped miles from the nearest village where he might have traded his labor for a meal.

He struck out through the forest, searching for anything familiar, anything to point him in the right direction and prayed he wouldn't meet a wandering woodcutter or shepherd—or worse, shepherdess—until he'd found his clothes.

An image sprang to his mind as he walked of a young woman clad in a long dark skirt, a pale gathered blouse and a lace-up corselet. Heat stirred in his groin and his penis responded, hardening, rising to attention. *Damn it, is she a dream or a reality?*

An ache spread through his shaft, a need to bed it inside her. *Inside a fantasy?* Had the long years of suffering this curse finally driven him mad? Oh he'd fucked his share of willing women—during the dark phases of the moon—but not one had stirred him like this imaginary one.

Another image flashed across his mind, of holding her, of wanting her, of ramming his cock deep into her, of exploding inside her. And of telling her to run for her life.

He froze in mid-step. That couldn't have been real. None of it. He'd spent last night as a wolf, not in caressing the sweetest female body he could conjure up from the depths of his love-hungry soul.

He reached the wide stream and followed it for a short distance until he found the tree where he'd stashed his pack. He bathed, dried himself and donned his woolen breeches, linen peasant shirt and vest. His supple leather boots—one of the few remnants of his earlier affluent life—he pulled on over the socks that badly needed darning. He could try to catch a fish, he supposed, but he didn't have the time.

*Not have the time?* Where had that thought come from? He had all the time in the world. He couldn't return to any form of civilization until the three nights of the full moon had passed. But a sense of urgency had been creeping over him since he'd first returned to an awareness of his self. He had to do something, find...someone?

*Bad idea,* he told himself even as he shouldered his pack and struck off through the forest.

He encountered a path almost at once. He didn't hesitate, his feet seemed to know which direction to follow. His steps quickened and his breath came more rapidly as the urgency grew, filling him.

After about ten minutes he reached a wider track and without pause turned to the right. Another few minutes brought him to a low stone wall surrounding a yard filled with fruit trees and bramble vines. Set back from the path stood a low stone cottage with a thatch roof. Someone had erected a shed to one side and he could hear the bleating of goats and the baaing of sheep. A series of raised vegetable beds followed the side of the house.

Guerrin paused with his hand on the gate latch. His heart pounded though he had no idea why.

A woman emerged from behind the shed, tall, lusciously rounded, a kerchief covering her head and a thick braid of dark auburn hair falling across her shoulder and down to her hip. She carried a basket filled with plants over one arm. She stopped and stared at him.

*Oh hells, I shouldn't be here.* He shouldn't have any contact with people, not at this time of month. But he couldn't look away from her. His cock swelled to rock-hard, aching. For her.

Slowly she stooped to set down her basket then started toward him, her expression unreadable. He opened the gate before he even realized what he did. *Bad idea. Run before you hurt her.* But he couldn't.

She halted a pace from him. "It's you."

He reached out, unable to stop himself and his fingers just brushed her face. His hand tingled from the contact but instead of pulling away his touch became a caress as he followed the line of her jaw. "My heart," he breathed. "Last night—" He broke off.

"Yes," she said simply. "The primal urge took you—took us both."



*Primal urge?* The words raced through his mind. They meant something important—no, vital. He grasped for the memory only to have it fade before the overwhelming need that pounded through his body.

He lowered his pack to the ground and reached for her. Instead of running for her life she walked into his embrace, raising her face to his, her mouth sweet and yielding to the demanding pressure of his kiss.

*Oh gods what a mouth.* His tongue traced her lips and they parted, welcoming him inside. With exquisite slowness he explored the warm depths, caressing her tongue with his. His hand tangled in the mass of her hair at the nape of her neck, holding her captive. His other arm wrapped about her waist, feeling the heat of her body. He pressed it tight to his and she melded against him, more than willing. Eager.

Bemusement flickered through his mind but his cock took over and did the thinking. It thrust against her stomach, throbbing, demanding immediate attention. Insisting on bedding itself within her.

She pushed away from him but only enough to reach for the loose ties at the neck of his shirt.

“Who are you?” He grasped one end of the thong that cinched her corselet. That action felt familiar, as if he’d done it before. And not with another woman. With this one.

“Your mate.” She sounded as if she didn’t quite believe it. She unbuttoned his vest and shoved it down his arms.

He paused only long enough to rid himself of it before returning to the important occupation of freeing her breasts from the garment that cinched just beneath them. She tugged his shirt free of his breeches. What in all the hells was he doing? *Uncovering this woman. My woman. My mate.*

And suddenly he couldn’t do it fast enough. All the reasons why he shouldn’t be here, why he shouldn’t be doing this, screamed in the back of his mind. But the

pounding of his blood, the certainty of his heart that this was inevitable and right, all but obliterated his protests.

He tore off both her corselet and her linen chemise and cast them aside. His gaze settled on the small rounded mounds he had exposed with their dark pink areolas and tips that seemed to harden and stand up even as he watched. Their rise and fall as her breathing quickened held him mesmerized. She glanced down at them and a flush crept along her cheeks.

"You're beautiful." He cast off his own shirt then tugged at the tie that held up her skirt. It fell to the ground, exposing full hips, dark curls covering her mound, swelling thighs, long graceful legs. "I can't keep my hands off you."

"Paws," she corrected.

*Does she know what I am?* But the thought—the fear—faded as she stepped out of her shoes and the thick woolen stockings that folded about her trim ankles. For a long moment she simply stood before him as if allowing him to look his fill, her lips parted, her green eyes dark with desire.

For him. He struggled out of his boots and breeches then dragged her into his arms, his mouth going for her throat. His teeth latched over the pulse that beat there. She was his. That knowledge filled him and the bite became a nibble, then a lick, then a kiss.

"Or your fangs." A laugh sounded in her voice.

"Damn right. I need to bite every part of you." He nipped his way gently along her neck to her mouth which opened once more beneath his onslaught. Hers tasted like heaven, so sweet, so perfect.

He dragged his lips from hers only to stoop to find one lovely breast. He kissed the pebbled tip then ran his tongue around the areola, then thrummed it with quick licking strokes. Yes, every inch of her was perfect. *And very tasty.*

A soft moan escaped her that shot straight to his already inflamed groin. His balls felt like rocks and the first drops of his fluid seeped from the head of his shaft. Hells, he

couldn't control himself any longer. He swept her off her feet and knelt with her to lay her on the grass. Her arms wrapped about his neck, dragging him down with her.

"I want to spend all day making love to you," he declared. "Slowly and thoroughly and savoring every inch of your adorable body."

"We don't have time yet," she gasped. "Take me now, oh please take me now. I need you hard and pounding inside me."

"Anything to oblige a lady." And though his tone was light and teasing he meant every word of it. For her he would do anything. He would even drive that silver-traced dagger he carried into his heart to save her from the pain he would eventually cause her. But right now he had another weapon that needed to be thrust deep into a different target.

He stroked her breast then ran his hand down her stomach to her mound, then lower to check the readiness of her pussy. She was wet with her need and her hips rose to meet his touch. She was his for the taking. He slid his fingers along her moist cleft to find her clit already erect.

She cried out as he rubbed his target. "Now," she begged, clutching his shoulders. "I can't wait. We can't wait." She raised her head and licked one of his nipples.

A deep growl rumbled in his throat. *Gods what a perfect woman.* Her teeth latched on and she tugged gently, her tongue still teasing the tip. He positioned himself between her spread legs, lowered himself to allow the bulb of his penis to trace a line from her clit and along her pussy until it came to rest at the opening of her tunnel. A whimpering escaped her and he pushed gently, barely sliding inside.

His need was too much. He thrust all the way in, deep and hard, unable to stop himself. He retreated as slowly as he could manage only to plunge in again. He could feel the wolf within him taking control, seeping into his brain, driving him to a frenzy. Sweat beaded his brow, his whole body.

"You're human," the girl cried out between her soft moans. "Hang on to that. Hang on to me."

With an effort he held down that animalistic primal urge. *I'm human. Well, mostly human.* But with this glorious creature who welcomed him into her body he would be what she needed. He would remain a man. He kissed her and concentrated on savoring the taste of her mouth. And the wolf slipped back under control.

A laugh of triumph shook him and he grasped this girl and rolled them so he lay on his back in the new grass and she shifted so she sat astride him, still impaled on his cock. She lifted her face to the sky and laughed right along with him, such joy in the sound that it brought him to the point of explosion. Her hips rose and fell, rose and fell, sliding up and down his throbbing phallus at an increasing pace.

He caught one of her breasts in his hand, the other nipple in his teeth and his free fingers sought and found her clit. Her inner muscles clenched his pulsing cock, squeezing and massaging as she continued her up and down rhythm. Sensation shot from his penis through his balls, down his thighs, up through his stomach. With a soft cry her back arched and she stiffened then contraction after contraction grasped against his burning shaft. The howl started deep in his body, building with the coiling tension, exploding from his throat at the same moment he shot stream after stream of cum into her depths.

With a sound that was half a sob, half a moan, she sank against him, burying her face in the thick hair that covered his chest. They lay tangled together, clinging, for several long moments. He nuzzled her neck, one arm wrapped about her plump hips, the other hand weaving through the thick plait of her hair.

Abruptly she sat up. A smile lingered on her lips and her eyes remained dark with their shared passion. "We haven't much time," she said.

A slow grin tugged at the corners of his mouth. "Are you ready to go again?" His hand slid down her shoulder to cup her breast.

She eased off him to sit in the grass at his side, her expression fading to somber. "The primal urge has possessed you. We have only two days and one more night to tame your curse or you'll die."

"I'll —" He rose onto his elbow. "What are you talking about?"

She drew a deep quavering breath that set her breasts waving in a manner that riveted his attention. "Soon after you became a werewolf did someone give you an object? A knife or a dagger or something like that made out of steel and silver with a ruby in it?"

"Gods," he breathed. She really did know exactly what he was and still had given herself to him. And she knew about the gift.

"This is important," she said, her eyes now bright, intense. She stood up and her braid swung about her hips as she reached for her chemise. "Did someone give you something?"

"A dagger," he admitted.

She tossed him his breeches. "I think we'll be able to concentrate better if we're both dressed."

She had a point. They dragged on their clothes in silence but as she began to lace up her corselet he went to her aid. She looked up into his face, studying him with a slight frown.

"What gave me away? The pointed ears? The lingering traces of fur?"

She smiled and ran a finger along one of his ears. "They are rather soft and fuzzy," she agreed. "And your eyes are still those of a wolf, even in daylight. But no. It was the way you leapt at me last night in the shape of a wolf but took me in your human form."

He tugged the lace tight and tied it. That brought his hands against the soft warmth of her breasts. He allowed his fingers to trace their curves. "That can't have been real. I thought it was only a dream. But when the moon is full my hours of darkness hold only nightmares."

Placing her hands on his shoulders, she rose on tiptoe and nibbled his stubbly chin. "It was very real. And very dangerous for us both. But now that it's been started we

must complete it. Bring your things." She pulled free from his hold and made her way to where she'd left her twig-woven basket filled with plants.

He grabbed his pack by a strap and followed her along the stepping-stone path toward the low cottage. Four paces from the door an odd tingling raced along his skin, standing his hairs on end – and because of the time of month he had far more hairs than usual to react.

She turned to look at him. "Have you evil intentions in mind?"

A slow smile tugged at his lips. "I've had thoughts of ravishing you again."

She smiled. "Those are good thoughts. Keep them close. The wards are probably only reacting to your nature. If you mean me no harm they should allow you to pass."

Wards? He cast a quick glance around the outside of the cottage. Ceramic jars hung from the thatch at each of the two corners he could see. And over the door someone had placed a straw weaving that resembled a circular maze. His gaze returned to the young woman who waited, her hand on the knob. "You're a witch."

Her smile deepened. "Afraid of me? Or prejudiced against my calling?"

A short burst of humorless laughter escaped him. "A werewolf to be prejudiced against a witch? I can only be grateful you haven't thrown spells at me to confuse me and drive me away."

Her amusement faded. "Even if I'd wanted to, it's too late now."

His brow creased. "What do you mean? You said something about urgency, that we didn't have much time."

"Come inside." She opened the door.

He followed her into the cool interior that consisted of a single large room. A huge hearth over which hung an assortment of pots and pans dominated the back wall. A small fire burned in the grate and a stack of logs and a basket of kindling waited at the ready. To one side stood a bed with a crocheted cover, two pillows and a very large tortoiseshell cat. A carved wooden chest rested at the foot of the bed.

On the other side of the room he saw a comfortable-looking chair inhabited by a large gray and white cat. A tiger-striped manx perched on the quilt-covered headrest. A row of oak cupboards took up half the wall to where a mullioned window, with its lace curtains pulled back, let in sunlight. Beyond that were shelves lined with bound books and notebooks and candleholders. A large table and several wooden chairs sat on a braided rug in the middle of the room.

A cozy place, he decided, perfect for a solitary inhabitant. Two could live there provided one or both of them spent most of their time out of doors. It would never hold a family though. He'd have to build onto the back. No, it would be better to construct a wooden story above this stone one. The staircase could go over there and –

He broke off that thought. He was thinking in terms of decades when he had no more than a few hours here before he had to put as much distance as possible between himself and this wonderful girl.

And every step he took away from her would cut him to his soul.

"Put your things over there." She gestured toward a corner. "Like I said, we don't have much time."

"Only hours," he agreed but he dropped his pack as she'd said.

She shook her head. "Two days and one night and I'm afraid we're going to need every moment of them."

"Not the night." He shook his head. "It's not safe for me to be near you at night."

"True." She set down her basket on the table. "But I'll be able to work while the moon is up. I'll have to set out special charms against werewolves to keep you away, I'm afraid. I'm sorry but now the primal urge has taken you, you'll find the wolf instincts will grow stronger."

"Primal urge?" She'd spoken of that before. He dragged out a chair, turned it around and straddled it, resting his crossed arms on its back. That was the only way he could keep from closing the space between them, dragging off all her clothes and throwing her on the bed for a thorough fucking. He'd never wanted anyone like this,

with an all-consuming passion that burned through him. His cock was doomed to suffer in a perpetual state of painful erection while he remained near her.

*Gods, if I could only remain near her.*

“How long has it been?” she asked. Her tone remained matter-of-fact.

“About six and a half years.” He tried to keep the bitterness from his voice. Six and a half miserable, torturous years. Seventy-seven months to be precise. Two hundred and twenty-nine nights he’d endured the muscle-straining transformation into a mindless beast. Two hundred and twenty-nine nights when he had no idea what horrors he committed. Only the telltale smears of blood—sometimes his own, most times not—to torment him.

She stared at him for a long moment. “You must be hungry.”

Without waiting for him to answer she crossed to one of the cupboards and brought out a plate, a bread knife, a spoon and a heavy mug. From another she produced a small dark loaf and a thick slab of cheese—goat from the smell of it. She placed these before him along with an apple from a filled bowl then filled a kettle from a pitcher that stood on the hearth and hung it from an iron arm over the flames. She built these up with several pieces of wood then turned back to him.

The bread felt soft to his touch. Fresh. And he was starving. He sliced off a thick chunk then spooned on a generous helping of the soft cheese. As he bit into it the flavors filled his mouth, the sweetness of honey, the tang of herbs, the pungency of the goat cheese. He took another bite, barely taking the time to chew before swallowing.

When had he eaten last? Yesterday morning? He’d been in such a hurry to get out of that town where he’d spent most of the month assisting the blacksmith that he’d neglected to pack any provisions. He’d come to like the people there. He couldn’t risk being close enough to return in wolf shape that night. Instead he’d encountered...

He swallowed his current mouthful. “What’s your name?”

She looked up from the ceramic jar where she removed a handful of herbs to place in her teapot. “Marya.”



She'd have no other name, he realized. She was a witch and that meant she was herself, without ties to others except those she chose to make in the course of her work.

"Marya," he repeated. It felt right on his tongue. It was a name to whisper in the depths of the night while he held her close, worshiping her body with his own.

And he wanted to do that again, right this moment. He set the bread down. Another hunger, a need as primal and savage as that for sustenance, gripped him, engorging his cock.

## Chapter Three

Marya pulled the kettle from its hook, her hands protected by towels. She turned to the table to pour the boiling water into the teapot only to stop, awareness tingling through her, settling in her breasts and between her legs. Her breath quickened with the need that surged inside, a desperation to fill her aching pussy. A desperation for... She almost laughed when she realized she still didn't know his name. "And what is yours?" she asked.

"Guerrin." He rose, his passion burning in his wolf eyes. "Marya, this is crazy."

She shook her head. "It's the primal urge. And now that it's begun it will either save you or kill you."

A frown furrowed his brow, increasing his resemblance to a wolf. "What do you mean?"

"Sit down." She added the water to the herbs. Her hands shook, she noticed. *Damn.* Having him near was going to play havoc with her ability to get anything done. And right now there were things they must do before it was too late. And while rolling around on the floor while he pounded that massive cock of his into her depths might be part of the magic they had to weave, it was only part. There were other, far more difficult, tasks they must complete.

Guerrin sank onto the chair once more. He picked up his bread and cheese and took another bite but his gaze remained focused on her. A slow sensuous smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. "Give me one good reason why I'm not fucking you until you moan with pleasure beneath me."

"Well, for one I just might be on top."

His eyes darkened and he started to rise.

"Sit down, I said. There's another reason. We have a very difficult task to perform and we only have until the moon rises tomorrow night."

"And if we fail?" His voice held more challenge than curiosity.

"You'll die."

He swallowed his mouthful of food. After a moment he asked, "And if we succeed? Will I be free of this curse?"

She shook her head. "But you'll retain your own mind while in wolf form."

"My own mind," he repeated. "I'll be able to choose what I do? Where I go?"

"You can stay curled up by a hearth or roam the hills. You won't kill unless you want to."

"No more nightmares." He stared at the remaining bread on the plate. "What do we have to do?"

She took the seat opposite him and poured tea into the two mugs, pushed one across the wooden table toward him then placed the honey pot in the center. "Very soon after you..." *How does one put it delicately? One doesn't*, she realized. "After you were bitten," she continued, "someone visited you." She made it a statement.

His expression clouded. "An old man."

She nodded. "Each...victim perceives the visitor differently. And he gave you a gift, in your case you said it was a dagger. The weapon is unique to each person, as unique as the giver."

Guerrin pushed himself from the chair and strode to the corner where he'd dropped his pack. He tugged at the leather thong that secured it, rummaged through the meager contents and brought out a bundle of cloths. He carried it to Marya and set it on the table before her. "Open it. I can't."

She unwrapped it with care from its cocoon of old toweling. He—or someone—had taken great pains to protect the object within. Or to protect Guerrin from the object. She removed the last cloth to reveal a dagger, perhaps twelve inches long, made of

gleaming steel with a thick tracery of silver inlaid in the blade. A wrought silver wolf's head stared out from one side of the handle and on the other gleamed a large blood red ruby cabochon, its bottom flat to fit the bezel setting, its top cut in eight facets.

"Yes," she breathed. After several long moments she dragged her gaze from it. "What did he tell you?"

A harsh half-laugh broke from him. "That this was my destiny and I'd know what to do when the time came." He reached toward it only to draw his hand back. "Steel to pierce my heart, silver to ensure my death and a ruby to bind the curse within me so I take it to my grave without spreading it to those who must tend my body." His hands clenched. "I've come close to using it several times but always the will to live has been stronger. Gods grant me the strength to do what is right before I kill innocent people."

Marya frowned at him. "Didn't he make it clear? Didn't he tell you this could save you?"

"What else could he have meant but my death?" he demanded. Then his eyes widened. "Do you mean it won't kill me? That it will – what did you say? Allow me to retain my mind?" He surged forward, reaching for the blade.

She snatched it away. "If you plunge this into your heart, it will kill you."

"Then –" He broke off, shaking his head.

"Didn't he tell you about the primal urge?"

His lip curled in self-disgust. "To kill."

"Think back," she ordered. "He'll have told you something."

Guerrin buried his face in his hands. "He said that when...no, *if* the primal urge came upon me the dagger contained all I would need to save myself." He raised his head. "By all the gods, I thought he meant that when I could no longer bear becoming a beast I could kill myself."

"You could, of course, or you could use the material contained in this dagger to free your true heart."

"How?" he demanded.

She rose and crossed to the smaller table that held the leather-bound book where she had taken her notes during the night. "Read this." She handed it to him. "I have a potion to prepare. Tamsin? Rumpson? Larkin? Over here, please."

All three cats rose, stretched then jumped from the various pieces of furniture on which they'd been lying and sauntered over to the table. As one they leapt to its top and positioned themselves in a line. The tips of two tails and one manx stub twitched. Tamsin opened her mouth in a barely audible *prrt*. Larkin cast a baleful glare over his shoulder at their visitor.

Guerrin's gaze focused on the cats for several more seconds then lowered to the volume he held. His finger stroked the soft cover then he opened it to the first page.

"I spent the early hours of this morning collecting the herbs I'll need to make the salve to protect you so you can touch the silver." She went to her basket and began laying out the different plants, separating them into two piles. Tamsin moved to sit beside the one she would have to simmer into a decoction. Rumpson took up a position near the other that she would have to macerate for its juices. Larkin turned and fixed his unblinking cat stare on Guerrin. Behind her she heard him turn a page.

She cast the first group of plants into a small pot, added sufficient water to cover them then hung them over the fire. The others she placed in her large stone mortar and began to grind. The cats turned their attention to this new endeavor.

"Where did you find this information?" Guerrin asked at last.

"I'm the fifth witch this cottage has summoned to live in it. One of our jobs is to record any scraps of useful information we hear." She gestured to the row of journals that filled more than one shelf. "You'd be amazed what those contain."

He nodded. "I have to make a chain from this steel with my own hands and inlay a bead of silver into each link. The ruby must be set into the central link, the wolf head into the clasp and the whole anointed with a potion made of herbs, oils and drops of my

blood from both my human and my wolf shapes. And my mate must fasten it around my neck at a moment when I am both wolf and man."

"And each step," she assured him, "must be accompanied by an enactment of that primal urge."

"Primal urge," he repeated. A gleam entered his eyes. "You don't mean killing, do you."

She looked down at the leaves and bark she pounded in her stone mortar, trying to hide her smile. "No." Just the thought of it—of him—sent heat coursing through her, made her breasts swell and her nipples stand erect as if begging for his touch. Her pussy ached for him to fill it again.

His chair creaked as he rose. "And we have to give in to this urge during every step?" He came around to her side of the table.

She kept her gaze fixed on the pestle she used to macerate the herbs.

"If that's the case, you're wearing too many clothes, woman."

A choke of laughter escaped her. "And you'd better start doing your part, mister." She raised her gaze to his and the amber glow in his wolf eyes captured her, drawing her in. She could lose herself in their depths. They held tragedy, fear, strength—and right now they held burning desire.

"Right. You keep on with whatever you're doing," he told her. "I'll see to the primal urge. And believe me, it's raging."

"But I need the cats to—"

He held a finger with a nail that more closely resembled a claw to her lips. "No arguing. Cats usually know what needs to be done. And we have to work this magic properly, don't we?"

"Oh yes, we do," she breathed.

"Then keep pounding those herbs while I pound something else."

She turned back to her mortar and pestle. She was actually quivering inside in anticipation. She'd never experienced that before. But she'd never wanted to fuck anyone like she wanted to fuck Guerrin.

The cats retreated to the hearth and set up a low purring hum as they watched the pot that had begun to boil. She could leave them to take care of it. Which left her free to concentrate on the magic she would work with Guerrin.

He positioned himself behind her and encircled her with his arms so he could unlace her corselet. He slid it down over her generous hips, down her thighs, caressing her every inch of the way. When he reached her ankles she stepped free of the garment and kicked it away. Already he'd returned to her waist, pulling her chemise free, sliding his hands under it and across her ribs. He kissed her neck then bit it.

"Mmm." She leaned her cheek against him. "Hey, no more than a nibble, please."

He chuckled, a deep, rich sound. "I couldn't—" He broke off. "I've actually been laughing with you. I haven't done that since...since I was bitten."

She turned in his arms. "From now on you're going to be laughing a lot. We'll see to that."

"We'll see to a lot of things," he promised. "Such as getting you naked."

He stooped to kiss her, gently at first then with more pressure as she responded. With a sigh she wrapped her arms about his neck, drawing him closer against her. Her mouth opened to the pressure of his and his tongue traced her parted lips then eased inside. She closed her teeth over it, capturing it, tasting it. *Gods, what a fantastic sensory delight. Raw. Primal. And right now all mine.*

He pulled away. "We've got some serious work to do here." He tugged the chemise over her head and she raised her arms to free them from the long sleeves. He caught her hands where they rose above her then bent to kiss her exposed breasts. His teeth latched onto one nipple and his tongue worked the pebbled tip.

Marya closed her eyes and a low moan escaped her. Her clit throbbed with her longing and the first flush of her nectar flooded her cleft but she wanted him to

continue what he did. *For a very long time.* He transferred his attention to her other nipple and the sensations drew a whimper from her. She pulled one hand free and tangled it in his long, thick hair, holding him against her breast. He released her other wrist and, still licking and sucking her nipple, he unfastened the tie of her skirt, loosened the gathers and allowed it to fall to the floor. He looked up at last and his expression of hunger – for her – set her pulse racing.

“Back to work.” He turned her around to face the table.

Work. It took her a moment to remember what she’d been doing, how little time they might have in which to complete this undertaking of magic. But how could she concentrate on anything when he came up behind her and wrapped his arms about her naked body and pressed so close she could feel his massive erection rock-hard through his breeches against her rear?

“That’s right, work that pestle,” he breathed in her ear. He ground his cock against her. One hand cupped her breast and pinched her nipple, tugging and twisting. “Grind harder.” His other ran down her stomach, over her mons, then lower still. He cupped her pussy and his fingers stroked along her cleft, drawing out more of her honey. He found her clit and she gasped as he caressed it.

“Even strokes,” he ordered her and suited action to words by thrusting first one, then two, then three fingers into her tunnel. “That’s right, slow, steady, releasing those oils. Harder now.”

“Ohhh,” she sighed. It wasn’t easy keeping her eyes open, focusing on the stone tools she held. A very different tool, one every bit as unyielding as stone, filled her thoughts. And she wanted it to fill her body. She gave up and faced him. “Now,” she begged. “Please, now.”

He turned her back around. “Keep grinding.”

He moved away from her and she looked over her shoulder to see him pulling loose the ties on his breeches and pushing them down to cover his boots.



"It might be easier if we just don't bother with clothes," he said as he positioned himself. "Now grind, woman."

He pressed once more against her and this time his weeping cock prodded her backside as his arms wrapped about her. She bent over, sticking out her rear, thrusting against his erection. He caught her nipples between his thumbs and fingers, eased back then slid his cock along her pussy and into her weeping channel.

"Use that pestle," he ordered against her ear as he thrust hard into her. "Grind." He rotated his hips against her rear. "Pound those herbs." He drew out only to hammer into her over and over.

"I— They're ready," she gasped. "And so am I."

"Not yet." He turned her to face him, caught her about the waist and lifted her until she sat on the very edge of the smooth worktable.

She spread her thighs to allow him to press in close and held out her hands, catching his broad shoulders while she took in the sight of him. He had a huge cock with balls to match. It stood rigid, engorged, ready for more action. And she wanted it to act.

She tugged at his vest and he dragged it off then divested himself of his shirt as well. A fine downy fur covered his body, compliments of the time of month. It grew thickest across his chest that must boast an enticing crop at all times then tapered down the defined muscles, across his stomach and lower to form a bush sufficiently luxuriant to cradle his impressive shaft. A smile, pure male, pure heaven, tugged up the corners of his mouth. He grasped her rear and slid her closer to the edge of the table, pressing himself between her legs. She wrapped them about him, holding him prisoner. The head of his cock slid along her cleft, found what it sought. He backed off a scant inch then plunged hard.

A gasp of joy escaped her as he thrust deep, imbedding himself to his hilt. Then he eased out again only to drive in once more. She buried her face against his neck. Was it

furrier than it had been before? Did it matter? *Not in the least.* He was hers, wolf and man. And this joining would bind them closer, imbue the spell with more power.

So they would make it a glorious fuck.

"Faster," she whispered but there was no need. Already he hammered with his powerful tool at an increasing rate. She tilted her head back and closed her eyes. Her hands caressed that wonderful flat stomach, so hard beneath the furry covering, and found his nipples. *Nipples? On his stomach?*

Her fingers explored and found another set higher up. Then she reached his chest and found a third pair, the normal ones. She looked into his passion-darkened eyes. "You've got six nipples." But even as she spoke she began to caress and tease first one pair, then the second, then the lowest.

He gasped. "They...they never go away," he managed. "Like my eyes. They brand me."

"Wonderful." While her fingers worked the lowest pair her tongue went to work on one of the uppermost ones.

He groaned. "Gods, I never thought I'd be grateful for them."

"You didn't have me." She began to caress the middle pair.

"Ohhh," he moaned as with fingers and teeth she tugged on three nipples at once.

*This could be a whole lot of fun. This could...* Thought faded as he slid one hand between them and found her clit. A whimper started deep within her. Every sense focused on that area between her legs, on her clit that burned against his fingers, on her core filled with raw, beating power.

The coil tightened within her, driving her to the brink. Still she held on, pinching and tugging at the hard tips she held until he cried out, a low guttural sound of pure primitive passion. It changed to a howl as he exploded within her, thrusting her over the edge. Wave after wave of contractions left her gasping. Somehow they had their arms wrapped tightly about each other, their faces buried in one another's necks. She

clung to him, desperate to keep him inside just a little longer, wanting to hold him forever.

But did she want the impossible?

## **Chapter Four**

At last Guerrin stepped back, his penis pulling free from Marya's sweet sheath. Damn she was beautiful, a goddess, her figure so lush, her heart so full of hope and love. It shone in her face. And what a lovely face it was with her jade green eyes darkened in passion and her gloriously kissable lips parted. He wanted to taste them again. Hells, he wanted to fuck her again right now, this minute. She steadied herself with her hands on his shoulders and her touch sent urgent messages straight to his groin. His cock, which had emptied itself within her only minutes before, stirred back to life.

"We...we have work to do." Marya slid off the table.

And right into his arms. That might not have been her plan but it was definitely his. He drew her close, pressing her against the length of her body, letting his rising phallus jut against her. He kissed the top of her head. She smelled of violets, sweet and full of promise.

With an effort he set her aside. "What next?"

"My ointment." A touch of disappointment sounded in her voice as if she would rather pursue other pastimes.

"What more does it need?" he asked. "No, clothes first," he decided. "Naked might be practical but it's too distracting."

She picked up her chemise and pulled it on. With regret he watched as her full breasts vanished, then her stomach, then her mons. The hem fell to about mid-thigh. His shaft rose a little more as if in protest to the covering of its preferred bed. While he brought up his breeches and tied them once more she went to the hearth, checked the contents of the pot and brought it to the table.

"What can I do?" He dragged his gaze from her graceful movements and looked around. She kept the cottage tidy, including the herbs hanging to dry from the rafters. Would she like a special room where she could prepare the plants, brew the potions and store her remedies? It might be safest for their children –

*Children?* Where had that thought come from?

*From looking at Marya*, he realized. She was a woman any man would want to spend a lifetime with.

But he wasn't just any man. He was a werewolf. Werewolves couldn't make plans for a future. In fact they usually hoped like hell they didn't have one.

"Is there wood to be chopped? Fences that need mending?"

She looked up from where she mashed the boiled herbs through a sieve and the expression on her face hit him with a force that drove his breath away. Love. Amusement. As if they shared a precious joke between them.

"I could use a few drops of your blood." A choke of laughter escaped her. "Yes, I'm serious. I need it for the protective salve to bind its power to you." She picked up a knife. "A finger? Or would you prefer your arm?"

"I'll do it." He took the blade from her, considered for a moment then pressed the point to his thumb. The sharpness surprised him. It also punctured his skin with ease. Blood welled from the tiny hole.

"Here." She held out the bowl containing the mixture. "Three drops, please."

He allowed them to fall then sucked the rest as it continued to seep and spread.

"Bandage?" she asked without looking up from her stirring.

"It's fine." He liked watching her, the way her long braid swayed as she moved, the way tiny lines of concentration formed in her brow as she forced the ground herbs through a fine mesh to reduce them to a powder. And he loved the way her full breasts bounced, free of their supporting corselet, as she reached for one of the small stoppered

bottles of fragrant oils or collected the beeswax she had set in a pot on the hearth to soften. She was as graceful as one of her cats.

As she turned back to the table he positioned himself behind her, wrapped his arms about her waist and laid his chin on her shoulder. She shifted so her rear fitted snugly against his ever-hopeful cock. "Time for another exercise of that primal urge?"

She leaned her forehead against the side of his head. "Time. We have so little of that." She traced her fingers along the line of his jaw. "Do you always have a bit of a beard? Or is this just temporary?"

"It tends to be heavy," he admitted. "More so at a certain time of the month now." He eased away from her. His cock demanded her attention—which it apparently wasn't going to get at the moment—and touching her made it impossible to ignore. He strode to the window and stared out, studying the sky and the position of the sun. It was later than he'd expected. He must have slept for several hours between the setting of the moon and the time he'd found himself lying beside the river.

"Cats?" she called.

He turned to see the three animals spring lightly onto the table. They gathered about the ceramic pot before her. One after another they leaned forward to sniff the contents then sat back on their haunches.

"Well?" she asked.

The large tortoiseshell, apparently the leader, opened its mouth and made an *eck eck* sound.

"Thank you." Marya looked to Guerrin, triumphant. "Now we test it."

"How?"

"Spread a tiny bit on your fingers. Then touch that silver wolf's head on the dagger."

"Touch silver." His skin itched just at the thought of contact with that metal. Even during the dark of the moon he could no longer so much as brush against silver without

causing severe welts. During the full phase it burned his skin, leaving seeping blisters. Definitely not something for him to treat casually.

Marya's lips twitched. "Don't trust me?"

"I do." And that fact didn't surprise him as much as it ought. He hadn't trusted anyone for six and a half years. But Marya made him dream of new beginnings, a new life and something far greater and more all-encompassing than just trust alone. She made him think of love and futures and families.

She held out the large pot and the cats immediately came to his side. He thought one of them emitted a low hiss but he couldn't be certain. He scooped up a tiny bit of the thick waxy cream. Miniscule flecks of herbal matter remained though for the most part she had sieved them out so only their oils and potency remained. He rubbed it into his hands, reached for the dagger, hesitated only a moment then laid his palm full on the silver wolf head.

A tingling shot through his hand and up his arm but he forced himself not to move. An itch began, only to fade. The blinding pain he'd expected didn't materialize. He grasped the dagger. Nothing. He set it down and looked at his palm. Only the slightest redness marred the skin and it faded even as he watched.

He became aware of Marya pressing against his side.

She took his hand, studied it, then pressed her own to cover it. "We can begin."

And only as she sighed and directed a brilliant smile at him did he realize how tense she had been.

And how deeply he had fallen in love with her.

\* \* \* \* \*

"People are staring at us," Guerrin muttered as they approached the village's sole street an hour later. He knew this was a bad idea. He should never go anywhere near an inhabited area during the full moon, even in broad daylight. People tended to be suspicious of men who had pointy ears, extra-long teeth and a bit too much facial hair.

And if they noticed his finger claws – well, he'd better hope they ran slower than he did or that their pitchforks didn't have silver tips on their ends.

"Of course they're looking at you. It's because I'm usually alone. And because you're a stranger," she added, shooting him a teasing smile. "Just stay in the shadows and keep your hat pulled low and no one will notice anything. I won't be long." She paused at the gate of the first house. "Wait there by the tree."

As he turned away he saw a woman emerge from the house with three young children clustering about her. Marya opened the gate and let herself into the front garden.

"Who's that stranger?" a little girl asked.

"He's going to help me with something," Marya said calmly. "Let me see that cut knee." She set down the large basket she carried and rummaged among the various pots and vials and bottles she'd packed.

The girl obligingly stuck out her leg and pulled up her long skirt. "Are you going to do magic?"

Marya smiled as she stooped to examine the injury. "You know better than to ask me my business." She smoothed on something from one of the pots then straightened. "How are your pigs doing, Mrs. Carter?"

"That skin condition cleared right up, Mistress Marya. No more problems."

"And your mother?"

"Well, another bottle of that joint liniment wouldn't come amiss. And mayhap a little something for that stomach trouble of hers?"

A bottle and a pot changed hands. There were a lot fewer medicines in her basket now than when they'd set out. They'd stopped at two farms and each time he'd waited out of sight while she tended the various ills. From what he'd overheard she served as physician for both animals and people and councilor to all who needed guidance or just a sympathetic ear.



She rejoined him and they continued into town, stopping once more for her to tend an elderly man's eye infection. While she went inside his cottage, Guerrin leaned against a tree and studied the village. Such as it was. It consisted of a single row of buildings constructed around a central square. He spotted a dry goods store, a livery stable, an alehouse, a number of cottages with large vegetable gardens and a few animals and a smithy.

A smithy. His gaze narrowed on it. Normally this would be a gathering place in any village, with its door flung wide, smoke billowing from its massive chimney and most of the elderly or youthful male population sitting around on benches talking or smoking or just watching the smith at his work. But here the doors remained closed, the chimney empty. Did no one work there?

"Just one more stop," Marya said as she strode up beside him. "Then we can begin our work." She sounded strained but not from her visits. Lines of worry marred her brow.

He gave a short nod. "The task can't be impossible." *I hope.* For the first time in six and a half years he had something—or rather someone—to live for.

They passed the dry goods store and two more cottages then she left him at the gate of the next while she went inside to check on a dog with a broken leg now well on the mend. When she reemerged a short time later they cut across a stretch of the grassy square and headed not toward the large double doors of the barn-like smithy but to the side where a small two-story cottage attached to it.

Guerrin positioned himself once more in the shadows of a sheltering tree while Marya knocked. Seconds crept into minutes before a stockily built man, well past his middle years, appeared. His right arm hung in a sling about his neck. Guerrin couldn't hear what they said but the man directed a searching look in his direction. Guerrin straightened, doing his best to look respectable—which wasn't easy for someone covered in fine downy fur and with teeth that tended to protrude from his mouth at the moment.

Abruptly the man gave a short nod, emerged from his cottage and closed the door behind him. He led the way down the path that led to the huge double doors. "I'll keep an eye on him," he announced in tones obviously meant for Guerrin to hear.

"That won't be necessary, Mr. Dale," Marya said as she followed him.

The man stopped. "But—" he began only to break off, looking skeptical—but also as if he didn't want to displease his village witch. "Well, we'll see about that, mistress." He opened the first of the massive wooden doors.

She stopped him before he opened the other. "He'll be working with these closed," she said as Guerrin joined them.

A frown creased the smith's brow. "Will he? Now why would a man want to close himself in with such heat?"

"Because of the nature of the work, Mr. Dale," Guerrin said. "And I take it very kindly that you'll allow me near your forge."

The man regarded him with narrowed eyes. Rheumy eyes that didn't seem quite to focus. There might be other reasons than the injured arm that kept him from his forge. "Well, you're doing a job for the mistress. Done this sort of work before, have you then?"

"Aye. Apprenticed when I was naught but a lad." To a weaponsmith and not a blacksmith but those days of growing affluence and prestige were long behind him now. Six and a half years behind him.

The man grunted in acknowledgement if not in satisfaction and led the way inside.

The vast darkness reached out to Guerrin like a welcoming embrace. The cool air felt good against his furry skin after the warmth of the spring sun. He set his cloth-wrapped dagger on a table and strode to the forge, checked it over then turned his attention to the stack of waiting wood.

"Now what's this job about if you don't mind my asking?" Mr. Dale studied Marya.

"A smithy knows a thing or two about the craft, enough not to ask questions," she told him.

"Like that, is it?" The man nodded and jerked his head toward Guerrin. "Has a touch of the gift himself, does he?"

Guerrin looked up from the base he laid for his fire. "A touch of the curse, more like."

"And this would be in the nature of curse-breaking?"

"Curse taming," Marya corrected.

Mr. Dale crossed to the table and unwrapped the dagger. Guerrin lunged to stop him only to pull up short. The smithy belonged to this man. He had a right to know what went on here.

Mr. Dale set aside the cloths and turned the weapon slowly in his hands. "This was made by no blademaker," he breathed. He stared hard at Guerrin. "Did you have a hand in conjuring it?"

Guerrin shook his head. Damn, was his hair getting longer already? It brushed his shoulders. It also formed a thick covering on the backs of his hands and he could feel the ruffling of his...fur...beneath the sleeve of his shirt. It shouldn't be happening so soon. He still had several hours before the early rise of the moon.

Mr. Dale's attention returned to the dagger and his finger traced the wolf head on the hilt then the silver tracery along the blade. "May all the gods protect us," he breathed. "You're a werewolf."

"Not by choice, Mr. Dale." An edge crept into Guerrin's voice.

"And this." The smith held up the dagger but it was Marya at whom he looked. "You think this will work? I can't say I've ever seen a man – nor a wolf for that matter – with the primal collar."

Marya nodded. "Most fall into despair and use it to take their own lives." She joined him and ran her hand over the delicate carving. Slowly she raised her gaze to Guerrin. "Not all are blessed to find their mate."

Mr. Dale snorted. "So it's that way with you, is it, mistress? Then I'd best be leaving you two alone to get on with your work."

"No rush. Let's tend your arm while he gets the fires hot."

Her gaze held Guerrin's for a long moment and a rush of emotion welled in his throat, almost choking him. *Gods how I love her.* And he never dreamed he'd see the same love reflected back to him in the depths of a woman's eyes. *This had better work.*

But the spell once started would come to completion one way or another. If they had yet to succeed by moonrise tomorrow night, he would die.

## **Chapter Five**

Marya sensed the buildup of the magical force even before she touched the barn-like door of the smithy. She opened it just enough to slip through then pulled it closed behind her. Heat filled the large room, heat and flames and the smell of the burning logs. And the energy that crackled with miniscule icy blue particles, unseen by the ordinary eye.

Guerrin had stripped to the waist and an orange-red light surrounded him, setting his skin aglow even through the fine down that covered him. She remained where she stood, breathless at the sight of him, of the bulging muscles outlined in fire and shadow, of the sheer aura of raw masculine power. As she watched he pumped the bellows into the forge, fanning the flames into a greater rage.

He looked up. "I felt you come in." His deep voice growled the words.

Desire flashed through her as hot and intense as the fire that raged in the forge. Her breasts tingled and the soft linen of her chemise suddenly scratched against her erect nipples. And what her clit demanded drove her near to swooning with desire.

He nodded toward the workbench that stood just behind the anvil. "I've cut free the ruby and the wolf's head."

And that meant it would soon be time for another exercise of that all-demanding primal urge. The tip of her tongue circled her lips in anticipation. "What will you do next?" And could it involve thrusting him back against the table and licking the beading droplets of sweat from his chest, from around his nipples? All six of them? And could she go lower, free his massive cock from his breeches, spread her legs and welcome him home?

"Melt the silver from the steel." His gaze held hers, his eyes burning as hot as the flames behind him. "We should make sure the magic is secured during this step."

"I'll see to it," she promised. "Go ahead."

Several more seconds passed before he looked down at the tools arranged on the wooden surface before him. He selected long-handled pliers with which he gripped the hilt of the dagger. Then he picked up a firing crucible in his other hand and extended both into the forge.

Marya came up behind him, reached around and stroked her hands along his flat stomach, up the deeply cut lines of his abs. Even before she reached his uppermost nipples she saw the silver liquefy then race along its groove in the blade to spill into the waiting long-handled cup. She pinched hard only to release him as he turned and tipped the contents in a slow but uneven stream into the small metal bucket filled with water that stood at his feet.

He set down the crucible and picked up the container. "Now we retrieve the silver droplets so they'll be ready to set in the steel links when I make them."

"Mmmm." She wrapped her arms around his waist and leaned her cheek against the fuzzy back of his shoulder. He smelled of smoke tinged with a muskiness that was pure male. With a touch of wolf thrown in. But it was a very male wolf. Raw sexual power exuded from him in the same way that the magical energy vibrated from the various pieces that had once made up the dagger. "Will it be hard?"

A low chuckle sounded deep in his throat. "Like a steel rod. And it's all yours."

A choke of laughter escaped her and her hands slid down to feel the engorged cock that strained against his breeches. She caressed it, savoring the force it represented, the force—if she had anything to say about it—that would soon be pounding into her again. "I meant the work. Converting a weapon into a collar."

He looked over his shoulder to where she still nestled against him and the smile that melted her heart tugged at the corners of his mouth. "It was made with magic for a magical purpose. It's possible I could have used any fire to create its new shape."

She shook her head. "There's power in a smithy. And there's power," she added, pressing her hands over his hard cock, "right here."

He drew a deep breath. "Then let's get on with the next step."

He drained the bucket and out poured nine large beads of pure silver. Neat beads, Marya noted. Pouring metal into water like that should have produced odd-shaped lumps and streamers. But these were perfectly round. Definitely magic at work. It would have to be, she supposed. Not all werewolves would know their way around a forge.

He set a thick metal rod into a vise. "And now..." he began only to pause. His gaze rested on her.

"And now?" she prompted.

That sexy grin that left her weak spread across his face. Even his pointy fangs were sexy. She could get used to a werewolf in her life. A tamed one, at least.

"Now you take off all your clothes." He reached for the drawstring of his breeches.

She gave an elaborate sigh. "Helping you in a smithy is dangerous work." She loosened her corselet with provocative slowness, enjoying how his gaze riveted on her fingers as if willing them to speed their actions. A low growl sounded in his throat as she inched the woolen garment over her breasts then higher, still with teasing deliberation until she eased it free and laid it on the table.

"Faster," he breathed. "I need to build up the heat."

"I think this is doing the job very nicely." She loosened the drawstring of her skirt until the fabric lowered to rest on her hips. She shimmied and it slipped a little more, then still farther until it rested on her mound. Another stronger shake of her hips and it fell to the ground, leaving her in only her long linen chemise. She tugged this up inch by provocative inch.

This time his growl sent a shiver through her, part exultation and part pure primal lust. *Gods how I want him.* But he needed the blaze to be white hot for the next step of his magical forging. She could hear his ragged breathing as she exposed her mound. She'd half expected him to surge toward her at that point but he stood his ground, his gaze devouring her as the linen slid up her stomach, over her breasts and at last over her

head. She laid it beside the corselet then stepped out of her fallen skirt and added it to the pile.

"As I was saying," he managed, his tone that of a lecturer, "the next step is to make sure the fire is blazing." He closed the space between them and his hands cupped her breasts. "This can be done by repositioning the wood," and he pinched her nipples, rotating them, tugging them, "and blowing in more air with the bellows."

He stooped to breathe on her pebbled tips in several short puffs. Then while his fingers massaged one areola he took the other into his mouth and licked the hardened bud, sucking until an uncontrollable moan escaped her. He blew again and the sensation shot straight to her clit. If he kept this up he would drive her over the brink.

"Then when everything is burning with intensity," both his hands worked her breasts now and his tongue flicked against her ear when he paused, "we thrust the metal into the hottest part."

"Oh gods, please, yes," she gasped.

She reached for his rod, every bit as hard as the one he'd set in the vise and at least twice its diameter. She leaned back against the table to keep from falling as his erection pressed against her stomach. Already it seeped with its longing to bed itself inside her. She eased her legs apart and that massive weapon of his lowered, pushing, prodding until it shoved against her clit. She moaned but as fantastic as that felt she needed it to quest further, to find her tunnel, to drive itself home. It slid along her pussy then he drew it away only to thrust back, plunging it within. She cried out and grasped his hips, holding him close, her inner muscles doing the same to his cock.

"That's right." His words came out on a ragged gasp. "We hold it there until it's burning hot and begging for action. Then we draw it out," and he suited action to words, "and begin to pound it. Hard." He plowed into her again only to withdraw at once. "Fast." He drove inside her again.

He continued his ruthless assault and with each thrust the sound of a hammer hitting metal on an anvil reverberated through her. She clung to him, near to fainting.



His mouth once more covered a nipple while he sucked and licked. His other hand forced its way between them so that every thrust caused his fingers to press hard against her clit. The tension coiled inside her, tighter, unbearable, until it exploded forcing a scream from her throat. Her inner muscles clenched over and over and he too let loose a cry that turned into a howl as he pumped his seed into her depths.

"So that's how you work metal," she gasped.

"Oh no. You have to do that again and again. Get it red hot, pound it, get it hot again. Pound some more."

She straightened as he stepped away from her. Gods he was a beautiful sight bathed in the orange light, his skin gleaming with sweat, the fine cover of fur only serving to outline his muscles.

He raised his head as if sniffing the air. "Time is passing. The moon will rise in just over three hours. I'll have to be far from here by then."

"Let's get back to work." And they could do that naked. Far better in fact for what she wanted—or was that needed?—to do.

He picked up the bellows and set to work pumping them. She handed him more of the split logs and he piled them in place then forced more air into the heart of the fire. The heat that emerged shimmered in its intensity.

Guerrin clamped the dagger once more in the long-handled pliers and inserted it far into the furnace. As he did so his cock stirred and began to stiffen until it rose high and proud once more. Ready for more magical action.

Marya dropped to her knees at his side. "Can you turn toward me?"

His gaze still on the dagger, he complied. She couldn't have asked for a better sight than the one he presented to her. He had the most magnificent cock and tackle. She took his balls in her hand, massaging them. She ran her tongue along them then found the base of his shaft. She licked up the length and it quivered in response. With her free hand she held it down so she could run her tongue around the edge of its crown.

"It's practically throbbing with the heat." Guerrin sounded surprised.

"I'd noticed." She squeezed his balls gently as she nibbled the shaft.

His deep sexy chuckle sounded. "That too. But I meant the dagger. Careful, I'm drawing it out."

She backed away as he brought the glowing piece of steel from the furnace. He set in on the anvil and, still holding it in the long pliers, picked up the hammer. "It should have taken much longer," he added.

"Magic," she reminded him. "Though I was hoping for a bit more time too."

He stooped to kiss the top of her head. "I have to pound it now but I'm not sure how we can—" He broke off as she settled her teeth on his cock once more.

She released him long enough to say, "Pound away," then she repositioned herself and took his bulbous head into her mouth.

"You're not safe," he protested. "The sparks—"

She pulled her head back and he slid free. "Magic," she repeated. "I'll be safe. And if you keep me talking we'll never be able to bring this...undertaking...to completion."

"Right." He swung the hammer.

\* \* \* \* \*

Guerrin forced himself to concentrate on the metal that he pounded from dagger-shape to a long narrow rod. Marya's ministrations to his cock and balls vied for his attention. How could anyone use their mouth muscles to such incredible effect? They seemed to ripple along the length of his penis. It had never throbbed so much, burned so hot for release. He thrust forward and his next blow with the hammer fell awry. Yet the steel stretched out just that little bit more anyway.

*Magic. Thank the gods for it.* With Marya working her portion of the spell he'd never be able to do his if it weren't actually doing itself. But no, he couldn't just stand back and watch the dagger re-form on its own. He had to do his part. Both on the anvil and in her sweet mouth.

He swung and thrust once more and a low groan rumbled from him. Damn, the sound of the hammer striking the anvil, the feel of her tongue, her touch to his balls. He couldn't hold out much longer. He needed to pound and plunge, faster and harder and deeper...

He couldn't hold back. Power surged through him too intense to bear. He swung one last time as he lunged into her mouth and he threw back his head in a lupine howl as he exploded, the intensity of his orgasm shaking him to his core. But instead of lassitude, energy surged through him. Energy to complete the links. Energy to —

The wolfishness stirred in him, seeping through his bones, running along his muscles, racing through his blood, raising his hackles. His mouth ached with the fangs that strained to lengthen, sharpen, tear into flesh as his prey ran from him in terror. He shook his head in denial but it turned into the full body shiver of an animal.

"The moon," he gasped.

Marya clutched his hand and closed her eyes. "It won't rise for about another two hours."

"The urge to change — it's too strong. It's taking me already."

She rose and grasped his shoulders as if to hold him there, to force him to remain human. "This is the peak of the full moon."

"But it's never come on me before it actually started to rise," he cried. He had so much to do still. And he had to run away, far from this town, far from anyone he might hurt. He needed to be many miles from here before he changed into a creature with the lust for blood filling his being.

"We've started a work of magic," she told him.

She sounded so calm, so steady. So dependable. He wrapped his arms about her, holding her close, needing the promise of hope she represented. Needing her love to keep him human. But for that he also needed the collar secured around his neck, never to be removed. They still had hours of work. But already he could feel the claws on his toes rubbing against the soft leather of his boots.

"I've got to get away," he breathed.

"Guerrin!"

He lifted his head, sniffing the air with a nose that sensed far more than a mere human's. Words sounded near him but they didn't matter. Only the smells, only the need to run, to hunt, to kill.

She slapped his face, over and over, not hard but with persistence. "Can you hear me? Guerrin!"

He drew a shuddering breath. "We'll have to finish tomorrow."

"Go to my cottage," she ordered. "Guerrin? Are you listening?"

With an effort he focused on her and covered her hands where they rested on his face with his own. They definitely had more hair on their backs than they should before the moon had crested the horizon. And his claws...

"Go to my cottage," she repeated, "and eat something. Bread. Cheese. Carrots. Human food. Do you understand?"

He nodded. Would he even have time to get there before the change overtook him completely, left him running on four paws instead of two feet? Left him craving warm blood and raw flesh instead of baked goods and dairy products?

"If you eat," she went on, "you won't be hungry as a wolf. You might not hunt."

*Eat. I have to eat.* Would he have time?

"Stay near my cottage." She spoke slowly, one word at a time. "You must come to me some time tonight when you are fully a wolf."

"I can't trust myself," he gasped. "Not tonight. The wolf form is too strong. If I come to you —"

"You must." She broke across his protests. "And the primal urge is stronger even than the wolf in you. You'll come to mate. Now go. Run. I'll straighten up here and follow as soon as I can." She pulled his head down and kissed him hard.

He dragged her tight against his body, savoring the feel, wanting never to let go. But a part of him that grew stronger by the second also wanted to rip her throat out. Not the best foundation for the life he wanted with her. His mouth sought hers for one last desperate caress then he dragged up the breeches he'd lowered and knotted them about his waist even as he sprinted for the door. It opened with well-oiled ease and he raced toward the nearest low wall. Several people turned to stare at him but he kept on, driven by his fear of what he might do if he remained. He laid his hands on the top stones, vaulted over and pelted across the field toward the forest beyond.

\* \* \* \* \*

Marya picked up her chemise and pulled it over her head then found her skirt. She was still lacing her corselet when she heard the door creak once more. She turned to see Mr. Dale standing in the opening, gazing back over his shoulder.

"It's all right," Marya called to him.

"That was him running across that field?" The smithy approached the forge but his gaze went to the anvil where a quarter inch diameter rod of beaten steel now lay. He picked up the pliers and prodded it. "Fast work."

Marya regarded it for a long moment. How could Guerrin have beaten it so smooth, so long, so perfect in so short a time? Magic of course. The smithy hummed with it. She was willing to bet the metal would be cool if she touched it.

"What now?" Mr. Dale's penetrating gaze studied her face.

"Now," she said slowly, "we do what must come next."

She helped the injured man to clean the smithy, replacing the tools where they belonged, wrapping the pieces that had once made the dagger into their original cloths and tucking them away in safety. They would still have a great deal to do tomorrow. But there would be time.

There had to be.

The fire has already died down in the forge. Magic, of course. Under Mr. Dale's instructions she raked it to coals and spread them out. Once sure that all was safe for the night she headed for home as fast as she could walk. She had a great deal to do. And she needed to be safe in her cottage before moonrise if they were to have any hope of bringing this spell weaving to a successful conclusion. If they failed – No, she couldn't bear to think of the consequences, of Guerrin dying because she couldn't do her part.

She would need very powerful protection this night. And for that she would need the cooperation of the cats, those persnickety little beasties.

## Chapter Six

The door to her cottage stood slightly ajar. “Guerrin?” Marya called but she didn’t really expect an answer. She let herself in to be met by the three cats howling their indignation at—she listened to their tone and caught their meaning—the invasion of their territory by a werewolf.

“He’ll be here—” she began sternly only to break off. Occasionally? More often? Permanently? “When he chooses,” she finished, her voice firm. But what did she really know about him? That he was the sexiest man she had ever met, even with that fine covering of fur that never quite left him at this time of the month. That he was strong. That he had principles. That he was a fantastic lover. That his cock was huge and powerful and that he knew how to use it to drive her wild with delight. That being with him made her think of a future and laughter and sharing.

That she was his mate.

But he’d had a life before he’d been bitten and cursed. He’d been a weaponsmith, he’d had position and money. He might even have had a family—still have a family who waited and prayed he’d one day be able to return to them.

Just because she was his mate didn’t mean he was free to stay with her.

His pack remained in the corner where he’d set it, apparently untouched. On the table rested a plate covered with breadcrumbs. A blunt knife still smeared with the goat cheese perched on its edge. Relief flooded through her. He’d eaten. That should blunt his bloodlust this night.

Until she stabbed him.

That would turn even the laziest wolf aggressive. And from what she’d seen of his incredible power and grace the night before, he’d fall into the energetic and decisive class, as far removed from “lazy” as possible.

She was wasting precious time. She moved the debris of his hasty meal to the sink, pumped a bit of water and left it all to soak. She had protective spells to weave—a tea for herself to drink, an oil to sprinkle over her clothing and skin, a balm to spread on the knife she must use and a salve to treat the wound once she had made it. And she'd better anoint her collecting vial as well to help ensure she brought home what she needed without spilling it. She would never have another chance.

She closed her mind to thoughts of what would happen if she failed. She wouldn't let herself.

She called the cats and they arranged themselves around the table, tails—and one stub—twitching. While they made themselves comfortable she hurried to the cupboard and searched among the herbs, pulling out one, hesitating, putting it back and choosing another instead. This must be exactly right.

Larkin set up a low growling. The moon had begun its slow rise, she realized. Where was Guerrin? Close at hand? Far away? She wasn't ready for him yet. She only hoped she'd be prepared when the time came.

She pounded her chosen herbs in the mortar, necessity—fear—lending every crushing stroke more power. She whispered the words that helped her focus her intention and the cats added their own muttered sounds. Leaving the macerated plant material to steep in oil under the watchful gazes of the cats, she turned her attention to the salve.

More than an hour passed before she finally looked up from the collecting vial she had anointed with protective oil. Energy pulsed around her from her labors and the cats' fur stood on end. So did the hair on her arms. And the back of her neck.

Her neck. That was one area with which she must take extra precautions this night. Fury and pain might well overcome the primal urge and she wanted no mysterious person paying her a visit with a dagger of her own in a month's time. If she still lived.

And Guerrin... Guerrin would be dead if she failed. She couldn't face that thought though she knew it was a very real possibility.



How many people had actually tried this spell? And how many—if any—had succeeded? But once the primal urge had struck there was no turning back.

*My neck*, she reminded herself. She searched through the cupboards and chests in the cottage. Nothing suitable, nothing that crazed fangs couldn't tear to pieces. She looked up from the wooden box through which she'd just rummaged and spotted Guerrin's pack. He was more likely than she to possess something suitable.

He did. Lying right across the top, a sword belt made supple by use. She drew the long leather strap free of the sheath and smiled as she fingered it. *Complete with a buckle even. Perfect.*

Prepared at last, armed with what she would need, she ventured outside. *Where is he?* Tonight the moon was at the zenith of its power. Tonight if ever the werewolf form might overcome even the primal urge. Which, she reflected, was why it was tonight she must draw his wolf blood to complete the spell of binding.

She crossed her clearing to the line of trees. Last night she had encountered him in this direction. Would he be there on the flat rock overlooking the river again? She closed her eyes, reaching out with her mind. Nothing. She couldn't sense him as wolf or man...or mate.

She hesitated, uncertain. She didn't dare stray far from her cottage and the protection offered not only by her wards but by the solid walls. She took a few more uncertain steps. The forest was quiet, too quiet, with none of the usual night noises.

An overwhelming desire to run surged through her. *Danger.* Every part of her vibrated to that inner warning. The sensations grew but now she tingled with anticipation, not fear. He was here. Guerrin was close by. And he was as aware of her as she was of him.

Longing surged through her to feel his hands on her breasts, his powerful cock thrusting between her legs, deep into her center. Her hunger for him left her weak.

But she must be strong, stronger than she'd ever been before if they were both to live beyond the following night.

She tightened her grip on her knife. She would have only one chance. If she waited too long she would lose the opportunity – and Guerrin.

Her arm felt awkward from the padding she had wrapped about it. She braced herself. *Where are you?*

She caught movement out of the corner of her eye, a deepening of shadows. Then his growl started low in his throat, building, surrounding her. She wanted to open her arms to him, rip off her clothes and spread her legs. Instead she shifted her stance. She could see the golden gleam of his wolf eyes, compelling, mesmerizing. Intoxicating. Her breasts ached unbearably. And as for the emptiness in her pussy that demanded to be filled –

She clenched her fists around the knife and the collecting vial to keep from throwing them to the ground and grasping her nipples, finding her clit and pummeling it until she cried out.

The wolf crouched low, the growling intensifying. Then he sprang.

At that same moment she lunged forward, wielding the knife in a slashing motion. Resistance, then yielding –

Guerrin howled, his eyes blazing as blood gushed from the wound to his upper shoulder. He shook his great head and snapped at her arm, his fangs sinking into the padding. She stumbled, falling beneath his great weight.

She couldn't think about what was happening to her, she had to concentrate on the ceramic vial she still clutched, on collecting enough of his wolf blood to complete the binding spell. The pressure of his jaw made her gasp in pain and his fangs sank deeper. But the warm stickiness flowed over her hand. *Oh gods, will the smell of the blood overpower the primal urge to mate? Will it send you into a killing frenzy?*

"Guerrin!" she cried but she doubted he could hear her over his own snarling. She couldn't shove the stopper into the vial. She thrust it aside with a prayer that she had enough, that it wouldn't spill.

"Guerrin!" she tried again. With her free hand she tugged at the gathered neckline of her chemise, dragging it down to reveal her breasts. If she could just reach his penis before he tore her apart...

The terrible crush on her arm slackened, the weight pressing on top of her shivered and no longer did a furry monster cover her but a man's body, a man's legs. A man's arms. He raised his head and by the light of the full moon she could see his expression of pain and fury.

He closed his wolf eyes then opened them again and slowly shook his head. "Marya?" Her name rasped in his throat. "Gods, what—" He broke off and groped for his shoulder where it joined his neck. Blood still seeped from the deep gash. His shadowy shape shimmered as the wolf part of him resurfaced.

She caught his head between her hands. "Kiss me." She dragged his mouth down to hers and the pressure left her bruised but needing more. When he tried to pull his head away she clung to him, running her tongue along his lips until with a groan he dragged her against his chest and buried his face in her neck.

"What—" The fur lengthened even as she watched and his jaw began to change shape.

"Fuck me!" She struggled to drag up her skirts. He shifted his position and she rolled to her hands and knees, pulling her garments up to expose her rear.

"Oh gods!" His words rang out, human words not the cry of a wolf, filling the stillness of the forest. He slammed against her, his iron-hard cock thrusting along her cleft, finding the entrance it sought, forcing its way inside her.

He fell heavily across her back and she shifted to support them both. His hands found her breasts, squeezing them as he drew out of her pussy then thrust in harder even than before. Then his arms dangled at her sides and she felt the fur pressing against her and the almost wolf that now thrust into her depths attempted to latch his teeth in a mating bite through the leather and cloth that protected her neck. Then fingers sought her nipples and it was a human face that hovered near her shoulder and

a human voice that kept breathing, “Oh gods, oh gods, oh gods,” until it broke off into a whine and a rutting snarl as the wolf shape again took control as he rammed his shaft into her.

Then a hand once more covered her breasts and another cupped her mound while his fingers found her clit. He rubbed hard, painfully, ecstatically and she moaned with her need for him to continue. Except paws once more draped down her sides and a rough tongue licked her ear. *How can this be so fantastic?* Sensation washed over her, filling every part of her body, driving everything from her mind but the human cock that pounded into her with increasing power and speed.

Her need intensified, tightening into a coil, screaming for release. And with a wild howl he exploded inside her, triggering her own orgasm. As wave after wave of contraction gripped her, she let out a cry – almost a howl – that joined and blended with his.

She fought against the desire to collapse, to lie in the tall grass holding his body – lupine or human or both, it didn’t matter – tight against her own. To relish the sweet afterglow of their passion. But life, she reminded herself, didn’t always work like that. She needed to roll away, find the pot of healing salve and apply it to that knife wound she’d given him.

His low snarl changed her mind. He pulled from her and she didn’t need to look around to know which form claimed him. The wolf – the hurt, confused and post-coital wolf – now watched her with only the faintest traces of the primal urge remaining to keep him from leaping upon her in a very different manner.

She would have to tend his shoulder later. She scrambled to her feet, found her collecting vial and ran. Behind her the snarling cut off abruptly, giving way to a yelp of pain. She wanted to go back, soothe him, comfort him...*and be torn to shreds?*

She forced herself to run faster toward the open door of her cottage, grateful for the light of the full moon that revealed every obstacle in her path. She could hear him limping after her, his stride uneven, his breathing labored. She was gasping herself as

she passed through her wards and reached the pool of light that flooded out from the lantern she'd left on the table. Then she stumbled inside, slammed the door behind her and bolted it once more.

She sank onto a chair, hugging herself, shivering. What a mating they had shared. Raw. Passionate. Desperate. Her gaze moved to the vial and with a shaking hand she set it on the table, propping it against one of the herb pots she'd left there. She'd lost the stopper but she had others. She rose to find her legs trembling but she crossed to the cupboard and pulled out the basket that contained the spare stirring sticks and other tools she used. She'd abandoned her knife and the salve as well, she reflected as she sealed the lupine blood in its container. No matter. She'd find them later when she had the time. Her lips twitched. Or rather when it was safe.

\* \* \* \* \*

A dull aching pain roused Guerrin. He lay without moving, allowing his senses to assess his position. The damage to his body. *What happened last night?* He couldn't remember.

The rush and burble of the river filled his mind. He could hear birds singing and calling. A squirrel—no, two—scurried around the trunk of a tree, their claws scratching the bark. Familiar sounds. Safe sounds. No human sounds.

He risked opening his eyes. No farmers with pitchforks, no hunters with bows lurked nearby ready to take vengeance for whatever acts he might have performed the night before. He shifted his shoulders and the pain stabbed anew. His shoulder near his neck. Too high for one of those grizzly animal traps. *What?* Then memory flooded back.

Blood. Marya had needed his wolf blood.

He dragged himself to a sitting position, setting his jaw to keep from crying out. He concentrated, trying to force details to reemerge. A flash of her face set in determination. And fear. *Hells, did I hurt her?*

He struggled to his feet then stood swaying as dizziness washed over him. Marya. He clung to the thought of her. Marya had stabbed a werewolf in order to collect blood. And the werewolf—he—would have struck back, infuriated. *Oh gods, what have I done?*

He had to find her, learn for himself if he had committed the unforgivable act.

He steadied himself on the nearest tree as he looked around for his clothes. No sign of them. And he didn't recognize this stretch of the river. Where was he? How many miles might he have covered, running in maddened pain-filled fury?

Dark crusty red streaked down his left shoulder, covering his arm and his hand. Dried now but last night the wound had been fresh, the blood flowing, leaving its trail. And he'd had years of practice learning to track himself back the way he'd come, his path sometimes crashing through the underbrush, sometimes so stealthy he could barely find a bent blade to guide him to wherever he'd dragged off his clothes as the wolf form possessed him.

He drew a shuddering breath. Already the sun rose high above the trees. He'd lost precious hours. And they had so very few in which to finish his collar.

He looked around again. He had no idea in which direction Marya's cottage lay. He took a staggering step toward the river, then another, more sure this time. He needed a drink. And food. He lowered himself on the rocks and scooped a single handful of the chilly frothing water to his mouth, then another and a third.

As he reached for the fourth he spotted a trace of blood, not quite a paw print but a smear. Where he must have stepped on a rock dampened by the churning flow. He looked downstream and spotted other traces, more dark smears, a bent twig. He hadn't bothered with stealth this time. And he'd followed the river.

He rose to a low crouch, hugging his arm on his injured side close to his body with the other, trying to spare his shoulder as much as possible as he began the search for his clothes. And Marya. The thought of her drove him on, over the rough ground, around the boulders. His strength crept back until he broke into a run. *Damn*, those rocks and

twigs hurt his feet. Why hadn't his soles hardened? He spent enough time running around barefoot during the full moons. He could use his wolf pads right now.

It took him more than an hour before he reached a massive rock he recognized. Flooded with relief, he dragged his clothes from their imperfect hiding place in the hollowed bole of a tree. The effort to pull on breeches and boots reopened the wound and he gritted his teeth against the renewed pain. He started for Marya's cottage, his shirt and vest over his good arm. Time enough to finish dressing once her soothing herbs began their healing process. But it must be noon already, judging from the position of the sun.

As he emerged into the clearing he stopped to stare at the low stone building, the neat gardens, the goats who peered at him then darted back into their shelter. It felt like coming home.

*Home.* He closed his eyes, stunned by the intensity of his desire to have a real home once more. He ached for one. And for all the comfort and security—and love—it implied.

He strode forward quickly, up the path and barely stopped himself from opening the door. He hadn't the right. Not yet. Maybe never. He knocked then waited, eager to hear her footsteps, to hold her close, to bury his face in her neck, between her breasts. Between her legs. His cock stiffened at the prospect and a slow grin tugged at the corners of his mouth. What was a knife slash to the shoulder compared to the thrust and plunge of the weapon between his legs?

Only he didn't hear her footsteps.

"Marya?" he called. Seconds slipped past. What if she couldn't respond? What if he'd injured her? What if he'd ripped her throat out?

He didn't even know where he'd encountered her last night. Had her attack on him cancelled out the primal urge? Had he killed her instead of fucked her?

He thrust open the door. "Marya!" His gaze swept the room. No sign of her.

Two of the cats sat on the table regarding him with unwavering stares. The third jumped up between them and yowled. It sat, he realized, on a piece of paper. And before the animals had growled at him and stayed out of his way. Now they sought to attract his attention.

He strode forward and the beasties scattered. A note. She'd left him a note.

"Beloved," he read and his heart surged. "So little time left. I've gone to the village to do my visits. When I'm done I'll meet you in the smithy and tend your wound there." And she had signed it with an M.

He clutched the sheet. She was all right. He hadn't killed her last night. And she called him "beloved". Elated, he crossed to the basin and washed off the worst of the gore then bound the wound as best he could. He could hardly walk past people looking as he did now. He donned his shirt and vest then tore off a chunk of bread and grabbed a couple of apples from a filled bowl to eat on his way to the village. He had to hurry, every minute counted.

And they slipped away all too quickly.



## Chapter Seven

At the door Guerrin turned and bowed to the cats. "Thank you," he said then let himself onto the porch and strode away.

Smoke already rose from the smithy chimney as he finally approached. Bless Marya for getting the forge ready. And bless Mr. Dale for helping her. He avoided the gazes of the few people he passed as he hurried down the road, crossed the common and entered the barn-like building.

Heat greeted him, wrapping around him as he paused just inside. And there was Marya near the forge, standing before the blacksmith tending his arm. She looked up and even at that distance he could see her face brighten. Mr. Dale said something with a grin that he couldn't hear but Marya handed him the bandage and turned toward Guerrin.

He broke into a run, catching her in his arms and holding her tightly against his chest. *Gods she's wonderful to hold, to smell, to taste.* His mouth devoured hers in his need to reassure himself that every bit of her was all right, undamaged and as eager for him as he was for her.

The sound of a deep chuckle dragged him back to his surroundings. Mr. Dale had risen and now stood just a few steps away. "I'll leave you to your work then shall I? And when it's successful, lad, come and see me. I could use a hand in my smithy just now. It's a job for a man whose health isn't playing him false. And I'm thinking I'm growing too old for this work." He gave a short nod and limped toward the door only to stop and look back. "But mind you get on with your task. There's a good deal of work left to be done and precious little time."

"He's right," Marya breathed as the aging blacksmith left them.

Guerrin kissed her forehead then the hollow at the base of her throat. One hand roamed down to her rear, clutching it, pressing her mons and stomach against the hard shaft that rose between them. The other slid over her ribs, upward to grasp the soft flesh of her breast where it protruded above her low-scooped neckline. "You've already got my fire raging."

"And the furnace is red hot and waiting for that rod." Her voice was deep, husky with her need.

"Mmm. The sooner I plunge it in the better." His mouth descended once more on hers with a greedy hunger, crushing and tasting and devouring the sweetness that was her. With an effort he pulled back. "Clothes off, woman. We've magic to make in here." He stripped off his shirt.

She gasped, her hands dropping away from the corselet she unlaced. "Guerrin, I—" She broke off, shaking her head. "That wound. I'm so sorry."

He placed gentle hands on her shoulders. "I only remember flashes of what happened last night. The wolf held full sway."

"Not quite. But I had to strike so fast before you changed to human form."

"I know." He leaned his forehead against hers. "You did what had to be done in the best way you could. But I was so afraid," his thumbs stroked along her collarbone to her neck, "I'd ripped your throat out."

A tremulous smile tugged at her lips. "I'm not daft, Guerrin. Last night was the peak of the full moon. I took precautions."

"Spells." *Thank all the gods she's a witch.*

Her smile broadened. "Your sword belt actually." She dropped her skirt to the ground then picked it up to rest with her corselet.

"A collar." Which brought him back to the one he had to make for himself, the one that would prevent him from ever hurting her — or anyone else — again.

"Let me see the damage." She pushed away from him and reached for his bandage.

“Later. After you’ve drawn my human blood as well. As Mr. Dale said, we have very little time and right now my rod is aching for the heat of that furnace.” He leaned against the workbench and dragged off his boots. As he pulled down his breeches his engorged cock sprang free. It throbbed, his balls hard, ready and eager to take on whatever Marya offered.

But first things first. He turned away from her so he wouldn’t have to watch the tantalizing spectacle of her peeling off her chemise, see how it exposed the curling hair that covered her mons, her softly rounded stomach, her full firm breasts. They’d bounce a little as she tossed the last of her clothes aside. Already his penis wept droplets in anticipation.

*Not yet*, he repeated to himself. If he started fucking her first everything else would fade from his mind.

He fixed the heavy pole once more in the vise then raised the mallet and brought it down hard on the target. Only the slightest tremor. It would hold while he shaped the steel. He picked up the rod he’d beaten from the dagger the day before. Beautiful. Smooth. And magical. But he had very little time left in which to make that magic work. Holding it with the pliers, he thrust it into the forge.

“That’s right.” Marya’s warm breath fanned his ear as she came up behind him. Her arms wrapped about him, one hand cupping his balls and the other grasping his throbbing penis. “Thrust it deeper.”

He did, both into the forge and into her massaging hold.

“Let it get really, really hot.” Her tongue traced the outline of his ear and she blew gently into it.

It sent a frisson along his spine. The hard pebbles of her nipples traced circles on his back. He closed his eyes, sinking into the sensations she created in him. Her teeth dug into the muscle where his neck met his shoulder on the uninjured side. Within the forge the rod glowed red. He glanced down, half convinced his cock must burn with the same raging hue and was almost surprised that it didn’t.

"Time to bring it out," he said.

"Mmm." She eased only far enough from him to allow him to back up and turn to the workbench where the form he would use to create the links waited. "This next step is going to be fun."

"And it had better be fast." He anchored the base of the heated metal in position with a clamp. "I can feel each minute I have left before the moon rises. And there aren't enough of them."

"There have to be." She pressed tightly against his back again. "Twist that rod." And her fingers did the same to his cock.

*Damn that feels good.* But instead of distracting him her touch guided his own movements. He gripped the end of the glowing steel with tongs and bent it. He should have had to hammer it to force it into its new shape but it yielded with surprising ease. Around the heavy pole he wound it, once, twice, three times before the metal began to cool and lose its malleability.

He removed the pole from its holder, thrust it deep into the depths of the forge and his cock heated right along with the steel, swelling even more, burning to the point of explosion. His balls felt like rocks. He wanted – no, needed – to thrust home in the slick, burning depths –

"Now," she breathed in his ear.

It recalled him to his task, to the urgency of his labor. With an effort he turned back to the workbench and locked the pole once more in its vise.

"Now twist," she told him and her hands turned on his cock.

She'd have to try harder than that if she hoped to make him move. He would swear his erection had turned to unyielding steel. But he grasped the end of the rod and turned it about the pole, this time completing the job.

"Heat it again," she urged him.

Her tongue along his ear played havoc with his already raging libido as he plunged the pole once more into the forge—and his burning cock into her hand made slick from his own seeping fluids. Once more the twisted metal turned red, once more he replaced it on the bench. With pliers he reached for the pile of silver pellets he had created the day before.

Marya repositioned herself to the side of the table, bending over, offering her sweetly generous backside to him. He lined up his cock and slid it along her pussy until he reached the entrance to her dripping tunnel. He set the first bead on one of the steel spirals then struck it with a hammer at the same time he pounded into Marya. She cried out, the sound one of pure joy to his ears.

Grinning he set the next bead and secured it with another thrust of both mallet and cock. Nine beads. Nine plunges. He lost focus as all thought, all sensation centered on her moist depths, on her moans and writhing, on her internal muscles squeezing him until he exploded.

He must have dropped the tools because he had his arms wrapped about her, one hand finding her breasts, the other massaging her clit until she whimpered and cried out. Her spasms clutched at his cock. He'd thought himself dry but she proved him wrong. He came again, driving harder and deeper into her, clasping her to him, crying her name over and over until their voices blended into a deep-throated howl.

At last she pulled free and straightened. "The links," she gasped. Her face glowed from the orange light of the forge, her skin sheened with perspiration, her lips parted, her eyes sparkling.

"Gods how I love you." The words tore from him. What he would give to make love to her all night long, not in a frenzied hurry. And in a real bed.

If he completed this task he could.

But the sense of impending moonrise crept once more over him. How long did he have? Less than an hour, he realized. Much less. The moon would crest the horizon long before darkness, earlier even than the evening before.

And he still had work to do. With the hammer he knocked the spiraled steel from the pole then turned to Marya. Hope they would make it, fear they would run out of time, surged through him, commingling, almost crippling in their intensity. "Ready?"

"For you? Always," came her prompt response. She moved behind him, resting her cheek against the muscles of his back. Her lips just brushed his flesh as she reached for his nipples.

With the giant cutters he separated the first link. Her fingers pinched his upper nipples as he did so. Sensation shot straight to his groin and his cock responded, rising once more to the occasion. He cut again and again, his cock engorging as she tugged and thrummed each pair of hardened tips in time with each nip of his tool. Three times for the upper set, three times for the middle, twice for the lower until his penis throbbed once more and nine loops of silver-beaded steel lay on the workbench before him.

She slid her hands along his stomach, over his groin then lower until one hand cupped his balls and the other closed about his shaft. As she squeezed and stroked he hammered the links flat then turned the first on its side and beat it again until the ends met, forming a perfect ring. His head swam on a tide of passion as each blow brought a new caress. He flattened the next link as she gently massaged his balls, looped it through the first and joined the ends. Then again and again, five links, then six, then seven.

Damn it, he'd come again any moment now and he wanted to be inside her when he did. If it was the last time...

No. It couldn't be. He wouldn't let it be. Which meant he didn't have time to stop now.

"Ease up," he gasped and her fingers stilled. He attached the eighth link, then the ninth, then draped the newly formed chain over the tongs and thrust the tool deep into the forge where the edges of the rings glowed red and ran together, sealing themselves with the magic that pulsed through the air, through the fire, through them.

That only left the clasp that Marya would have to fasten about his neck. And the ruby that must be joined to the center link. She still wrapped herself about his back, her fingers tangling in the thick hair that covered his chest. Too thick. Already he was sprouting his lupine coat. He'd been at work for a couple of hours though it felt like no more than minutes. Blissful minutes as he'd savored her ministrations.

And now too few remained.

He thrust a poker into the flames then faced the bench once more. "I'll need to sit," he warned her. She released him at once and despite the blazing forge only a few feet away he shivered with cold where she no longer embraced him.

She dragged up a stool for him then sank to her knees and crawled beneath the table. "Tell me before you attach the ruby."

"I'm converting the wolf head into the clasp on the last link," he told her, suiting action to words.

At once her fingers traced their way along his inner thighs, drawing a groan from him. *Focus*, he ordered himself. *Funnel the sexual energy into the work. No time to waste.* The collar had to be ready for her to fasten about his neck at the moment he changed from human to wolf. If they failed... But he'd already gone over that in his mind so many times. If they failed he would once more become a ravaging werewolf. He would probably kill her. Then as the moon set he himself would die. They would win or lose all in the next minutes.

So few minutes...

Without standing he withdrew the poker from its bed of flame and secured it in the vise. He had only to touch the metal pieces together against that heated pole for it to sear them permanently into position. A smile tugged at his mouth, easing the tension in his jaw. Bless the magic that made this so much easier than it normally would be.

And bless Marya who now licked his thighs. He eased himself forward on the stool, allowing his legs to spread, granting her access to his balls. *Oh gods yes.* That woman — *my woman* — knew how to use her tongue. And her fingers.

He checked the catch. The wolf head fitted the final ring to perfection, leaving only enough room to fasten it to the first link with a screw-on knob. He closed his eyes as Marya licked the length of his cock. Screw. He had to keep his mind on screwing her. No, on fashioning the screw and knob. The knob of his cock. *Oh damn, focus!* He could screw her while she screwed his collar into position.

With an effort he dragged his mind from the incredible sensations she created in his penis and crafted a threading on the catch. It should have been crude, the knob he fashioned should never have fit but he knew it would work, that Marya would be able to secure it in place.

"Now for the ruby," he told her.

"Hand it down here. And could you pass me my basket?" When she had them both she brought a ceramic pot from her store of medicines and unstoppered it. Then she slipped a finger into her pussy and brought out a bit of her creamy nectar. She scraped it into the pot then turned to the droplets that shimmered at the slit of his bulbous head. These too she added to her mixture. She stirred it then spread a thin layer over the ruby. At last she handed it back to him. "Set it in place."

He reached for it. The fur covering the backs of his hands had thickened and his nails had already begun to lengthen and turn to claws. Only minutes remained to them. He could feel the moon hovering just below the horizon, ready to crest. He thrust the cooling poker once more into the fire. His hands—or were they paws?—shook as he drew it out and set it in place so he could seal the ruby's bezel into position.

"Give me your finger," Marya commanded.

The world blurred, the colors faded as his lupine sight began to take over.

"Your finger!" Marya's voice rose.

He responded to her urgency, to his own rising fear. They'd run out of time, he hadn't worked fast enough. A knife flashed in her hand, his finger stung with the sharp prick and his lips curled back in a guttural snarl. "It's too late," he managed. "I can't control myself. Run."



But she gripped what was still his hand, holding it over the pot while three drops of his blood fell over—over blood that was already there? Her blood, he realized. And his wolf blood.

“You’re still human.” She yelled the words even as she mixed the contents of the pot until the bright red tinted the ointment a dark rose. She grabbed the steel links with their silver beads and ruby center and wolf head clasp and smeared salve over every part.

“The moon is rising,” he cried between teeth that were now fangs. He stumbled as he surged from the stool. His fingers and toes ached with the lengthening of his claws.

Marya sprang to her feet and clasped the collar about his neck. “Screw me,” she begged even as he felt her fingers fumbling to connect the knob with the threads.

He fell against the workbench. Tools clattered to the floor but only one thing mattered. He rammed his cock into her, desperate to seal the spell before the last seconds fled away. Before his frantic gaze his arms changed into the forelegs of a wolf. He tried to kiss the lips that hovered before his own but his mouth had become long and pointed. Yet he had no desire to rip out her throat.

A sudden gasping laugh escaped Marya. “I love you!” she cried. “I love your fur and your fangs and your wonderful pointed ears and even your claws. And gods how I love your six nipples. And your cock in both your shapes.”

He thrust again and the hair faded from his arms, his paws became hands, his mouth covered hers in the kiss he thought he might never claim from her again. He plunged again and again into her, his rhythm increasing with his building need. He stooped to grasp one dark rosy nipple in his mouth and prayed to all the gods he wouldn’t shift back, that he could lick it and tug it with teeth and not fangs.

She gasped and moaned, thrusting her hips forward to meet each of his lunges, her muscles clenching and grasping him, pulling him deeper. He couldn’t hold on much longer but from the feel of her gasping breath and the nails that raked his back, neither could she. He sucked harder at her nipple as he gave one last plunge. He raised his

head and let out a long triumphant howl as his cum blasted into her. Her answering spasms wrung him dry as her own howl joined his only to break in laughter that wrapped around him like her warm embrace.

\* \* \* \* \*

Guerrin sat back on his haunches, panting in contentment. Marya sank to her knees at his side and held him close, her face buried in his long dark fur. "Oh my love." Tears filled her eyes.

Their brilliance warmed his heart. He wanted to tell her how much he loved her but had to content himself with licking her mouth. At last he pulled free and padded over to her discarded clothing and pushed them with his nose.

Her lips tugged into a watery smile. "You're right. Mr. Dale might come to see how we've fared." She rose, stretched her curvaceous body then stooped to shake out and pull on first her chemise then her skirt. As she laced the corselet she smiled at him. "Can you help me clean up in here? We can't leave the place like this."

He certainly could. He grasped tools in his mouth and brought them to her and she arranged them either hanging from their hooks or lying neatly on the table. His own clothing went into her basket along with her remaining salves—except for his bulky boots that he took carefully between his teeth.

She raked the remnants of the fire into coals. "There," she said at last as she hung the scraping rod beside the great furnace. "That should keep for the night. Let's go home."

*Home.* How unbelievably good that word sounded. A real home again. Of course he'd have to convince her cats he was harmless. He looked up at Marya's sweet face. Tomorrow, he decided. The cats could wait until tomorrow. Tonight he had a very different sort of pussy on his mind. He intended to spend many hours coming to know every part of it too.

And he was going to do it in a real bed for a change.

He trotted happily at her side as they left the smithy and headed for their cottage.

## About the Author

Elyssa Lynne firmly believes that life ought to be one long fantasy – and the more fantastic, the better. She loves the quirky, the magical, the romantic – and the tyrannical furry beasts who dominate her home. She is also firmly convinced that her computer runs on chocolate chips instead of silicon chips.

Under her own name she has written numerous books and won several awards, but she has only just discovered the delights of writing for Ellora's Cave. She feels she has embarked on a joyful new adventure, not only in her fiction but also in reality.

Elyssa welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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