



ANASTASIA MALTEZOS

LYCAN LOVE



He brought her body close to his and

placed light, feathery kisses all over her face as he ran his hands up and down her back. Jen felt her limbs melt with each hypnotic caress of his touch. He brought one of his hands under her chin and lifted her face as he held her tight against his hard body with his other hand. He lowered his head, but this time the kiss wasn't soft and light. It was hard and passionate. She slid her hands over his shoulders, pressing her body closer against his. Her fingers meshed with his glorious blond mane.

Jen moaned softly. All her dark thoughts disappeared. This was heaven. She felt lightheaded and weak and didn't care he was crumbling her defenses. His mouth, his body, and his hands made her forget what was buried deep in the back of her mind—a thought too frightening to contemplate.

Her mind was spinning out of control and all she could think of was how much she wanted this man. A man she barely knew. The feeling was so powerful, so intense, there was no reason or logic behind it. It was primal need. A baser instinct that ran below the line of civility. It was wild and hot and Jen welcomed it.

In that moment, she did feel like an animal with a painful, throbbing need to mate.

Praise for *WHEN THE SUN SETS*

“*WHEN THE SUN SETS* is a romantic read that takes the reader on a journey of the heart and soul! You will find yourself immersed in the depths of this soul-searing story the second you pick it up and start reading! I am looking forward to reading more of Anastasia Maltezos’ wondrous works of art in the future and to see where she will take us next with her magical and passionate pen!”

~*Janean Sparks, Night Owl Romance (5 Stars)*

“I just finished reading *WHEN THE SUN SETS*. What a great book! This is a story about a love lost and then found again by chance. This story spans centuries, 300 to be exact. Through the centuries the reader finds that love in fact is the greatest healer. It may take time, but love can in fact conquer all. In this book love offers a moral compass, a will to survive, compassion, and most of all forgiveness. If you enjoy love conquering all as well as everything that comes with it, this is the story for you. All in all a wonderful book.”

~*Angibabi4, Night Owl Romance (5 Stars)*

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by

Anastasia Maltezos

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

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Dedication

To Angela Salera,
the best friend a girl can have.

Chapter One

"I said put your clothes on and get out!" Lucas Wilde roared as he threw her clothes on the bed. His gut wrenched at the look of disbelief and shock on her face, but it couldn't be helped. Dammit! There was no time!

He tried to control the raging fire slaking through his veins. He fought for breath as his chest expanded. He tried to stave off the powerful transformation spearing his limbs.

Worse, he struggled to comprehend the dire implications of what had just happened. Dammit to hell! If there was a loaded gun next to him, he'd fire the silver bullet into his skull. He wanted to die for what he'd just done to her.

He muttered a harsh curse word as he watched the woman hurriedly slip on her clothes. His primal need staggered him as he gazed over her smooth skin, her sultry curves, her lush limbs, and his loins tightened violently. He wanted her.

Now. Again.

Even though he knew she would die of fright being taken by a beast, a monster. Even though *she* would put that gun to his head once she knew the truth.

She raised a pair of stricken brown eyes to him. "Lucas? Why are you—"

"I said get out! Now!" His time was running out. He couldn't control his change for another second.

Human warred with animal. Reason fought with instinct. He watched her dress hurriedly, grab her purse, and scramble to the door—her shoulders taut

with pain and humiliation. Anguish ripped his soul. She slammed the door behind her, and he released the hold he was losing fast.

His blood pounded, his pulse quickened, as his skin and bone expanded and transformed. He clenched his eyes, raised his head, and opened his jaws—releasing a feral howl

“Nooo!” He moaned inwardly and hoarsely as he brought his taloned, curved hands to his protruding forehead and sank to the floor.

“No,” he repeated after a few more moments. Calmer this time. This couldn’t be possible. He’d just met her. His mind tried to reason with what happened. All he wanted was one night of mindless sex. He’d been without a woman for so long and coupled with the intense, powerful surge of animal lust he felt when he saw her tonight, all he could think of was getting her back to his place.

She couldn’t be the one. Even if she was, how could she ever forgive him? It wasn’t supposed to happen like this. First, he was supposed to fall in love with *the one* and then tell her his dark secret before they made love. He wanted *the one* to choose this life of hell, not have it forced on her the way it had been forced on him. Damn it! It wasn’t supposed to happen with a one-night stand!

But the legend was precise. A werewolf would involuntarily transform into his Lycan form once he made love to his soul mate. And his soul mate, on the next full moon, would turn into a werewolf.

His transformation complete, Lucas Wilde raised his eight-foot form off the floor and went to stand by his window. His penthouse overlooked the city’s vast skyline, but he was more interested in what was below. Fifteen stories up, his sight in this monstrous form was more pronounced, and he could see her clearly. He could make out the tremors riding her shoulders. His gut clenched with anguish.

She was sobbing. She tucked her long, silky, dark hair behind her ear, and he narrowed his gaze on her profile. His heart plummeted. She looked pale with taut, drawn-in features, and he could see tears glistening on her lashes. He saw her pull her cell phone from her purse and dial. He pressed his ear up against the glass and ignored all the other sounds from the city as he focused on her voice.

She was calling a cab.

He waited until she was safely driving away before he went to the bathroom. He stood before the large mirror and grimaced. He despised his werewolf form—both eyebrows meeting at the bridge of his nose, ferocious jowl, and a low set of pointy ears. With no thought at all, he smashed his fist into the glass—shattering the mirror into a thousand pieces.

Any way he looked at it, she was his now.

First, he had to find her before the next full moon in eight days...

...He had to find her before she changed.

Chapter Two

“Jen, I hate to tell you this, but Lucas Wilde is here.”

Jennifer Hart froze as a mixture of anger and humiliation welled in her breast. She pinned her friend, Amy Watson, with a dark, narrow gaze, ignoring the admiring glances from the men at the bar. She knew her long, dark haired, dark eyed, willowy form gave her an exotic look that appealed to members of the opposite sex, but this was one time she could do without the attention. After what happened to her last week, she was *off* men!

“Where is he?” She asked, leaning forward so Amy could hear her above the loud music in the crowded nightclub, *Full Moon*.

Amy grimaced. “He’s about twenty feet behind you; talking to the redhead we saw earlier wearing the little tight, black dress.”

Jen felt her anger and humiliation mount. “This was a bad idea. I want to go home. I should have stayed home tonight.” She groaned. “I can’t believe you convinced me to go out—and here of all places!”

“Forget it! We came out to have a good time and that’s what we’re going to do. Lucas Wilde can go to hell.” Amy grabbed her purse from the bar, giving Jen a firm look. “I’m going to the bathroom. You better be here when I get back.”

Jen nodded numbly and took another sip of her drink. She was dying to turn around and see him, but couldn’t find the nerve.

The humiliating memory of their encounter last week kept resurfacing in her mind and in the span of

a few seconds she relived the mortifying experience.

It had been her twenty-third birthday and her friends had taken her to the *Full Moon*, a trendy new nightclub. After one too many drinks and a whole lot of fun, she met the owner of the club, Lucas Wilde. Their attraction and chemistry for one another was instantaneous, and she then proceeded to do what she had never, ever done before in her life. She had a one-night stand with him! She tried to block the heated memory, but failed miserably.

She let all her inhibitions fly out the window that night and had gone to his penthouse to experience what was the most passionate night in her life, with the exception of one thing. Right after consummation, he told her to put on her clothes and leave.

Jen had been mortified then as she was mortified now just thinking about it. The past week she'd managed to ignore the humiliating sting of his rejection and the painful stab of her shame, but the one thing she couldn't forget was the passion and excitement from his searing touches.

She recalled how her skin throbbed with need where his sensual mouth trailed hot kisses, how her limbs quivered and melted with the agony at wanting more of him. And when he entered her, she thought her body would splinter into a million pieces, and it did. The sheer ecstasy had been more than she could bear, and she'd cried out in passion—digging her nails into his back.

Her heart jolted at the memory and she angrily took another sip of her drink, ignoring a man staring suggestively at her from the bar. While she waited for Amy to return from the bathroom, she felt the hair at the back of her neck rise, her stomach drop to the floor, and a curious sensation on her spine, like invisible hands were caressing her. She *felt* more than *knew* he was behind her. The chemistry

between them when they met had been so powerful and intense she hadn't known what hit her. It was like a tidal wave of emotion washing over her—making her feel she would never be the same again. Now she realized only one man could make her nerve endings spark with his mere presence.

"We need to talk," Lucas said.

A hot flash of rage made her spin around abruptly and before she could control herself, she tossed what remained of her drink into his face. She ignored the shocked stares from the men at the bar.

"How's that for conversation?" she asked.

She watched him slowly mop up his face as he pinned his blue gaze on hers. His expression was a curious mixture of regret, exasperation, and desire, and she had to bite her lip to stop herself from making the immediate apology that wanted to spring to her mouth. He deserved something worse than getting a drink tossed in his face, she thought resentfully. What man put a woman through such a degrading situation? He had effectively shattered her pride, and on her birthday of all days.

Now, as she stared up at him, she tried to ignore the tantalizing effect his nearness had on her. The chemistry between them was intense, dark, and sensual, with an overwhelming sense of awareness. She watched his gaze flicker over her appearance, and his mouth tense when he glanced at her lower lip caught between her teeth.

As furious as she was, she couldn't deny this man's pure, male energy or that he was the most attractive man she had ever met. He stood over six foot three inches tall, with shoulder length, dirty blond hair, a firm sensual mouth, prominent cheekbones and a strong jaw. He resembled a Norse God.

If Thor was a man, he would have looked like Lucas. Having a mind of its own, her gaze went over

his wide, muscular shoulders and an unbidden memory of their naked bodies entwined in heat and passion resurfaced. She recalled too readily how his skin felt under her hands—warm and strong. Jen felt curiously weak at the knees, and her anger mounted.

“We have to talk,” he repeated, his deep tone firm.

“I’m not interested in anything you have to say.”

“We can’t talk here. When are you leaving tonight?”

“Why?”

“I’m taking you home. We need to talk somewhere quiet.”

“No,” she said and made a move to walk away from him, but his hand on her arm stopped her. She glanced up into his intent gaze.

“Please, Jen. It isn’t what you think.”

Resentment raced through her veins. “Isn’t it? You rejected me in the worst way possible and you had better have a damn good reason why you put me in such a humiliating position.”

“I do.”

“What is it?”

“I can’t tell you here, but I can tell you how terribly sorry I am.”

“That’s not a good enough explanation.”

She jerked her arm loose and crossed both of them across her chest. She caught his gaze dip to her breasts, and a muscle started working along his jaw. His blue eyes darkened.

“This is where you apologize again *with* a valid explanation,” she said.

“Not here. Not now.” He glanced at his watch. “I’ll meet you at the front entrance in an hour.”

Jen wasn’t sure if she wanted to leave with him. He spelled danger with a capital D, and the nervous flutters in her stomach and racing heart told her she

was not as unaffected by him as she would have liked. One week had done nothing to assuage the intense heat she felt around him.

"Please, Jen."

Hating herself for what she was doing, she nodded her consent. He looked relieved, his tense mouth softening somewhat.

"Thank you." And without any warning, he grabbed her by the shoulders and pulled her towards him. His head came down and before she had time to think, his mouth closed over hers in a fast and furious kiss, leaving her breathless when he pulled away.

"One hour, Jen," he said, his expression firm and uncompromising.

She spun around to the bar, muttering a defeated *dammit* under her breath, and hailed the bartender. She ordered another drink, her last one of her two-drink limit, and tried to calm her nerves. She would meet him, give him the chance to explain himself, and then leave. And she would *not* sleep with him.

He'd had his chance with her and he'd completely blown it. She couldn't fathom any logical reason to justify why he'd done what he'd done, unless he had a girlfriend, or worse—a wife—who was coming home that night. She felt a sudden wave of gloom settle over her. She couldn't deny her attraction to him, even now, a week after what happened, and she wondered what wrong she had done in a past life to deserve this form of karmic retribution—wildly attracted to a man, who was a total jerk!

Chapter Three

After spending the good part of the hour convincing a furious Amy that Jen knew what she was doing, she went to the front entrance and stepped out into the cool night. She hugged her arms around herself and looked up into the night sky. It was inky blue with wisps of smoky clouds. The moon, almost full, appeared, and she marveled at how big it looked tonight. She shivered, wrapping her arms tighter around her torso.

She looked down at the outfit she'd chosen to wear. It was one of her favorites—a sleeveless yellow wraparound top, and a black A-line skirt falling just above her knees—but it did little to keep her warm. The hair on her arms rose in the cool breeze, and she shrugged her long hair over both shoulders to cover her exposed skin.

“Here. This will help.” A deep, sultry voice spoke from behind her, and she felt Lucas place his tan suede jacket over her shoulders. For a split second she welcomed his touch, but his fingers accidentally grazed the side of her breast and she gasped softly at the naked stab of need that coursed through her body. Jen swallowed hard and turned around to face him.

Even in the cool, night breeze she could smell his cologne. Or was that him? She wasn't sure, but she liked it. It was an appealing mixture of woodsy soap and crisp aftershave, and she almost sighed in appreciation. There was something very basic and animalistic about how she felt whenever she was close to him and in that instant she knew she made

the right choice meeting him. Even if the pleasure would be short lived. Oh my God, he was going to tell her he was married, she thought with resignation.

"Thank you for the jacket," she whispered. She felt her heart skip a beat at the possessive look on his face. "Where...where do you want to talk?" She brought her hands up to free her hair from his jacket and let it settle over his coat.

His mouth softened. "Your hair looks as beautiful as it smells." He caught a lock in his hand and stared at it almost absentmindedly. "It smells like apples and strawberries," he added quietly.

Jen widened her eyes in surprise. "That's one strong sense of smell you have. It's Pantene's new summer brand, Apple Strawberry Fusion."

Abruptly, he dropped her lock, almost as if it seared his hands. Jen caught a slight narrowing of his eyes, an imperceptible tightening around his mouth.

"I like it," he said brusquely and straightened his shoulders.

"Thanks." Jen wasn't sure what had come over him, but the moment she mentioned his strong sense of smell, he'd withdrawn from her.

"I thought we would go to my place again. It's just a couple of blocks from here," he said.

Jen nodded. "I remember." She tried blocking the image of their one night stand from overwhelming her. "We...we can walk. I could use some air if you don't mind."

"Fine." He frowned, looking up into the night sky.

"It's not going to rain, if that's what you're worried about," she offered. The look he gave her was unreadable, but she could feel his tension.

"How do you feel?" He asked.

His concern was tangible, and she drew her

brows together. "I'm fine. Your coat is keeping me warm."

"And all week? How did you feel?"

Jen's frown grew. "Fine. Why?"

He looked like he was going to say something, but the front doors to the club swung open, and a splash of loud music jarred their silence. The redhead wearing the little tight, black dress sauntered out. She looked around, spotted Lucas, and glided to his side. She was tall, stunning, and had a confident air that made Jen intensely curious about her.

"There you are. Leaving so soon?" The redhead purred, tossing Jen a venom-filled look.

She stiffened, but that was nothing compared to what she sensed in Lucas. She glanced up at him and noticed the grim set of his jaw, the dangerous narrowing of his eyes, the muscle throbbing menacingly along his jaw.

"Serena, leave it alone." His deep tone harsh. "I thought we came to an agreement. You can come to my club, but you stay the hell away from me."

Serena leaned forward and put her hand on his strong arm. He nearly flinched at her touch. "Come now, my pet. You know that's not what I want."

His face darkened. "You have a choice. You go back inside and leave me alone, or I'll have you barred from my club."

Serena's face tightened, and she shot Jen another hate-filled look. "So you can be with her? She's nothing, Lucas."

"You're going too far, Serena. I would be careful with what you say next."

Jen watched them in silence, shocked at the woman's rudeness and uneasy with Lucas's mounting anger. Somehow she knew people didn't push and goad men like Lucas.

Jen saw the woman's expression grow hard and

angry. And she wasn't certain, but she could swear she heard a very low, imperceptible growl. Instinctively, Jen took a small step back. This was getting a little too weird for her.

"Hey, I don't want to intrude in some lovers' spat," she began to both of them. "I'll...I'll just be going now."

She made a move to remove Lucas's jacket from her shoulders, but his hand stopped her.

He gave Serena a cold look. "It's over. I never want to see you in my club again. Is that clear?"

Serena's pretty face contorted into an expression of rage. "You don't belong with this bitch."

Jen felt a flash of anger rise in her throat. A lovers' spat was one thing, but calling her names was another. "Now wait just a damned min—"

The growl coming from Lucas was unmistakable this time. Jen heard it. It was deep and dark and almost inhuman. She nearly gasped at the fury reverberating from his tall, muscular physique.

Her hand flew to her mouth. She had never heard anyone make that sound. Nothing human, in any case.

"Stay the hell away from her, Serena," he began, but Jen could hear the dangerous undercurrent in his tone. "And I swear if I ever see you within a hundred feet of her, I'll kill you."

Now Jen did gasp. Out loud. This was definitely getting out of hand.

Serena laughed. Coldly. "We both know you can't do that, Lucas. Not unless you want to suffer the consequences." She began to walk away, tossing a cold, "Go ahead. Have your little freedom, but mark my words—we will be together," over her slim shoulder. And she walked around the corner and disappeared into the night.

Seconds later, Jen heard an ominous howl coming from around the building where Serena

disappeared, and she shivered in spite of the warmth of Lucas's jacket. A crazy thought entered her mind. Since when did wolves roam the city?

"I'm sorry about that. Serena is...as bad as they come."

"You're telling me." She gave him a look that told him she was glad the other woman had left. "I guess that's one relationship you wish you never had."

"I was never with her." He grimaced. "Let's just say it began and ended in one night. Any man she gets involved with is doomed to a life of hell."

Jen lined her brow in a delicate frown. "I gather it's over between you two?"

"It was not what you think between us, but yes, it's over."

She wrapped his jacket tighter around her. "Good. I have a rule about getting involved with men who are already involved. And that rule is *don't*."

His mouth softened into a smile. "Let's go."

They walked in silence for a few minutes until Lucas stopped dead in his tracks. They had reached the edge of the dimly lit park, and he brought his head up and looked around.

"What is it?" She asked nervously. Was there someone hiding out behind the trees? She recalled the papers mentioning some grizzly murders in the park lately, and everyone in the city had been warned to steer clear of strolling there after sundown—until the killers were caught. Jen shivered. The last murder involved a young couple who had had their limbs gnawed from their bodies.

She watched Lucas tense as he raised his face and...*did he just sniff the air?*

He cursed under his breath. "We have to hurry." He took her hand, and they continued to walk.

Jen could tell he was edgy, his narrowed gaze darting dangerously around them, and her fear

grew. The street wasn't deserted. There were a few cars on the road and two people waiting for the bus, but she still contemplated breaking into a run with him.

"You're scaring me, Lucas. Do you think Serena is following us or something?"

"Not Serena."

She jerked him to a stop, and he dropped her hand, looking down at her. "Who?"

His mouth thinned. "Jen, I need to get you indoors." He looked up into the night sky, and the thick, smoky clouds concealing the nearly full moon shifted slightly. "Please don't ask me anymore questions until I know you're safe." His head jerked to the left, and he seemed to be listening for something. His face turned grim.

She grabbed his arm. "What's going on?"

His expression looked savage and wild as he took a step towards her. She drew back in fear, wondering if it was the trick of the moon's glow that cast the dangerous, predatory look on his face. "I'm sorry for what I am about to do, but it's for your own good." And with a low, feral growl from deep within his throat, he bent towards her and flung her over his shoulder.

Jen screeched. "Lucas! Put me down!"

He ignored her shocked pleas. Before she knew what was happening, he ran down the street. Jen screamed as her body bounced with his swift run. She wasn't heavy by any means, but he carried her like she weighed nothing and ran faster than she'd ever seen a man run.

She caught him looking around again, sniffing the air. She heard the sound of howls in the distance and stiffened when Lucas cursed loudly. He vaulted over a park bench, and she screamed, afraid he was going to drop her. A small part of her brain, all the way at the back of her mind, was nudging her to

awareness, but she refused to explore the implication.

She wasn't crazy. Besides, it wasn't even a full moon tonight. The full moon was tomorrow.

And then he stopped at his front door and put her down. He unlocked it. "Get in," he growled.

"What—"

"I said get in. Now!"

Jen dropped her gaze to his shirtfront, and she watched in horror as...as his chest—my God, was his chest expanding? Someone must have slipped something into her drinks because what other reason could there be for what she was witnessing? Numb with shock, she looked up into his face and saw the tortured look in his eyes as he shoved her into the lobby of his penthouse. She gasped at the color of his eyes. They were still blue, but his irises had taken on an amber color, and she wondered if it was some trick of the light.

"Wait for me near the elevators," he growled. "I'll be back."

The little part at the back of her mind was screaming now and all her reason and logic refused to listen to it. She could hear the howling in the distance coming closer. It sounded like...like a pack of wolves.

"Lock the door behind you," Lucas said, his voice hoarse and deep. He released a wild, feral growl, and she slammed the door. Jen was numb. It sounded like there was a war going on outside. She heard growls, thrashing, howls, and she took small, shaky steps back.

My God! It sounded like there was a pack of animals fighting. She pictured Lucas being ripped to shreds, and her legs nearly gave way.

The back of her knees met with the cushioned lobby bench, and she sank down. She stared at the door for what seemed like an eternity, until finally,

all she could hear was silence.

Her heart raced as she saw the front door slowly open. The sight of Lucas standing there in his black cotton boxers, holding his shredded clothes in his hand made her breath catch. His lip was bloodied, his brow cut, and he had dangerous looking gashes all along his chest. She whimpered, bringing a shaky hand to her mouth.

She rose slowly and went to him, her gaze running over his cuts. "What...oh my God...what happened?"

He reached for her hand and without saying a word, brought her in front of the elevator. They rode up in silence, Jen giving him concerned, dazed looks as they went into his penthouse.

The last time she'd been here she hadn't been too aware of her surroundings because by the time they had walked into his spacious black and white décor living room, he had taken her into his arms and they had collapsed onto the thick rug in front of the unlit fireplace. Their passion and attraction for each other taking precedence.

Now, she looked around and noted the lush, green, floor to ceiling plants and wall-to-wall windows showcasing the city's skyline. His furniture was all black leather, and his coffee table white marble. She put her purse on the white ceramic counter separating the chrome appliance kitchen from the living room and looked at him nervously. "We need to get you to a hospital."

"No." He went into the kitchen, opened a cupboard beneath the sink, and stuffed his shredded clothes in a garbage can. When he turned around to face her, she nearly flinched at the sight of his raw cuts. He looked like he'd been slashed and carved with something sharp and deadly. Thankfully the blood had already started to dry up.

"I...I don't think you need stitches," she began

tremulously, "but you still need to go to the hospital. You may need a shot."

"That won't be necessary." His expression was grim. "I'm going to take a shower. I'll be back in a few minutes. Make yourself comfortable and please help yourself to the bar and pour yourself a drink."

Shocked and confused, she nodded numbly. He watched her in a brooding silence, his throat working with emotion, and she thought he was going to say more, but he abruptly turned on his heel and went down a hallway.

Jen released a shaky breath. She didn't want a drink, but she could do with some water. She poured herself a glass and tried to make sense of what she'd just witnessed downstairs. Had he been attacked by wild dogs? And why wasn't he concerned about his gashes? My God! One of the dogs could have had rabies!

She sat down on the black leather sofa. Somewhere in his penthouse she could hear the shower running, and she leaned her head back, closed her eyes, and tried to calm her racing heart.

She wondered if getting involved with a man like Lucas was a smart move. He had a crazy ex-girlfriend, strange things happened to him with wild dogs, he seemed to have a fascination with the moon, and their last encounter told her he wasn't quite capable of having a committed relationship. Jealousy reared its ugly head and she wondered if he had told Serena to put on her clothes and leave after they had sex. She pushed the thought from her mind. She had bigger things to worry about, as in what just happened outside with the pack of animals that obviously attacked him.

Jen didn't know how long she stayed on the couch with her eyes closed, but shortly thereafter she felt a gentle hand on her shoulder. She opened her eyes. Lucas sat next to her, wearing jeans and a

white polo. His hair was still damp, and he smelled of soap. She looked at his face and gasped. The cuts on his lip and brow were gone.

"What happened to your face? How...how could you have healed so quickly?"

His face turned grim, but he remained silent.

Jen rose, feeling unnerved. "Your...your cuts! Where did they go? Lucas, what just happened outside? What's going on?"

His lids came down, hooding the expression in his eyes. "It was nothing."

"Nothing? How can you say that? You were attacked! Shouldn't we call the SPCA or something? Shouldn't we let someone know there are wild animals out there? Maybe that's what's been killing all those people in the park lately!"

"No."

Jen knew he was hiding something, and her fear mounted. She wasn't as afraid of him, as what he was not telling her. "I...I need to go." She rose and collected her purse. This encounter with him was nothing like the last one, and she preferred passion over danger.

Lucas rose abruptly and stopped her with a firm grip on her elbow. "Don't go. Jen, I would never do anything to hurt you."

She turned and looked up into his face, watching his blue gaze darken as he glanced at her mouth and lower to her breasts rising and falling with each nervous breath. A strong, sexual undercurrent flowed between them, and all the pent-up passion she had for him surfaced and coursed through her veins.

The man was a walking menace to her senses, and she tried to ignore the tantalizing effect his hand had on her elbow. An unbidden memory flashed before her mind of when those same strong hands had caressed her breasts and lower to her

femininity. Jen gasped softly.

What was she thinking? She caught her breath and tried to calm her racing heart. "We can't. This is wrong. I don't know you and I'm still angry with you for what happened last week."

"I'm sorry, Jen. It...it couldn't be helped," he sighed deeply, drawing her gently towards him.

"I saw the deep gashes on your chest," she said tremulously. "Where did they go?"

Her limbs melted at the determined look on his face. He gazed at her mouth. He wanted to kiss her, she thought, and a big part of her wanted him to kiss her too, but she had too many questions, too many doubts, and too many fears.

"I will tell you all in good time." He took her by the shoulders and drew her into his arms.

"What...what do you want from me?" She asked breathlessly.

His mouth thinned dangerously. "I don't know, dammit, but since I met you, I can't get you out of my mind. And as wrong as it is, I want to make love with you again."

His head came down and his lips met hers in a punishing kiss before she could say a word.

As wrong as it is? Was that what he just said? She felt heady and light as his lips coaxed her mouth open, and his tongue meshed and mingled with hers. His hands slid to her bottom, and he lifted her skirt, pressing her up against his evident arousal. A tremor shook through her body, her legs weakening.

What was so wrong about this, she thought, as resentment rose in her throat. Did he have a girlfriend?

Her passion ebbed as her anger mounted and she pushed at his muscular chest. Freeing her mouth, she gasped, "Let me go."

He groaned. "I don't want to, even though every instinct in my body is telling me to."

She grew cold. He *did* have a girlfriend! His guilt was eating him up inside, that's why he kept saying this was wrong. Bastard! Her anger flared and she struggled to get out of his arms. "Then let me help you make a decision." And she promptly dug her heel into his bare foot. He sucked in a sharp breath and let her go.

"Why did you do that?" He asked hoarsely.

"You have a weird way with women, Lucas. You want me, but you don't. You're obviously attracted to me, but you can't bring yourself to be with me."

His face hardened. "There's a perfectly good explanation for that."

"Is there? Good, then tell me. Do you have a girlfriend? A wife?"

"No."

"Is...is something wrong with you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you have a disease?"

He grimaced. "No."

"Then what? Do you like playing games with women? Is that it?"

"No!" He exploded. Immediately, he drew in a ragged breath and ran a rough hand through his hair.

Jen pursed her lips. "Then *what?*" She asked vehemently. She narrowed her eyes. "I'll have you know I'm not interested in having a repeat of my last relationship. My ex kept more secrets from me than I could imagine—the final one being him getting a mutual friend of ours pregnant. That's why I moved here—to get away from him. *Not* to find someone like him."

"I'm afraid!" He ground out deeply. His mouth tensed as his throat worked with emotion.

She stiffened and her eyes widened in shock. "Of what? Sex? Love? Commitment?"

Slowly, he released a drawn out breath. "Of

you," he replied quietly, his anger spent. "For you."

Jen frowned in confusion. "Me? Why?"

"I...I don't know what...what I did to you when we made love last week. And I don't know what will happen if we make love tonight."

She wasn't sure she'd heard him correctly and her expression must have told him so because he ran a rough hand through his hair as he took a deep, unsteady breath.

"Jen, from the first moment I saw you in my club last week, I knew I was lost. And as much as I knew getting involved with anyone was wrong for me, I couldn't help myself with you."

"Why?" She whispered, feeling a curious sense of dread. "Why would it be wrong?"

"I'm afraid for you. I...I don't want to hurt you."

Her frown deepened. "You mean sex? You don't know how I will react if we have sex again?"

"Yes." He swallowed hard. "And I don't know how I'll react. What will happen. Last time I...I didn't expect my reaction and I'm afraid for it to happen again." His throat convulsed. "We need to wait until after tomorrow. After the first full moon since we made love. Only then can I be sure you're okay."

She stifled the nervous giggle from her throat. This was the most ridiculous conversation she'd ever had with a man. Was she standing in front of the most arrogant, conceited, egotistical man who ever walked the earth? She cleared her throat. "Let me get this straight. Are you worried our passion will overwhelm me?" Now, a slight giggle escaped her throat and he frowned darkly. "And we need to wait until after the full moon tomorrow to make sure I won't succumb to your...er...virility?"

"Not quite." His expression was grim. "Jen, I haven't had...I have abstained from having sex for two years. Suffice it to say, I have to abstain from

you until tomorrow for your own good. I need to be sure I haven't...you're not—I need to be sure I didn't change you."

"Do you know how crazy you sound?"

His jaw tensed. "Yes, but I'm not crazy."

"And you're not concerned how ridiculous all this sounds to me?"

"No. What could happen if we make love and I *react* again would be more devastating. The implication would confirm my deepest fear."

Jen stared up at his serious expression and realized he truly believed what he said.

"I see," she said quietly. But she didn't. She was more confused than ever about him. Was he delusional? Worse, was he on meds and hadn't been taking them lately? The deep recess in her mind asked her another question, a dark, chilling question, but she erased the thought before it took an alarming turn in her conscious mind.

An expression of regret cast a shadow over his handsome face. "I think you should go now. I have a friend who's a cop. He's on the night beat. I'll call him and he'll drive you home. You'll be safe."

She crossed her arms on her chest. "You've got to be kidding me! You're getting rid of me *again*?"

"If you stay, I will make love to you and I don't want to take any chances. Last time could have been a coincidence. My *reaction* could have stemmed from my long abstinence."

"What are you talking about?" She was starting to get exasperated. All this talking in circles was grating on her nerves.

He took her by the shoulders and gave her a deep look. "Jen, I'm sorry. I'm doing this to protect you."

Jen felt a spurt of indignation rise in her throat. "Save it. I've had enough." This was the second time he was sending her away. And it was going to be the

last time. She shrugged herself out of his hands and grabbed her purse.

He didn't follow her to the door. She turned around and saw him pick up the phone and dial. "Jack, can you swing by in two? I need you to take someone home. She's leaving my place now. Yellow top, black skirt, long dark hair. Take care of her for me."

When he put the phone down he gave her a look filled with regret and for a split second she reconsidered leaving. "Well, it was nice knowing you, Lucas. Good...good luck to you and I hope you find what you're looking for."

"A cop car is swinging by in a minute to pick you up."

She left before he could say another word. Out in his hallway, she leaned back against his door and shut her eyes. This had to be one of the strangest encounters she'd ever had with a man and she drew in a shaky breath to calm her nerves. And who knew cops who acted as cabbies, she wondered? Who...who had a deep fascination with the moon? And who the hell healed so fast after being cut to shreds by animals?

Worse, why did she have to get stuck with men who managed to break her heart? She sighed brokenly. Well, her heart wasn't broken exactly, but she did have some very distinct and strong feelings for this man. Feelings she thought she'd never feel for anyone again. Jen pushed away from his door and was about to leave when she heard a strange sound from within his penthouse.

It sounded like a sad, dejected howl. She gasped and put her ear against the cherry wood. There it was again. A melancholy howl. Jen frowned. She didn't recall seeing a dog in his home, or even a food or water dish anywhere on the floor.

The howling changed to small, short whimpers,

and she felt her heart constrict with sympathy for the poor animal that sounded completely and utterly miserable. Without thinking, she reached for the door knob and slowly opened Lucas's door.

"Lucas, are you there?" She called out softly.

She heard the whimpers stop and walked into his living room. And there it was. A huge, dog-like animal sitting by the window, his head down, looking very dejected and very sad.

"It's all right, boy. Where's Lucas? Where's your master?" She asked gently.

The animal turned its head towards her and Jen had to stifle a gasp. It resembled more of a wolf than a dog and she had the strangest feeling it recognized her as its crystal blue gaze settled on her face. It whimpered again, bowing its head. Any fear Jen felt completely fled.

Slowly, she walked over to it, staring at its rich deep coat. It was the color of sun kissed wheat, thick and shiny. What a beautiful animal. Where had it been hiding all this time?

"You're a beauty, aren't you, boy?" she continued in her gentle tone, careful not to startle the animal.

It whimpered again, and she placed her hand gently on its head and gave it a light pat. The animal closed its eyes and growled softly under its breath. Jen ran her hand over its smooth, lustrous coat and sighed. She loved animals, especially dogs. They had such a soothing effect on her nerves.

Not like the animal's master who had done nothing but send her nerves into chaotic turmoil. She looked around for Lucas and frowned. Where was he?

"Lucas?" She called out gently.

The animal stiffened under her hand and she glanced down. "What is it, boy?" Jen knotted her brow into a deeper frown and looked around her again. He couldn't have left. She would have seen

him leave. "Lucas," she called, louder.

The animal jerked out from under her hand and raised its head. It howled long and loud and Jen jumped in fright. This time it didn't sound melancholy. This time it sounded irritated, almost annoyed, angry and frustrated.

She took a cautious step back, silently cursing Lucas for not answering her call. "Easy, boy," she said brokenly as it turned its head to her. Another deep growl came from its throat. "I'm not going to hurt you."

The animal's eyes stayed on hers, and she grew nervous. Was it going to attack her? She was about to scream Lucas's name when the animal howled another long, tortuous sound and sprang its body through the window, shards of glass flicking and bouncing everywhere.

Jen screamed at the top of her lungs and flung her hand to her mouth. Stunned and shocked, she found the strength to go to the window, dread making her legs and stomach feel heavy at the thought of seeing the animal's broken body down below on the pavement. They were a good fifteen flights up—no way could the dog survive.

She looked down at the ground and gasped. The moon's glow illuminated the street below and there was the dog, looking up at her, alive, before it sprung into a run across the street, disappearing into the night.

She wasn't sure what had just happened, but something wild and crazy was nagging her subconscious. An invisible hand came down and obliterated the crazy notion from her mind, and she carefully walked over the broken glass and searched each room for Lucas.

She didn't see him anywhere, but she did find a service elevator directly in his den. No wonder she hadn't seen him leave. This was the exit he probably

used to leave his penthouse.

What was she going to do? She couldn't leave his place like this. His window was broken and his wolf-dog was gone.

She pursed her lips, making up her mind. Maybe he had gone back to the club and would return in a couple of hours. It was Sunday tomorrow, so she didn't need to go to work. She'd wait for him, she decided. And hoped he wasn't too far away.

Jen sat on the couch and waited patiently. Thirty minutes turned into an hour until she closed her eyes and fell asleep.

Chapter Four

Jen looked at the thick, dense forest around her. She couldn't find a way out. It was cold and dark. She heard the sound of a distant howling and tried to find a place where she could hide.

Wolves! And the sound was getting closer.

And then she saw it. A huge, menacing wolf ambling towards her. Something about it looked familiar. Its coat, golden brown, was thick and gleamed under the bright moon. Jen gasped, but not from fear or dread. She felt something else. A connection to this animal that was primitive and intense. Her breasts rose and fell sharply as the beast came closer. Once it reached her, she felt nearly faint with excitement as anticipation sent her heart into a string of erratic beats.

And then the animal changed. Transformed. It rose, grew, and shaped into the body of a tall, muscular man. Lucas! His expression was dark and ruthless, almost predatory.

And he was naked. Jen ran a dark, heated gaze over his beautiful body. He was magnificent. And very aroused.

He took two steps and grabbed her shirt front, and tore it apart to expose her bare breasts. He ran a hunger filled gaze over her skin and cupped her curves in his strong hands. Jen screamed and woke up.

Panting, she wiped the thin film of perspiration from her forehead. Disoriented, she looked around and saw she was still on Lucas's couch. Her strappy,

bronze sandals were removed and a light blanket covered her. She could hear the sound of the shower running. What time was it? She looked at her watch and saw it was nearly sunrise.

Her heart still raced from the dream. She glanced around and noticed Lucas had taped a huge piece of cardboard over the gaping hole of his bay windows and swept the broken glass from the floor.

A part of her wanted to stay and wait for him to come out of the shower and another part of her wanted to run away. A curious mixture of fear and desire settled in her breast, and she didn't know what to do.

Awake now, she realized how terrible she felt. Not terrible *mentally*, but terrible *physically*. Her head throbbed, her stomach hurt, and...and she had a weird feeling flowing through her body. Like her veins were pumping ice through her limbs. She prayed she wasn't coming down with the flu.

She slipped on her sandals and rose, feeling an attack of nausea overwhelm her. She steadied herself and took a deep breath. God, she really did feel terrible. Maybe Lucas had some aspirin she could take. She heard the shower stop and her heart skipped a beat.

Forget it. She was going home to bed. She grabbed her purse and made her way quickly to the door. Her hand was on the knob when she heard his voice behind her.

"Don't go," he said hoarsely.

Slowly she turned around. He was dressed in a white T-shirt and jeans, and his hair was damp. "I...I have to. It's late—morning really—and I need to get home."

"It's too late, Jen." His expression was grim. "You can't go anywhere. I felt your forehead when I came in. You have a fever. You have to stay here, with me."

Come to think of it, the back of her eyes felt like they were burning. She placed a hand on her cheek and grimaced. He was right. She had a fever. Damn! Another wave of nausea attacked her and she swallowed hard. And then everything became blurred, she felt unsteady on her feet. She swayed, her vision dimming, and a ringing grew in her ears. Oh my God, was she going to faint?

"I don't feel well..." She closed her eyes, her legs giving way.

She heard Lucas swear roughly and then his arms were around her. He lifted her and carried her to his bedroom. This was one nasty bug, she thought, and hoped she didn't need antibiotics. She hated medication of any kind. It always made her feel woozy and weak.

She groaned, putting her hand on her forehead as he lay her down on his bed. "I hope I don't have to go to the doctor. I hate doctors."

"I'm sorry, Jen." Lucas said, his tone deeper with regret. "I didn't realize you were the one. If I had known, I would have waited, given you time. I would have given you a choice."

"Huh?" What was he talking about? She watched him remove her sandals and place a light cover over her. She felt so weak, as though any second she was going to conk out.

"Try to get some more sleep, Jen. If I could spare you the next twenty-four hours I would."

"What? Sorry, I didn't hear what you said—*what is that smell?*" She closed her eyes and rubbed her nose. "Lucas, do you smell it?" She asked as she opened her eyes and stared at his somber face. "I think someone is burning rubber or something in the building."

"It's coming from the street. They're working on the sewage system down the block."

She frowned her confusion. Well, that didn't

make any sense. She was about to ask him to repeat what he'd said when a spasm speared her gut. She gasped, and doubled over in pain. "God! What was that?" She felt his soothing hand on her back and the pain subsided.

"It will all be over tonight. You'll never have to go through this again," he said. "The first full moon is always the hardest."

Her mind felt foggy and none of what he said made sense. Full moon? But it was morning. She closed her eyes and curled up on her side. She needed to sleep.

"Sorry about your dog," she murmured sleepily. "It may be hurt. When it jumped through the window, the awning below must have broken its fall."

"That wasn't my dog, Jen," she heard him say quietly.

"Oh," she replied as her mind started to race with the wild thoughts she had been ignoring the past few hours.

"Jen, there are a few things I need to tell you. Things you need to know, so sleep first and when you get up, we'll talk."

She nodded lethargically and drifted off into oblivion—the last thing she felt was his gentle kiss on her forehead.

Chapter Five

Sixteen hours later, Jen opened her eyes. It was after ten in the evening and she was positively, absolutely ravenous! She touched her forehead. Her fever was gone. Slowly, she got out of bed and rose. She didn't feel nauseous. Thank God. Maybe the sleep did her good? Maybe she got rid of that nasty bug she had been feeling earlier?

She slipped on her sandals and went to look for Lucas. She found him cooking in the kitchen. She stopped dead in her tracks, staring at the platters on the counter. Her gaze ran hungrily over the bowl of sautéed vegetables and the plate of grilled steaks. Her mouth watered. He looked up from the pasta he was draining and ran a quick gaze over her appearance.

"How are you feeling?" His voice was laced with concern.

"Starving."

"I know."

She found his comment odd, but didn't remark on it and went to sit on one of the counters stools. "Mm. Did you cook all of this?"

"Yes. You need to eat."

She took the plate he gave her and placed a grilled steak and a few vegetables on it. "This smells great."

She smiled her thanks as he handed her a knife and fork. Lucas stood there, staring at her. Jen laughed nervously. "Are you just going to watch me while I eat? Aren't you having any?"

"I made it all for you."

Her hunger pains grew, gnawing at her stomach, making her feel faint. She was almost tempted to chuck the knife and fork down and grab the steak with her hand, but what would Lucas think of her if she did that? That she was an animal, that's what.

She laughed, a bit hysterically, and cut a small piece of steak. "You made this all for me? Do you think I have the appetite of three full grown men?"

"Yes. It's the first time."

She brought the steak up to her mouth and frowned. She wanted to ask him what he was talking about, but the smell of the grilled sirloin dashed everything from her mind and she shoveled it into her mouth. Mm. It was delicious. Quickly, she cut another piece. Damn, she wasn't getting the food fast enough in her mouth. Without realizing what she was doing, she threw down the knife and fork and grabbed the steak. Within a couple of minutes she devoured it. But her hunger was still there, gnawing her, making her feel crazed with the need to feed. Without worrying about Lucas watching her solemnly, she grabbed another steak with one hand and bit into it as she grabbed a fistful of vegetables and stuffed them in her mouth. And every few gnashes, she ripped a bread roll and consumed that, too.

This was insane! What was coming over her? She chewed and swallowed, never once taking a pause for air until all the food Lucas had prepared was gone. Slowly, she raised a pair of terrified eyes at him and gaped.

"Lucas, what the hell is going on?"

He grimaced. "It's the first time. The first turn is always like this. The earlier pain and discomfort you felt. Your fever. The nausea. The long sleep. And after the sleep, the endless hunger." He glanced at the kitchen clock and frowned. "Then there's the

first turn once the moon rises, at nine minutes after eleven tonight. In thirty-eight minutes.”

Was he mad? Delusional?
“What...the...hell...are...you—*talking about!*”

He strode around the counter and took her hand. His throat was working convulsively and his mouth was tense. “Jen, touch your stomach. Does it feel full? You ate three full meals and you feel as though you had a bowl of soup.”

She gasped. My God! He was right. A huge meal like that would have made her feel like she was splitting her gut, but it didn’t. She touched her belly and felt its flat, slim surface. Where did all the food go?

Gently, he took her by the hand and led her to the couch. “And there’s one more thing. Another hunger you will feel shortly. The need to mate. That hunger only happens when you’re with your one true love.”

Nervously she glanced at the clock. He kept talking about a change, a turning. A part of her knew what he meant, but another part of her knew it was impossible. But the facts were there. All of them; his disappearing gashes, the pack of wolves who attacked him, her ravenous hunger, and how she felt as light as a bird. Was she losing her grip on reality? She felt faint.

Numbly, she sat down beside him. “Lucas, what did you do to me?” She whispered huskily.

“I am as stunned as you are. When we made love the first time, I asked you to leave because I felt my change coming.” He rubbed the back of his neck and shook his head. “I couldn’t control it and we always control our turning, even when there isn’t a full moon, but a Lycan loses control the first time he mates with his soul mate.” The look he gave her made her knees grow weak, even though a part of her brain was screaming the terrifying truth at her.

"You turn into a Lycan by being bitten by one on a full moon or by making love to the one who is your soul mate."

She rose unsteadily to her feet. "This is crazy. I don't believe you." She took a deep breath. "Are you telling me we're soul mates?" Her voice rose in hysteria and she refused to ask him the other question, the one she was dying to ask.

"Yes."

"But I don't love you!" She was shaking now. "We had great sex and that was it!"

He grimaced. "That's what I thought, until I felt my change coming." His mouth tensed. "The legend is clear, Jen. We're destined for each other, whether we feel the love now or not. It will come in time."

Her legs were going to give way and she tried to breathe. Oh my God! She was hyperventilating. "I'm...I'm going to go home, wash my dishes, do my laundry, and get ready for work tomorrow." She knew she sounded ridiculous, but she didn't care. He sounded far more insane.

"You can't." He rose and faced her.

"I can and I will!" She wrinkled her nose as his scent filled her lungs. His sweet, male, masculine scent. She felt dizzy. Her gaze dipped to his mouth and she licked her suddenly dry lips, and lower, she felt a slight discomfort, a heat invading her limbs. She swayed on her feet at the overwhelming rush of need that assaulted her senses. Her need to be one with him.

Was this the second hunger he spoke about? The need to mate? Damn, she felt like a pervert, wanting nothing more than to rip off his and her clothes and jump him.

He took her by the shoulders. "It's ten forty five. After your change I can help you control it, master it." His voice grew hoarse. "Stay with me, Jen. I'm not that guy. I'm not your ex. You can trust me."

Could she? Yes, she thought almost immediately, but there was something about him that frightened her, and she wasn't ready to hear what he had to tell her. He'd mentioned the word Lycan, but that was different. It was the other word that would make this final. Make it more terrifying.

"I should go home," she began, trying to inject normalcy into her tone. "Thanks for dinner." She backed away. "Call me and we'll talk sometime."

He took a couple of quick strides towards her. "Talking is the last thing I want to do with you right now. It's the last thing you want to do right now."

Her heart raced. He was right. She still wanted him, badly. "No, Lucas. This can't go any further. I'm sorry," she added breathlessly.

"Is it because you're afraid of what I am?"

Her heart raced as a panic attack threatened to overwhelm her. "I...I don't know what you mean."

"Don't you?" He grabbed her by the shoulders. "I'm not a monster, Jen. I've waited a long time to meet a woman who could make me feel like a man again."

"Stop. This is wrong."

"Why?" He asked harshly. "Because you feel it too, and you're afraid of me? You want me as much as I want you, Jen. There's no denying it."

"No. No," she whimpered fearfully, drowning under his intense, blue gaze. The heat in her lower limbs mounted, and her need for him grew.

"Yes," he said, his mouth softening. "This isn't wrong. Animals have it right, Jen. Their instinct, their need drives them to mate. Without words, without explanations, they just act."

She tried to push him away, but he was too big, immovable. "I want to go home," she repeated weakly.

"Don't be afraid, Jen. I want to show you how right I know instinctively it will be between us." He

bent his head slowly towards her, his blue gaze fastened on hers. She shivered as he placed a light kiss on her mouth and she closed her eyes, melting.

He withdrew his head slowly and wrapped his arms around her. "Ever since I saw you in my club last week, I knew my life would never be the same again. And I know you felt it, too. I sensed it. I could...smell it."

He brought her body close to his and placed light, feathery kisses all over her face as he ran his hands up and down her back. Jen felt her limbs melt with each hypnotic caress of his touch. He brought one of his hands under her chin and lifted her face as he held her tight against his hard body with his other hand. He lowered his head, but this time the kiss wasn't soft and light. It was hard and passionate. She slid her hands over his shoulders, pressing her body closer against his. Her fingers meshed with his glorious blond mane.

Jen moaned softly. All her dark thoughts disappeared. This was heaven. She felt lightheaded and weak and didn't care he was crumbling her defenses. His mouth, his body, and his hands made her forget what was buried deep in the back of her mind—a thought too frightening to contemplate.

Her mind was spinning out of control and all she could think of was how much she wanted this man. A man she barely knew. The feeling was so powerful, so intense, there was no reason or logic behind it. It was primal need. A baser instinct that ran below the line of civility. It was wild and hot and Jen welcomed it.

In that moment, she did feel like an animal with a painful, throbbing need to mate.

She ground her body against his, and their tongues met in passionate heat. Jen felt her ache for him grow, and she whimpered under the passionate onslaught of his kiss.

He drew back sharply, breathing hard, his face taut with desire. He grabbed her face in both hands and kissed her hard. Her lips felt bruised, her body on fire, and she held him tight around his waist.

With sharp, urgent movements, he brought his hands between them and untied her wraparound top, shoving it roughly over her shoulders. He looked down at her lace-covered breasts and an almost inhuman sound came from deep within his throat.

Jen felt the air grow thick around them as she reached for his zipper. Their heated gazes locked, and he cupped her breasts as she fumbled with his pants. His hands felt like liquid fire on her breasts, and she arched her back, crying out in passion.

A satisfied gleam entered his gaze and he dropped his hands to his T-shirt removing it from his pants with rough jabs. He slid it over his head and Jen nearly gasped at the sight of his powerful chest. She ran her hands over his skin and moaned softly at the sheer pleasure she took by touching his strong, beautiful, velvety skin.

She forgot about the pack of wild animals that attacked him, the taunting, imminent full moon, and the wolf dog she had seen in his apartment—her only thought to mate with this man.

Then their hands were everywhere. On him, on her and before she knew it they were embracing each other naked, heated flesh against heated flesh. Her breasts peaked with desire as he crushed her to his chest.

He lifted her into his arms and carried her to the couch. "You're so beautiful," he murmured deeply as he lay her down and gazed at her body.

And she felt beautiful. He made her feel like she was the most desirable woman in the world.

"Lucas, I...I...my God, this is crazy."

"This is passion in its most primitive form," he said hoarsely, covering her body with his as she

spread her legs to embrace him. "I can't...get...enough...of you," he ground out, his strong, powerful member finding the hot, moist place between her legs.

Jen tensed in anticipation and not a little fear as she clutched his shoulders and arched her neck. "Now," she breathed. "I can't wait."

With one hard, searing thrust he filled her and she cried out. And when he began to move inside of her, she gasped in delight at the sheer ecstasy flowing through her veins.

She looked into his face and saw a mixture of pleasure and pain darkening his features. She grabbed his face and pulled it down to hers.

Her passion and need mounted as his hot kisses made her soar to the heavens and above. And then, wave after wave of ecstasy washed over her body, and she shook and convulsed with pent up release. She felt like she had just splintered into a million pieces and would never be whole again.

And with one final, hard thrust, Lucas stiffened, threw his head back, and released an inhuman roar as he released himself into her warmth.

They lay entwined, breathing hard, their bodies glistening with sweat, and Jen squeezed her eyes closed.

"Oh my God," she whispered hoarsely.

He gave her a dark, sexy look, "You're mine, Jen. We belong together."

"This is crazy." She worried her lip. "We...we don't even know each other."

"We know enough to understand what we feel for each other is right." His face darkened. "You already know, Jen. You already know what I am."

Jen refused to believe what had been plaguing her subconscious. "No. That's not possible. This doesn't happen in real life."

"It's possible and it's very real."

"I don't believe you." She closed her eyes, blocking the truth in his gaze.

"Look at me, Jen," he said quietly. She opened her eyes, her expression wary.

"Do I look crazy?"

"N...no."

"So you believe me when I say I would never hurt you?"

"Yes," she whispered. "The animal I saw here last night? That dog...that was..." she said brokenly.

"It wasn't a dog, Jen. It was a wolf."

She pulled away from him and rose. Her legs turned to jelly, and she collapsed on the floor. She placed her hands on her face. Lucas knelt at her feet, gently taking her hands.

"I'm sorry, Jen. I didn't know you were the one."

Numbly she stared at his face. His expression was tense with worry, fear, and something else she couldn't define. She saw him swallow hard.

"Jen, I think I'm falling in love with you."

Her heart skipped a beat. "Oh." She was numb. Another time, another place hearing him say those words may have made her feel joy, but not today. It was almost nine minutes after eleven. Her first full moon.

"And for the first time in my life, I'm afraid," he added grimly. "You can't walk away from what we have because I'm...because I...because of what I am."

"You're a werewolf, Lucas!" she screamed. "Oh my God! And you turned me into one, too!" Her voice rose in panic. She clutched her stomach, her head spinning. "I...I think I'm going to be sick."

"I wish things could have been different, but they aren't. That night I saw you, all I thought we were going to have was sex. I didn't know we were destined for each other. I didn't know you were the one. I didn't know," he added brokenly, "I was going

to end up loving you.”

She stared at his face and saw the truth. He wasn't lying. His sincerity was palpable. “What's going to happen to me?” She asked in a small voice.

He glanced at the clock and grimaced. When he brought his gaze back to hers, his expression was grieved. “You'll change into a Lycan. You'll have strength and power and...and...”

“And *what*? Tell me?”

“And immortality.”

She was dizzy with fear. “I'll be a werewolf forever?”

He nodded. “But after this one time you can control the turning. Even when there isn't a full moon.” He paused. “Tonight, your change will last a few minutes and then you'll revert back to your human form.”

“So it's not like in the movies where there's a full moon and I'll change into a werewolf until the moon sets?”

His mouth quirked. “No.”

“And I can control it?”

“Yes.”

“And I'll live forever in human form as long as I decide not to change?”

“Yes, but on every full moon, the Lycans do change. We have to—to protect the humans. There is another group of Lycans amongst us. Evil ones. Every full moon they change and go on a rampage to bite as many humans as possible to add to their numbers.”

Jen gasped. “So Lycans—the good ones—change every full moon and fight their evil kind?”

“Yes, but there's more.” He glanced at the clock. “Jen, we'll have to finish this conversation later. It's almost time.”

Dread made her limbs go numb. She nodded, rising.

Lucas rose as well and took her hand. "Do you want to go into the bedroom? There's a mirror. If you see yourself, you may not be as frightened."

A thought struck her and she clutched his hand. He glanced down at her, concern lining his brow. "It's a full moon. Does this mean you're going to leave me alone tonight to fight the bad werewolves?"

His expression softened. "Not tonight. I'm going to spend it with you."

She couldn't wrap her head around this conversation and followed him into the bedroom. "This isn't how I expected my love life to turn out."

"And you think I asked for this? Serena bit me on a full moon. That's how I turned into a werewolf."

She was surprised. "I thought you and she....that you..." She didn't know what to say.

"That we had sex?" His expression turned grim. "No. Even if we had, it wouldn't have had an effect because she and I weren't destined for each other." He paused. "I was out one night and she was coming on strong. It was a full moon and she followed me out into the parking lot. I didn't know what hit me. Before I knew it, I was turning." They stood before the mirror on the dresser.

Her brow puckered into a frown. "I don't get it. You said the first time is always the hardest with the fever, the pain, the long sleep, and then the endless hunger before the turn."

He nodded solemnly. "That's if you make love to a werewolf who is your soul mate, and on the rise of the next full moon you change. In my case, it was different. If you're bitten by a werewolf on a full moon, the change is instant."

"This is too confusing." She stiffened. What was *that*? She stared at her naked reflection and gave Lucas a started look. "My...my bones feel like they're cracking!"

"They're expanding," he said quietly. "It's time."

She felt a fierce cold seeping through her limbs, a jarring blast of ice flowing through her veins. She threw her head back and screamed. The pain! It was excruciating. Then she felt the fire, scalding her, torching her from the inside out. She could feel her form changing, her face stretching, her limbs expanding. She opened her mouth to scream again, but this time an ominous howl filled the room. She kept her eyes shut, refusing to look in the mirror. Terrified, she blindly reached out for Lucas, expecting to touch his arm, but she felt his head. My God! How tall was she?

"Open your eyes," he said quietly. "Don't be afraid. It will only last a few minutes."

She trusted him. Slowly, she opened her eyes and gasped, but it didn't sound like a human gasp. It sounded more like a low, deep, growl. Threatening, inhuman, scary.

She stared at her hideous form. "I'm grotesque. Oh my God! I'm a monster." She couldn't get over how different her voice sounded. It was sinister. She looked at Lucas's naked reflection and watched him staring at her with compassion in his eyes.

"You're not a monster. You're still Jen."

She shook her monstrous head. "I'll never turn voluntarily into a werewolf. Never!"

"You'll have to if you need to protect yourself from our evil kind. A werewolf can die in one of two ways. With a shot from a silver bullet, or if it kills the one who turned them. That's why I can never kill Serena. If I do, I will die."

"I'm a monster," she hissed through her ferocious jowls. "Look at me."

She heard him curse under his breath as he reached up and took her face in his hands. "Look at me." And he changed into a Lycan. "We can change into two forms. This one—the Lycan form. Or a wolf."

Oh my God! And she thought *she* was huge! Lucas towered an extra foot over her and had an extra six inches of sinewy muscle all over his form. She cowered back. And then she looked into his eyes and amidst his ferocious jaw, the menacing angles and planes of his face, the protruding brow, she saw warmth and something else in his blue gaze. Was that love?

He reached for her curved back and drew her close. "You're not a monster. I still desire you, even in this form." And he brought his head close and rested his sinewy cheek on hers. Comfort. Compassion. Caring. She almost forgot what she looked like.

Slowly she calmed down, and they remained embraced for a few moments before she felt her body and limbs relax, melt somehow, and transform back into their human form.

He followed suit.

"Let's get dressed."

A ridiculous thought entered her mind. She'd have to change back into her black skirt and yellow top—clothes she'd been wearing for nearly forty-eight hours. A bubble of laughter rose in her throat. She felt on the verge of hysteria.

He gave her a concerned look. "Are you all right?"

"No. I just saw myself transform into a ghoulish freak and I'm more concerned that I'll be wearing the same clothes again for the second day in a row."

He pulled her into his arms, resting his head on top of hers. "This can't have been easy for you." He sighed heavily. "I wish it could have been different. I wish I could have prepared you for this."

"I know," she mumbled into his chest. "How could you know a one night stand would turn into eternal love?" She wasn't trying to be funny, but when he spoke, she heard the hint of a smile in his

voice.

"I'm glad it did." He drew back and looked down at her. "You only have to wear those clothes one last time. We'll go to your apartment and you can pack a bag."

Things were definitely moving way too fast. "Er, and how long do you expect me to stay with you?"

"Forever."

She thought he was kidding. "And you think I'll only need to pack one bag?"

"We can always go back tomorrow for more." His face took a grim turn. "Jen, you have to stay with me. Be close to me where I can protect you. Lycans can sense each other, even when they're in human form. You'll never be safe from them again."

She felt a frisson of fear. "Lucas, I have a job, friends, family. I can't give all that up."

"You won't have to, but you need to learn how to keep a low profile. I will help you. Teach you. And there's more. Do you remember the dog you saw here last night?" She nodded slowly, knowing what he was going to say. "That was me. I'll teach you how to change into your wolf form as well."

She put a hand up to her head. It was throbbing. "Is there anything I won't be able to do?"

"Yes. Turn back the clock. What's done is done, and you need to learn how to accept and adjust to your new life. With me."

He said the last part deeply. She knew he was right. How could she walk away from him? How could her life ever be the same again?

Soul mates. Were they? They must be if she'd been transformed. Then why didn't she *feel* it? It would have made everything so much easier if she *felt* it. How did lust change into love?

She found herself giving him her address and they dressed in silence before they took his service elevator to his underground garage and got into his

car.

An hour later they were driving back to his place with her bag in his trunk. She stared out the window thinking about the man beside her. She couldn't deny she was crazy about him, couldn't ignore their mutual attraction. And Jen couldn't discount the incredible energy and connection they shared. Was that the beginnings of love? She'd never felt like this before in her life.

They drove by the park.

"Mommy, I'm scared!" Jen's head snapped to the park, but all she saw was the tall shadow of trees and darkness. "Mommy!" A little girl's voice whimpered. What the hell!

"Lucas, stop the car!"

"What?"

"Stop the car!"

He pulled along the curb and before she knew what she was doing she jumped out and sped into the park. She heard Lucas yell behind her, but she kept running. Oh my God! She smelled blood! The park was dark, the trees dimming the glow of the moon, and she realized with a start that her sense of smell was guiding her, bringing her closer to the little girl.

Then she saw them, a little girl of about seven and her mother surrounded by three enormous wolves. The mother had a gash on her arm and the little girl stood behind her, clutching her skirt. Even in the dim evening light, Jen could see the woman was pale from fright.

Jen heard the low, deep, menacing growl and was shocked to realize it came from her own throat. She needed to change into her wolf form and help them. She stared up at the moon, desperate.

She heard the little girl scream and Jen dragged her gaze away from the moon. She saw two wolves advance threateningly toward the mother and

daughter. Jen didn't doubt what they were. They weren't real animals. They were the evil Lycans in their wolf forms. One of the wolves bared its jowls and sprung in the air.

Jen didn't have time to think. She felt the dread of cold fear seep through her veins and raised her face to the dark heavens letting out the longest, most tortured howl. And before she knew what was happening, her body transformed. Her line of vision grew lower, her torso became parallel with the ground. She growled, realizing she was on four paws. Lunging forward, she sprung her body between the mother and daughter and the wolf ready to pounce on them. The wolf's fangs made contact with her legs and tore her flesh. She would have screamed if she was human, but the sound that came out of her throat was more of a painful yelp.

The wolf growled and lunged again towards Jen this time, the other two wolves following suit, when a ferocious sound came through the air. She looked up and saw Lucas in his wolf form diving towards the closest wolf to her. He fought and wrestled, fangs gnashing, growls reverberating through the air, while the other two wolves circled them.

Terrified, Jen glanced at the mother and daughter. They were running away. She glanced back at Lucas and saw that although he had injured the first wolf, the other two were now bracing for attack. She had to help him!

Rising, she looked down at her injured foreleg and whimpered. Fierce hot pain shot up her paw, and she fell back down on the ground with a whimper. Lucas was now fighting two wolves at the same time, a blurry cloud of fur, growls, and slashes. She feared for his life. The injured wolf seemed to have healed remarkably fast and was bracing itself to join his evil brethren.

How could she heal herself to help him? Why

wasn't her injury going away? She whimpered. Then another fear rose in her. She felt herself transforming back into human form. No! She couldn't! Lucas would die without her help.

Lying naked with a deep gash on her arm, she saw Lucas fight the three wolves. He felled one with a bite on its neck and injured another one. Jen's heart stopped. He was going to die! She tried to change back into a wolf and failed. Damn it! What kind of a werewolf was she if she couldn't change into one?

She screamed and desperately looked around for a weapon she could use. She saw a rock by her feet and flung it at a wolf. It hit it on the head and it turned with a growl and looked at her. She gasped, watching it leave Lucas alone with his brother. Oh my God! Now *she* was going to die!

She could hear Lucas roar as he clawed, and bit, and thrashed the wolf he fought. Jen scrambled to her feet, realizing at the back of her mind her leg was healed, and grabbed a thick branch from the ground.

"Get away from me, you monster!" She yelled at the wolf threading its way dangerously towards her. She flayed the branch in the air.

A sharp whimper caused her to turn back to Lucas and she saw the wolf he fought slump to the ground. The distant sound of sirens flooded her brain. Lucas sprung in the air towards her. She gasped seeing the streaks of red on his fur. He was hurt! The first wolf rose from the ground, healed, and was about to attack Lucas from behind when she heard three consecutive gunshots.

Dazed, she saw the three wolves slump to the ground. Lucas transformed to his human form, his injuries healing, and he fell to his knees, breathing hard. Jen ran to him and cradled his head to her bare breasts.

“Oh my God! I thought you were going to die.”

The cop dropped a bag at Lucas's feet. “The woman called us. She said she was being attacked by wolves. You okay?”

Lucas looked down at his body and nodded. Then, with a grimace, he gently took Jen's arm and inspected it. He looked relieved.

“Your healing abilities are kicking in,” he told her deeply. “I was worried they wouldn't. I thought I arrived too late.” His expression was tortured.

Her heart melted at the look of love and relief on his face. She watched him reach into the bag the cop gave him and pull out two T-shirts and two black sweat pants. He gave her the smaller sizes. “Standard issue,” he remarked. Rising, he got dressed. “Put them on.”

In her fear for Lucas's life, she had forgotten she was naked. Quickly she slipped them on. The cop put his gun back in his holster and gave the three wolves a grim look. Jen followed his gaze and gasped. They weren't wolves anymore. They were in their human form. She tossed Lucas a dazed look.

“When you die, you revert to your human form.”

All she could say was, “Oh.”

The cop called for back up on his phone. Lucas thanked him for his help and led a dazed Jen away. In his car, she turned to him.

“That cop was one of us, wasn't he?”

“Yes.”

“And he killed those wolves with silver bullets.”

“Yes.”

She leaned her head back on the head rest and squeezed her eyes shut. “I couldn't change back to help you. I couldn't,” she whispered.

“You're new. You're just developing your skills.” And then after a thick pause. “You shouldn't have run off like that. You could have been killed.”

“I couldn't help it. I...I heard that little girl. I

had to do something.”

He gave her a look tinged with admiration. “I know. You were very brave.”

Lucas drove the rest of the way to his penthouse in silence, and every once in a while Jen could feel his concerned gaze on her. Inside, he led her straight to his bathroom. He ran a steamy, hot shower. Without saying a word, he stripped and then removed her clothes. Numb with the shocking events of the past half hour, she stood there as he bathed her and himself, removing the dried blood from their skin. Jen closed her eyes and welcomed his soothing touch. His hands felt like satin on her skin. She was half disappointed all he did was wash her, but she could feel more than she knew he was exhausted. He’d just had the fight of his life and had almost gotten ripped to shreds because of her.

He toweled them dry and led her into the bedroom. He turned down the bed as Jen stood quietly to the side. Was he mad at her? His silence was deafening. He walked to the windows and drew the blinds closed. “Is this comfortable for you?” He asked.

“Yes,” she whispered.

He slid into his king size bed and Jen did the same. A wave of shyness fell over her, but it quickly disappeared when he drew his arms around her and brought her close to his side. She nestled her head on his chest and closed her eyes.

Jen was exhausted and she welcomed sleep. As she drifted off, she felt an inexplicable surge of security and comfort being in his strong arms. And with a kiss on the top of her head, he murmured deeply, “Try to get some sleep.”

She nodded, sighing contentedly. Here was where she felt safe. In his arms.

Chapter Six

By ten the next morning, she woke up to loud voices coming from the living room. Jen frowned as she got out of bed and slipped on jeans and a top from her overnight bag. The voices grew louder and more agitated. Lucas sounded angry and the woman's voice sounded equally irate. Jen stiffened, recognizing Serena.

She moved closer to the door and heard Serena snap, "You can't be with her every minute of the day, Lucas."

"Get the hell out," he said with barely controlled anger. "And pray I don't see you anywhere near her."

Jen went into the living room and caught Serena leaving. She felt a thread of fear as she looked at Lucas dressed in jeans and a white shirt, his fists clenched to his sides.

"You buzzed that crazy woman up?" She asked.

"She said she wanted to make amends and apologize. Like a fool I believed her."

He turned and faced her, his features tense with anger and worry.

Jen tried to make light of it even though her heart was racing. "She has it that bad for you, huh?"

"It has nothing to do with love. It's all about control and she can't accept the fact that I don't want her, nor that she can't control me."

"Lucas, it sounded like she was threatening me. Should I have reason to be worried?"

He remained silent for what seemed an eternity before he replied. "Yes."

Jen drew in a shaky breath. "Well, I'm going to

the police. I'll put a restraining order on her."

His face turned grim. "The police already know about her, Jen. They've been keeping an eye on her for years." He paused. "We have our kind in the police force."

"I kind of figured that one out—the other night when you called your cop friend to pick me up and drive me home and again last night in the park."

He nodded. "Let's have breakfast. I think it's time I told you everything."

"Can I use your phone? I'm going to take a sick day from work today."

"Sure."

She left a message on her boss's voice mail, feigning a sore throat and achy bones and returned to the breakfast bar as he prepared two plates of bacon and eggs. She sipped her coffee, thoughtfully watching him move around the kitchen. Her heart jolted at the memory of their shower last night and how gentle he was when he bathed her. And then her heart thudded when she recalled him fighting off the three wolves. Her brow skewered into a frown.

"Lucas, if your cop friend hadn't shown up last night, how could the fight have ended?" He gave her a quizzical look. "I mean, if only a silver bullet can kill a werewolf or if a werewolf dies if it kills the one who changed him, how could there have been a victor last night? You're all immortal and your injuries kept healing."

His face tensed as he brought the plates to the bar. "Lycans are never too far from their silver bullets. My cop friend called this morning and told me he found their clothes and guns nearby. As for me, I always keep a loaded gun in my car and here, in my place." His face darkened. "Speaking of which, I need to give you something. I'll be right back." He returned a moment later with a gun in his hand. "Keep this in your purse at all times. It's loaded with

silver bullets so be careful. Have you ever used a gun before?"

Her eyes were as wide as saucers. She shook her head.

"It's nothing," he explained. "Here's the safety catch release. Pull this, point, and aim. When you want the safety back on, push it here." He handed her the gun, his expression grim.

"You're not kidding. You want me to keep a loaded gun?"

"You have to. For protection. There's no fighting to the death with our evil kind. If they sever a limb of yours, the wound will heal, but you'll go through life without your arm or leg."

She shivered, putting the gun in her purse. They sat in silence. She picked at her breakfast trying to assimilate her life's change.

"During the first year after turning," he began quietly, "all I wanted to do was kill myself. I couldn't live with the fact I had turned into a monster. I had a business, a PR firm, and sold it to travel the world to find a cure. After months of dead ends, I returned. On the second night back in the city, I was in a corner store late one night buying a bottle of the strongest alcohol they had and a man walked in. I sensed rather than knew he was like me and when he changed and tried to kill the store owner and his teenage son for all the money in their till, I couldn't stand back and let it happen." He paused and took a ragged breath.

Jen gasped softly. "What did you do?"

"I changed and stopped him. Soon after, two cops arrived and they took him away in his human form. One of the policemen took me aside, I thought to ask me questions of what had happened, but the moment I looked into his eyes I knew he was like me. He thanked me and told me of the Brotherhood. It's a secret society here in this city, and other

places, where we band together and protect humans from our kind, the evil Lycans.” He paused and swallowed hard. “I’m telling you this because I know what you’re going through now. I know how confused and lost you feel, how scared you are at how your life has changed.”

She appreciated his compassion, but something nagged her. “Wait a minute.” Jen frowned. “You said the cops took away the Lycan in his human form. Was he arrested? How...how can a jail cell hold a werewolf?”

“The cells are made of pure silver and the werewolves are sedated with a small dose of mercury to prevent them from changing. We have a few cops who are werewolves and they guard our secret well.” He paused, his mouth tense. “Jen, the Brotherhood doesn’t only have werewolves as members.” She frowned. “The Brotherhood is also made up of vampires.”

Did she hear him correctly? “What did you say?” She asked quietly.

“The Brotherhood is made up of both werewolves and vampires.”

Her breathing slowed. “You mean vampires as in Bela Lugosi? Coffins? Bats? Disintegrating into ashes at sunlight?”

His mouth curled into a small smile. “No to all of the above. Fictional vampires are nothing like the real world. They sleep during the day because they have a rather severe skin disease of the sun. A stake through the heart and not feeding for the day can kill them. They’re immortal and they try to live normal lives like us.” His expression turned serious. “And like us, there are good vampires and bad ones. The good ones have a code much like ours. Protect the human life from their evil race.”

Jen laughed, but it sounded shrill and false. She raised her hands. “Wait a minute. You’re serious,

aren't you?"

"Yes. Why is it so hard to believe? You're a Lycan now. A werewolf. Why do you have a hard time accepting vampires exist?"

"I don't...it's just I can't...." She was at a loss for words. She swallowed hard. "Next you're going to tell me witches exist, too," she mumbled.

"They do," he replied quietly. He reached for her hand. "Jen, I know this is all hard for you to accept, and believe me, I had just as hard a time accepting it, too. You need to realize the world you knew is behind you. Everything has changed. As soon as you understand that you'll be able to move forward."

She saw the truth in his eyes and nodded slowly. She was afraid to ask what she was dying to know. "Do...do you know any vampires?"

"My silent partner at the *Full Moon*, Tobias Knight, is a four hundred year old vampire. He recently got married and lives not too far from here. He and his wife, Cat, are expecting their first child in six months."

"How...how did my life get so crazy? How is all this possible?"

He shrugged casually. "There are many stories going around. The one most people believe is somewhere in Europe around the start of the middle ages, a man made a pact with the Devil to save his wife's life. She was dying of a blood disease and he tried everything to save her. He was a man of the Church and prayed to God to save his wife, but nothing happened. She was close to death when he lost his mind and swore at the heavens for forsaking him. That's when he denounced God and turned to the Devil, begging and pleading with him for help. He was willing to trade his soul for his wife's life. Folklore says he heard a voice in his head. It told him to cut his wife's throat and drink her blood to rid her body of the disease. She would be reborn as

the Queen of the Damned and they would live side-by-side forever. The Devil, having a wicked mind, stuck to his end of the bargain, but transformed the man into a man-wolf. Hence, the first vampire and the first werewolf were born.”

“And they lived happily ever after?” She remarked dryly. She saw his mouth quirk at her attempted humor.

“Jen, the past year, I’ve accepted who and what I am,” he continued. “The Brotherhood has made me realize I can do more good alive than dead.” He raked his hand through his golden hair, his expression hardening. “I made the decision never to fall in love and then I met you. You made me feel like a man again. I was watching you for a long time that first night when you came to my club with your friends to celebrate your birthday. And I was fighting every primitive instinct in my body to come to you.”

“But you did come to me,” she whispered. “And you asked me to dance. What changed your mind?”

“The man who approached you. When I saw him talking to you and place his hand on your arm, I was consumed with such a powerful rage of jealousy and possessiveness it nearly felled me. I was blindsided. I approached you then and there because I didn’t want anyone else to have you. I wanted you for myself. As a werewolf, my emotions, my instincts, my desires are more pronounced. I couldn’t control myself with you.” Lucas paused, his expression going through a myriad of emotions. Desire, regret, deep concern. “And that night, after we made love and I felt my change coming, I was stunned to discover you were *the one*.” He paused. “Jen, I need to know if you’re at least willing to give us a chance. I know I’m already falling in love with you. Can you give yourself a chance to love me back?”

Jen’s heart flipped in her chest. She hadn’t

expected the conversation to turn into this particular topic. What did she feel? She knew she was crazy about him, but did she love him? "Lucas, I've never felt like this about anyone in my life. It's like I'm...I'm bonded to you somehow. Connected to you. I can't deny the passion and chemistry we have." She took a deep breath. "You're every woman's dream. Gorgeous, sexy, rich, and...and nice."

He grimaced. "Nice?"

She smiled. "Nice in a good way. You're compassionate and warm." Her smile faltered. "I...I need time."

"We have forever."

Her stomach jolted. "I keep forgetting I'm immortal. Oh my God! What am I going to tell my parents? My friends?"

"Nothing."

"Excuse me?"

"Jen, you can't tell anyone anything. We live in secrecy. All of us. Werewolves and vampires. The less your family and friends know about your double life, the more you'll protect them from people like our evil kind and the Grangers."

She was starting to get a little crazy now. "Who...are...the...Grangers?" She asked slowly.

"They're vampire killers. They'll kill anyone connected to a vampire." He paused. "As Tobias explained to me, we must live in anonymity. We must not stand out. Our lives to everyone around us must appear normal and natural."

She tried to grasp what he said. She felt her eyes prick with tears. "I'll see my family and friends grow old and die."

"No. We must disappear every few decades before people realize we don't age. I'm sorry, Jen."

"You seem to be apologizing a lot to me lately."

"I truly am sorry."

She knew he was. "I know." She reached for

their plates and brought them to the sink. "Do you want more coffee?" She asked numbly over her shoulder. She didn't want to talk about this anymore. She didn't think she could take another dose of reality.

"Jen."

"Would you prefer more juice?"

"Jen," he said firmly.

She spun around. "*What?*"

He rose and strode with determination towards her. He grabbed her shoulders and looked deep into her eyes. "You have me. You'll always have me. You're not alone." His head came down and he placed a firm kiss on her lips.

She nearly sighed at the instant swell of comfort flowing through her veins. She wasn't alone. She had Lucas. And he would always be with her.

"I'm meeting Tobias at the club at noon," he said when he lifted his head. "I want you to come with me."

She nodded.

An hour later, after clearing up the breakfast dishes, they were in his car driving to the *Full Moon*.

Chapter Seven

"Your club is open this early in the day?" She asked as he parked the car.

"No. Tobias prefers to meet when it's closed. His wife is pregnant, and he's keeping a very low profile, to keep his wife and child safe."

"From vampire killers?"

"From everyone. There are Lycans who want him dead, too. Tobias is a very powerful vampire and as he works closely with our kind, he has many enemies." He unlocked the front doors to his club and switched on the lights. "He should be here shortly."

"Where's the ladies room?"

"Down that hall to the left."

"Thanks. I'll be back in a minute."

"My office is behind the DJ booth over there."

She smiled her thanks. "Okay."

Jen was nervous to say the least. She would be meeting a real live vampire for the first time in her life and the thought left her breathless. She splashed cold water on her face and took a deep breath. She could do this. If she was falling in love with a werewolf, she could meet a vampire.

Jen froze. Was she falling in love with Lucas? Her breath grew short and she stared at her reflection in the mirror. You have me, Lucas had said. Her belly warmed at the thought.

If not for the fact that he was a werewolf, Lucas was perfect. She frowned at her image in the polished glass. She was a werewolf, too, and she couldn't forget that.

She left the washroom and made her way through the vast dance floor. She stopped dead in her tracks when she saw a stunning blonde embracing Lucas in a hug. A wave of green-eyed jealousy attacked her, and she couldn't move.

The woman was stunning in a white, flowing strappy gown, her blonde mane gleaming down her back. She laughed as she grabbed Lucas's face, pulled his head down, and kissed his cheek. Jen felt sick.

At the back of her mind she knew there must be a perfectly logical explanation why a gorgeous blonde was mauling her man, but Jen's jealousy was choking her, and she couldn't think straight.

As if sensing her presence, Lucas turned to her and waved. "Jen, come here. I want to introduce you to Cat, Tobias's wife."

It didn't make it any better, Jen thought. Her jealousy was still firing through her veins at the possessive hand Cat placed on Lucas's arm.

"Nice to meet you," Jen said.

Cat dropped her hand from Lucas and came forward. "The pleasure is all mine, Jen." Her smile was dazzling and...sincere. Jen felt a flash of shame. "I'm so glad to finally meet you. When I heard Tobias was going to meet Lucas's *one*, I had to come here." And without waiting for a response, she hugged a stunned Jen. *Stunned* because Jen couldn't get over the ethereal glow about Cat's face. It almost looked otherworldly.

"I gather you're referring to me being Lucas's soul mate?" Jen asked.

Cat pulled away and gave Jen a look filled with mirth. "Don't worry, my dear. I was just as skeptical when Tobias first met me and told me I was *his* soul mate. Actually, he told me I was the reincarnation of his wife, Seraphina, from three hundred years ago."

"A fact you've come to believe, my darling," a

deep voice said.

Jen looked behind Cat and saw the most stunning man she'd ever seen. He was tall with black longish hair, a dark gaze, and skin as strikingly vibrant as his wife's. He smiled warmly as he held out his hand.

"It's a pleasure to meet you," he said in his deep, sexy voice.

Jen flushed. "Me, too. I...this is the first...that is—"

Tobias smiled. "I gather you've never met a vampire before?"

Cat gasped, feigning outrage. "Did you just read her mind? I thought you weren't going to do that anymore unless it was a matter of life or death."

Tobias gave his wife a loving peck on her forehead. "And I've been true to my word, darling. Actually Lucas told me Jen might be nervous about meeting us."

"Nonsense. Jen's not nervous," Cat said. "In fact, why don't you and Lucas go off and have your meeting in the office while Jen and I sit by the bar and have a nice chat."

Lucas nodded before he placed a hand on Jen's lower back. His gaze was warm when he looked into her eyes. "Would you like me to make you a drink first? It can be non-alcoholic if you like."

Jen shook her head. "I'm fine. Thanks." He looked like he wanted to say something else and Jen smiled. "Really. I'm fine."

"All right," he said and followed Tobias into the back office.

"I'm jealous," Cat said once they sat on the comfy bar stools. "Since turning three months ago, I haven't even had water. I miss eating and drinking. It took me a long time to get used to it, but I still miss it."

"So, you're a vampire."

Cat smiled. "Yes. So you're a werewolf. Crazy, huh?"

Jen made a face. "You could say that."

"Oh, it's not that bad. Being a vampire has its merits. I never have to worry about bed hair or my skin breaking out." She smiled. "Actually, I wouldn't trade a moment of it. I can't even fathom a life without Tobias. He's given me so much." She touched her nearly flat tummy with a loving hand. "Making love to a vampire has a healing effect. I couldn't have children before I met him and now I'm waiting anxiously for my first one."

"Congratulations." And Jen meant it. She was really starting to like Cat. There was something genuine about her that Jen found endearing.

"Thanks." Cat's face grew serious. "Jen, I know what you're going through. I went through it, too." She paused and looked like she struggled to find her next words. "Do you love him? Do you love Lucas?"

"I...I think I do. I'm not sure."

Cat smiled kindly. "Just like me at the beginning." She gave Jen a meaningful look. "The love will come. I can see the energy between you two. It's powerful. And I like you. I liked Lucas, too, from the first second I met him."

"How did Tobias and Lucas meet?"

"At Lucas's first meeting with the Brotherhood. They hit it off instantly. Lucas wanted to start a business and needed a partner. He found out Tobias had taken a few decades off from work, and asked him if he was interested in going half with him in his business venture. Soon after, they opened the *Full Moon* and have been close friends ever since."

"It must be nice to take a few decades off from work."

"Oh, Tobias is very accomplished, Jen. He has three degrees, he's amassed a fortune, and he's fluent in several languages. When you have eternity

ahead of you, you tend to view life differently. Now his focus is on his family.”

Jen’s face fell. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to offend—”

Cat smiled. “I know what you meant.”

Her expression showed her relief. “What did you do before you met Tobias?” She asked politely.

“In this life or in my past life?”

Jen knotted her brow.

Cat smiled again. “In this life, I was an erotic paranormal writer. In my past life I was his wife, Seraphina.” She laughed softly at Jen’s expression. “A few months ago he saw my picture on the jacket of my latest book and couldn’t believe I had come back to life. He sought me out, found me, and tried to protect me from the Grangers, who are vampire killers. To make a very long story short, Tobias turned me into a vampire and made me realize he wasn’t crazy believing I was the reincarnation of his dead wife from three hundred years ago. Back then I was killed by Clive Granger. The founder, if you will, of the vampire killers. He was my father.”

Jen gasped.

Cat’s face dimmed. “My brother, Quinn, was my father’s protégé and had turned him against me, too. After my death, Quinn had to go into hiding because a vampire had turned him. My father had passed from the plague, and every few decades my brother would reappear and take his place at the helm of the Granger clan. He had to disappear otherwise the clan would discover he was a vampire. A vampire doesn’t age, and while everyone around him was getting older, he remained young.”

“Unbelievable,” Jen whispered.

“Oh, there’s so much more, but the end of my story is Tobias not only gave me a child, he also gave me back my brother. Our centuries long feud is over.” Her face fell. “I’ve been worried about him

lately. I haven't heard from him in over a month."

The sound of Lucas and Tobias coming from the office halted Cat, and she patted Jen's hand. "Things will work out for you. I can see Lucas is already madly in love with you. Give yourself time to love him, too. If there's one thing we can't run from it's fate, and the two of you are meant to be together. Like Tobias and I."

Chapter Eight

Back at Lucas's penthouse, Jen pondered over what Cat had said. Was Lucas her fate? Was he madly in love with her? More so, was she in love with him?

He told her he needed to run a couple of quick errands for the bar and would be back within two hours.

"I can go back to my place and pick up a few more of my things," she remarked.

"No!"

She stiffened. "I'll be back before you will and it's a beautiful day. The walk will do me good."

His jaw tensed. "I said no," he replied quietly.

Jen was irked. "Are you forbidding me?"

"Protecting you. It's not safe out there for you anymore. And your skills as a werewolf are not developed enough where you can protect yourself."

"It's broad daylight! It's not even a full moon."

"It doesn't matter. I told you Lycans can change any time of the month."

She crossed her arms. "I don't think I like where this is leading, Lucas. You're starting to make me feel boxed in."

"I'm sorry about that, but it's for your own good. If I lose you, I'll never forgive myself. We only have one soul mate, Jen, and if a Lycan kills you, I won't live the rest of my eternal life without you." He gripped her hard by the shoulders, his expression dark. "Promise me you'll wait till I return and I'll take you to your apartment."

She could see he was serious, but so was she. It

was broad daylight and he was worrying for nothing. The phrase “ignorance is bliss” played about in her mind and she realized what Lucas didn’t know wouldn’t worry him. Crossing her fingers behind her back, she said, “I...I promise nothing bad will happen to me.” She wasn’t exactly promising him she wouldn’t leave, so technically she wasn’t lying to him or breaking a promise.

“Good.” He bent his head and claimed her mouth in a bruising kiss. “I’ll be back before you know it.” And he left.

Ten minutes later Jen was writing him a note with her phone number and left it on the kitchen table. *Don’t be angry and don’t worry. Picking up some things I need. 555-7633.*

If she was going to spend an eternity with him, she needed to set some boundaries. She couldn’t deny he was genuinely concerned, but he needed to understand having been on her own since she was eighteen, Jen wasn’t used to having someone tell her what to do.

Thoughts of an eternity jolted her stomach. She still couldn’t fathom it. What had Cat said? That she missed eating and drinking? At least Jen could still enjoy a good home-cooked meal.

On her eight block walk, people passed her, cars swept by, street noise surrounded her, but she didn’t pay attention to anything. All she could see was Lucas.

And the one thing that kept going over and over in her mind was not the talk of werewolves or the Brotherhood or how her life was in danger, but how he’d said he loved her.

Just thinking about their lovemaking warmed her skin. Her breathing halted as she thought about his searing touches, his sensual kisses. Her stomach and lower belly quivered. Oh my God, she wanted

him. Now. She gulped some fresh air and tried to regain her composure. What was wrong with her? She'd never felt such a strong connection to a man before and wondered if this was what *the one* was supposed to feel, this constant need to mate with their *one*, this hunger overpowering reason.

If circumstances had been different, she would be floating now. Rushing back to tell him she loved him. But her circumstances weren't different. Their relationship was anything but ordinary, and Lucas was not your average gorgeous male. He was a werewolf. *She* was a werewolf, and the sooner she accepted that fact, the sooner she could move on with her life—and Lucas.

Her head began to spin. She was a werewolf. Every time she repeated that in her mind she felt like she was spiraling into an abyss of madness.

She pushed her key into her front door and felt someone tap her on the shoulder. Jen turned around and froze. Serena was standing directly behind her with a malevolent glare on her face, twisting her pretty features into ugly lines.

"What do you want?" She asked, trying to inject bravado in her tone she was far from feeling.

Serena gave her a head-to-toe look filled with hate and derision and laughed harshly. "What do I want? Lucas. I want Lucas, my pet." She sniffed the air, her eyes narrowing. "Ah, so I see he changed you." She reached out and shoved Jen's collar aside. Serena frowned. "Where—"

"He didn't bite me."

Serena's face twisted with rage. "So, you're *the one*. His destiny. How sweet. Too bad his joy will be short lived."

Jen shrunk back. She couldn't hold Serena's unwavering, cold gaze and glanced at her street. Her apartment was situated on a relatively busy street, but at this moment it seemed deserted except for an

elderly man waiting for a bus at the corner.

She looked back into Serena's face and gasped. The pupils of her eyes took on a yellowish glow and her eyebrows seemed to grow between the bridge of her nose. Jen's fear mounted, and her heart raced with terror. Serena was morphing right in front of her eyes.

"Open the door or I'll break it down," Serena said in an odd tone. Her voice was deeper, hoarse.

Jen couldn't move as she noticed the redhead's ears appear lower than they were before and her forehead widened and protruded forward.

"I'll scream," Jen choked out.

"And I'll kill you and anyone who tries to stop me if you do." Serena smiled evilly and a pair of long incisors appeared. She patted her purse. "I'm never without my silver bullets, but first I want to torture you, make you hurt."

Jen noticed a mother pushing a baby carriage coming down the street and gave Serena a pleading look. "Please. Don't do this," she whispered urgently.

Serena glanced at the young mother. "If you don't open the door now, I'll kill that mother and her baby."

"You wouldn't!"

"Try me."

Terror and fear made her legs grow numb and Jen scrambled to unlock the door.

"Smart choice," Serena remarked coldly, growling faintly as she followed Jen up the stairs to her apartment.

Jen was numb with fear. Worse, she tried willing her body to transform into either her Lycan self or wolf form and failed miserably. Nothing was happening.

Like a caged animal, Lucas moved restlessly around in his penthouse. Damn it to hell! He knew

he'd been too controlling, but he couldn't help it. He growled menacingly as he stared at her note. He should have taken her with him on his errands. He should have never left her alone. Damn it, and if she felt like he was crowding her, then to hell with it. He loved her and would rather she was angry with him than dead.

Cursing under his breath, he grabbed his phone and dialed her number. He felt a cold dread creep up his spine when Serena answered.

"You're too late, my pet," Serena purred. "Jen and I are getting acquainted before I kill her."

He could feel the blood drain from his face. "Damn it, Serena. Leave her alone! She hasn't done anything to you."

"Oh, but she has. She's taken you away from me and for that she will pay."

Lucas felt the blood pound in his ears. "Serena, you can't do this," he said, his voice hoarse with fear and desperation. If anything happened to Jen, he wouldn't be able to live, he wouldn't be able to breathe.

"Too late. She fainted a minute ago, just before you called, when she watched me change...ah, and I see she's coming to. I want her awake when she sees me ripping her limbs from her body." She laughed demonically. "This bitch is going to realize the hard way no one messes around with my *things*."

Lucas didn't have a second to spare. He dropped the phone and transformed into his Lycan form. He stood eight feet erect, his jowls baring huge fangs, his forehead protruding menacingly. And for the second time in forty-eight hours, he smashed himself through his window and vaulted over the rooftops to Jen's apartment. His heart pounded fiercely in his chest, and he felt his rage and fear mount with each leap across the rooftops. He roared ferociously.

Jen came to as Serena put the phone down, but it wasn't Serena exactly. It was Serena in her Lycan form; tall, menacing, and bare with a smattering of hair all along her body. Jen felt another faint coming on and took an unsteady breath. The she-wolf spun around on her long, muscular, hind legs and growled. Jen stifled a scream as she shrank back, and tried focusing all her energy on transforming. Damn it!! Why wasn't she changing? As a werewolf, she could protect herself. As a human, she would die judging by the malevolent hatred and cruelty on Serena's face.

Serena moved towards her, slowly, threateningly, baring her fangs. Jen sat frozen on the ground, unable to move a muscle. She knew there was nothing she could do. The woman-beast stood erect, seven feet of muscle and sharp fangs, and deadly long talons.

"Please, let me go," Jen whispered hoarsely. "I...I don't want to die."

"Don't worry, my pet. You won't feel a thing," Serena said in an unearthly voice. She continued to approach Jen slowly, saliva drooling from the side of her jaw. "When I rip your limbs from your body, you won't feel a thing." She laughed demonically. "And then I'll shoot you right between the eyes."

Jen rose on her knees and scrambled backwards. "Stay away from me."

"It's too late. I will kill you."

She squeezed her eyes closed, and sobbed for a miracle. Within seconds a loud crash reverberated throughout the apartment and she stared in stunned silence at the male werewolf who landed in her living room.

Serena released a loud growl and spun around to face him. "You can't stop me, Lucas. You know the consequences if you do."

Lucas! Jen nearly fainted with relief. He'd come

to save her! She watched him in his Lycan form and shivered at the sheer power and menace he invoked. He turned to her and their gazes met. She could feel the real Lucas beneath this form, the real man, and she half smiled, half sobbed at him. Slowly, he walked to her and placed a taloned finger under her chin and lifted her face to his. His gaze ran over her face.

"I'm...I'm all right," she whispered.

He released her and with a ferocious growl turned to Serena. "Leave now," he said in a hoarse, deep voice.

"No. I'm going to finish this," Serena snarled.

Lucas lifted his head back and released a long, furious growl. "If I have to, I will kill you."

"And die? You know you can't kill the person who turns you." Serena laughed coldly. "Do you care for this woman so much that you're willing to die for her?"

"Touch her and I swear I will kill you," he said.

Jen gasped. If Lucas killed Serena he would die. No! She couldn't let that happen. He couldn't risk everything for her. She remembered the gun Lucas had given her. Quickly, she scrambled to her purse. Stifling a sob, she opened it and pulled out the gun with the silver bullets. Lucas bared his fangs at Serena, and Jen fell back, pointing the gun on the deranged woman.

She heard the distant sound of sirens in the background, and her courage grew. "Leave...leave him alone."

Serena spun around to face her, poisoning herself to spring on Jen's body. She closed her eyes and fired. The sound was deafening and the force of the dislodging bullet knocked her backwards. She lay gasping on the floor, her eyes closed. How long she remained like that, she didn't know. Only when she felt Lucas's hand on hers, did she slowly open her

eyes. She stared up at him in his human form and swallowed hard. Fearing what she'd see, she slowly turned and found Serena sprawled dead on the carpet, a bullet hole over her heart. Naked and in human form. Jen whimpered and placed a trembling hand up to her mouth.

She'd just killed someone.

"It's okay, Jen. It's over," Lucas said quietly as he pulled her into his arms.

She clung to him and sobbed onto his bare chest. "Lucas, oh my God! What have I done?"

"You saved your life and mine."

"I thought you were going to kill her."

"I was," he replied, holding her tight.

She looked up at his handsome face. "You would have died," she whispered.

"Yes."

Her heart soared, but she couldn't embrace the joy she wanted to feel because Serena's body lay too close. Movement at the door caught her eye and then two policemen entered. They acknowledged Lucas with a grim nod.

Jen gave him a searching look. "How did they—"

"I called them before I called your apartment. I wanted to make sure you were safe."

"We'll take care of the body," the older policeman said, giving Lucas the bag he carried. "Sweat pants and a T-shirt."

Lucas nodded, glancing down at his naked self. "Thanks." He rose, quickly shoved on the clothes, and took Jen's hand. "Come on. You don't need to see anymore."

Jen shook her head, wiping the tears from her eyes. "I...I killed her."

The cop who gave Lucas the bag said, "Ma'am, you killed a monster. Her last victim was a seventeen-year-old boy. She bit him on a full moon expecting him to join her with our evil kind, but he

resisted. The Brotherhood tried to help him, but he killed himself last week because he couldn't accept what he'd become. Poor kid turned a gun with silver bullets on himself."

Lucas's face was grim. "She used to be a member of the Brotherhood years ago. Somewhere along the line, her greed to rule and possess consumed her and her humanity slowly disappeared."

Jen shivered. She looked up at his somber face and rose, avoiding looking at Serena's body. "You would have sacrificed yourself for me?"

"Yes. It was the only way to protect you. Saving you meant more to me than my own life." He swallowed hard and took her by the shoulders, bringing her close to him. "Tell me there's a chance between us. Please tell me you're not walking away from me."

Could she walk away from a man who was willing to risk everything for her? Could she ignore the fact that from the moment she'd met him, she'd never been the same? That she was as fascinated and bound to him as he was to her? No. She looked up at him, and her heart melted at the expression of love on his handsome face. "I won't walk away from you, Lucas."

He sucked in a harsh breath. "Does that mean you can find it in your heart to love me?"

Her heart instantly cried yes. "I don't think that's going to be a problem."

He lifted her face to meet his and bent his head, possessively claiming her mouth. When he lifted his head she was breathless. The two policemen growled their appreciation.

Lucas looked at the older cop. "Do you need us to stick around?"

"No. We'll take care of the paper trail and call it in as a robbery."

Lucas nodded solemnly. "You know where to

reach me if you need me.” He took Jen’s hand. “I’m taking you home.”

Home. Her home was with him now, and she could face the future bravely with him by her side.

A word about the author...

Fascinated by the paranormal genre, Anastasia Maltezos loves to create stories with Vampires, Werewolves, and Witches where love is the biggest power of all.

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