



Only a vampire is man enough
to teach werewolves how to fight

The Omegas

Annie Nicholas

The Vanguard: Book One



Back Cover Copy

Only a vampire is man enough to teach werewolves how to fight.

Pretty librarian Sugar wants her life to stay quiet. That's hard enough when friends and neighbors turn into furry werewolves every full moon. But when a hot vampire gets involved, life's bound to get complicated.

The Omegas have always been the pansies of the paranormal. Now Chicago's top werewolf pack has issued them a life or death challenge. Their only option: hire a vampire warrior to teach them the moves.

Daedalus has been a powerful vampire for ages. Intrigued by the chance to train the geeks of the underworld, he wasn't bargaining on losing his heart to a human. Can he make the Omegas a success, fit into Sugar's quiet life, and avoid being ripped to shreds in the process?

Highlight

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by

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Dedication

I'd like to dedicate this book to my family who stuck by me through sickness and health.

Acknowledgements

To my fellow writers at Rom-Critters and Romantic at Heart for teaching me all I know.

Chapter 1

“I found the solution to our problem!” Eric strode into Sugar’s living room holding an envelope. He handed it to her and joined the rest of his werewolf pack lounging on her mismatched furniture.

Sugar examined the front, then the back of it. “Pal Robi Incorporated. What’s this?”

“It’s our salvation.” Eric shifted in his seat to lean forward. “Read it to everyone.”

She slid her fingernail in a corner, tearing it open. The letter was printed on good quality paper with a huge golden company emblem stamped at the top. An errant blond curl slid in front of her eyes, she shoved it back behind her ear.

To the Omega pack:

I have reviewed the details of your plight. Pal Robi Incorporated deals mostly in security issues, but I find your problem worthy of my personal attention. Enclosed you will find a non-negotiable contract. Please review it closely, and have your signature notarized. The return fax number is listed on the contract so proceedings can begin. Mail the original to my office. Thank you for your business.

Sincerely,

Daedalus Pal Robi

As Sugar scanned the contract a cold surge of intuition clenched her stomach. Shocked confusion exploded inside her mind, robbing her of any coherent thought. “You hired a vampire?” Her shout shattered the silence around them.

The pack responded to her outburst with low growls directed at Eric.

On days like this she wondered what she’d gotten herself tangled in. She wasn’t pack, just a plain vanilla human. The Omegas were her neighbors. They were also her best friends.

Every full moon they became werewolves, each of them outcasts from their old packs. Driven by loneliness, Eric had solicited Sugar to help him search for others like himself. Werewolves with no attitude. Geeks of the underworld. Pansies of the paranormal.

Their friendship spanned years, since high school, when he’d rescued her from a home of drug abuse. Eric had treated her like a little sister, advising her on life in general. When he survived his werewolf attack, both their worlds shattered and their roles reversed.

Eric found four others to join him: Sam, Tyler, Katrina and Robert. No alphas ruled in this pack. They needed each other, so they became a family. All five lived in the apartment next to her.

Eyes wide, Eric held his hands out in front of him. “Mr. Pal Robi is offering to teach us how to fight.”

Sugar tilted her head as she surveyed her friend. “Yeah, for a substantial fee. How can you guys afford this?” He always thought with his heart.

Eric looked at his pack, pleading. “Before you make any judgments, let’s have Sugar read the contract out loud.”

She held it in front of her.

This is an agreement between Pal Robi Incorporated and Eric, Sam, Katrina, Tyler, and Robert, from here forward to be known as the Omegas.

Scope:

- 1. Pal Robi Inc. will provide to the Omegas, training in defense, hand-to-hand combat and small weapons use.*
- 2. Training will take place for the duration of the period beginning with the trainer’s arrival until the challenge date.*
- 3. Combat training is inherently dangerous. Pal Robi Inc. is not responsible for injury or death sustained during such training.*
- 4. Trainer will not intentionally hurt and-or kill any Omega during the period of this agreement.*

Responsibilities of the Omegas:

- 1. Omegas will provide trainer from Pal Robi with appropriate lodgings.*
- 2. Omegas will provide daylight security of said trainer.*
- 3. Omegas will submit to the direction of the trainer without question for the duration of the training.*

Fees:

1. Omegas agree to pay Pal Robi Inc. \$8,000 in cash prior to the beginning of training.

2. In addition, Omegas will provide the trainer with fresh, consumable blood upon request.

Penalties:

1. Failure to provide payment renders this agreement null and void.

2. Failure to abide by the terms specified represents a breach of contract which renders the agreement null and void.

3. Breach of contract will result in an immediate investigation. Vengeance will be swift and unmerciful.

Sugar placed the contract on her lap while waiting for their reactions.

Robert held up his hand to speak, like a kid in a classroom.

She sighed. How could this pack of puppies fight a pack of wolves? “Robert, speak up. You don’t need to ask permission to talk anymore, remember?”

He grinned sheepishly. “What do they mean ‘vengeance will be swift and unmerciful?’”

They turned to Eric, but it was Tyler who answered. “It means if anything happens to the vamp, we can kiss our asses goodbye.”

Eric stood to face his pack mates, staring at each one in turn. “How can we not hire him? The Ayumu pack officially challenged us. One of us has to fight and beat one of their alphas in a month. There’s no other way.”

“We be absorbed again,” Katrina whispered in her exotic oriental accent, as she hugged her knees tight against her chest. Being a submissive female in a pack equated to being anyone’s meat. Sugar tried to help Katrina open up and come to terms with those old wounds, but they kept her captive, stuck in this phase for life.

Tyler shuffled closer to Katrina, petting her long, black, silken tresses. She shrank from him, fear etched on her delicate features.

He looked at Sugar and shrugged. It made her furious to watch Katrina cringe. Nothing would make her happier than to get some kind of revenge on the pack mates that did this to her dainty friend. How did preying on weaker members equate to strength? She just couldn’t understand werewolves.

“Couldn’t you run away?” The weight of Sugar’s words hung in the air.

Eric crossed his arms. “There will always be another Ayumu pack wherever we go. We’re finally happy. We have jobs, friends, and a home. It’s all worth fighting for, right guys?”

Sugar looked around her disorganized living room at her stray werewolf friends. They nodded to each other, sealing their fates.

There went her quiet life.

A vampire would be moving in next door.

* * * *

Two nights later Sugar heard struggling outside her apartment door. The book in her hand didn't grab her attention like the racket in the hall did. Standing, she left the book behind and tiptoed to the door. She cracked it open to peek outside. Eric, Tyler and Robert were carrying a large, black, shiny coffin past her apartment.

Sugar sighed and rubbed her chin. She'd like to hide in here for a month, not wanting to meet the trainer. It was silly to worry about this stranger, but he meant change.

Vampires had announced their existence years ago, becoming legal citizens. This one apparently ran his own business, which would help her friends. It wasn't like he'd be something from the horror movies that had kept her awake with nightmares when she was a kid. She squared her shoulders. Time she faced her own demons and met this new neighbor.

She padded down the carpeted hall barefoot, to where the boys were trying to wedge the coffin through their doorway.

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"You're not wolf." He loomed over her. A black tattoo on his well-developed chest peeked out from underneath his partially unbuttoned white dress shirt.

Eric tapped her chin with his finger, silently instructing her to close her mouth. "Sugar is our neighbor." He gestured to the rakish vampire. "This is Mr. Pal Robi."

Heat crept up her cheeks. She stuck out her hand. "Nice to meet you."

His hand engulfed hers while he shook it tenderly. "Is that your real name?" He didn't release his hold.

She dropped her chin. A thrill ran through her. “My parents have a poor sense of humor. I have a twin named Spice.”

Amusement creased the skin around his eyes. “Sugar and spice, and everything nice.”

The poem annoyed her more every time someone quoted it. “Yes, I’ve heard the rest. I’m not a little girl anymore.” She withdrew her hand from his. Maybe the phenomenal packaging was only skin deep.

A carnal light sparked in his eyes. “Definitely not a little girl. You may call me Daedalus.” His gaze traced her face and slipped lower, caressing the curves of her breasts, then down along her hips.

Sugar gasped as this alarming man studied her. She could almost hear the Omegas leering at her response to Daedalus. “I’ll get out of your way.”

He didn’t move as she pressed herself against the wall to squeeze by him. The tips of her breasts brushed his well-muscled arm. They pebbled, pushing through her blouse. Naughty images of him running those large palms over her nipples played in her mind.

Her panties got damp as a flash of desire burned through her. She realized he’d wanted her to brush against him. He was such a cad, and it made her want him even more.

* * * *

Daedalus watched her heart-shaped ass wiggle back down the hall. She was ravishing. He would never mix business with pleasure, but she didn’t belong to the pack. Just a neighbor and a bonus.

She reminded him of the 1950’s pin-up poster girls, pretty and full of luscious curves. He still kept those posters in storage.

Sugar. His thoughts sprang to the hard caramelized shell on crème brulee. He would like to ignite her sweetness into a passionate inferno.

Daedalus had felt her response to him as she brushed his arm. The flush of color in her face pleased him. He wanted her to turn and look his way one more time before she entered her home.

The Omegas began wrestling with his coffin again. “Can we call you Daedalus?” one of them piped up.

Sugar glanced back at him.

“No.” He gave her a shameless wink.

Chapter 2

Sugar walked to the Omegas' apartment. Quiet dominated their corner of the building since Mr. Pal Robi's arrival last week. She'd seen them when she went out on her garden balcony to water the plants last night. They jogged with their vampire trainer on the sidewalk. He ran, and they straggled behind. Other than that she hadn't seen any of them. No one came over to visit. Not even Katrina, who had become a permanent fixture in her home.

She stood in front of their door and wiped her sweaty palms on her old, worn jeans. *Maybe I should have changed.*

The thought irritated her. She'd never worried about her looks before he moved in. She'd never lusted after a man like this either. Her past lovers always started as emotional relationships, then grew into something physical. What she experienced with Daedalus seemed more animalistic. If she fucked him and got it over with, then maybe her mind would clear. The memory of his sexy half-smile with a wink haunted her every night. Those blue eyes, broad shoulders, firm body, bald head—

The apartment door swung open, and the demon of her fantasies stood staring at her, shirtless. A thin sheen of sweat covered his pale skin as if he'd been doing some vigorous exercises. It made him shine. The circular tattoo she'd glimpsed through his shirt on their first meeting covered his heart, a black snake eating its tail.

He gave her a crooked smile, melting her to the spot. "Hello, sweetness. I got tired of waiting for you to knock." He stepped back and gestured for her to come in.

As she entered the Omegas' apartment she noticed the place looked cleaner than usual. Five wolves under one roof could make quite a clutter. Daedalus must have them run a tighter ship.

"How did you know I was out in the hall?" A little shaken after his sudden appearance, her concentration slipped and she couldn't remember her reason for being there. His being half-naked didn't help.

"I have a good sense of smell." He closed the door behind her.

"You smelled me? Good to know for future reference."

Fingers ran through her curls as she walked past him. She glanced over her shoulder, but his back faced her while he locked the door. It must have been her imagination. The touch felt real though. Did he move that fast?

He finished with the locks and turned around. "I heard you walk down the hall too. Why were you waiting?"

She didn't know, looking for some courage maybe or a little self-confidence with an internal pep talk. "I was thinking about going back for a book Sam wanted to borrow," she lied. Something unsettling occurred to her. "Can you read minds too?"

He chuckled and leaned in close, his nose almost touching hers. "Possibly. Are you thinking dirty thoughts?"

"No!" Her cheeks burned.

"Then I guess I can't."

Did that mean he was thinking them?

He brushed past her to sit on the worn, beige couch. His touch sent a thrill through her, it unnerved her too. He tapped the cushion next to him.

Out of her element around him and his flirtatious ways, she sat in the armchair across from the couch. His request to sit next to him ignored since she couldn't trust herself to not jump on his lap. Her lack of self-control surprised her. She allowed her eyes to roam his handsome face to his bare chest, each time she jerked them back up to meet his stare, they'd meander back down to those well-defined muscles.

An unfamiliar quiet filled the living room, where laughter and banter normally flooded the space. "Is anyone else home?"

"No." He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. The heat in his gaze grew as he made his interest in her clearer. "We have the place to ourselves. What did you have in mind?"

Not sure what to do with the invitation, she blushed even more as the room became warmer. What she had in mind was to tear her clothes off and let him have his way with her, but the Omegas could walk in at any moment. "Where did they go?" she croaked, her mouth and throat gone dry.

His smile widened as the burning heat in his eyes turned into amusement. "I've sent them on a mission." He snickered to himself. "See..." He gestured around the room. "They don't have a television, and I *really* need to watch football this weekend. I have a division of Pal Robi Security housed not far from here, so I've sent them to steal theirs."

She raised her eyebrows, her anxiety and insecurity combusted in her fury. "You want them to steal for you?" The nerve this vampire displayed, to turn her kind-hearted friends into thieves. It made her blood boil. A mission indeed. She knew hiring him would be a mistake.

He leaned against the couch, his arms along the back. "Is taking stuff from yourself stealing? Technically, I own the television."

She stood up, hands on her hips. "Will your security see it that way?"

"No."

She stepped closer to him. "They'll hurt them, Daedalus. This isn't a joke. Your contract stated they wouldn't get injured."

He stood up, and up, to overshadow her. She felt small and fragile next to him.

The sexy smile faded. "Don't quote my contract to me. A little ass kicking is part of the training. They're werewolves, Sugar, not human. My security can't damage them too much. They can take more of a beating than you think, or for that matter, than they think. If the Omegas don't stop fearing pain they may as well concede the challenge to the Ayumu pack."

"Is that so bad?"

He raised an eyebrow.

“Instead of fighting? I don’t want any of them to get hurt. If they can’t win, they should concede or run away.”

“Who said they can’t win?”

His question slapped her across the face. “Win? Eric and Robert are computer programmers. Katrina’s a waitress in Chinatown, Tyler’s a real estate agent, and Sam delivers pizza. Not exactly warrior material.”

“The problem is you see them in only a human perspective. They went against pack instinct to follow their alphas, for whatever reason, and banded together. Do you have any idea how difficult that is or how unique they are? It takes strength of character. They’ll win with some guidance.”

“What kind of guarantee can you offer them?”

He shook his head. “None.”

“They agreed to this?”

“They didn’t have a choice, sweetness.” His voice became tender as he pushed her hair behind an ear. “I understand you care for them, but coddling them won’t help defend their freedom. Do you want them to become the scapegoats of the Ayumu? Where the pack could take their frustrations out on them?”

She shrugged his hand away and looked at her feet. “Of course not.” In her book, violence only begot violence. Nothing she did or said would keep the Omegas safe. She hated to admit it, but maybe Daedalus could save them.

His sigh caught her attention, and she brought her head up. He’d sat on the couch again, his arms crossed over his bare chest while he watched her.

She sat on the edge of the armchair, determined not to apologize for her beliefs. “Does it need to be a fight to the death? There has got to be some other way for packs to resolve things.”

His expression did not soften with her heartfelt words. “There used to be. The werewolf packs have diminished over the centuries due to infighting and territory wars. Many of the young were left untrained in the ways of honor. After corresponding with Eric, it became clear pack issues are getting worse, with slavery and crime being among them. The Omegas are damaged goods but young and good hearted. It’s a sad time when a vampire needs to teach werewolves how to be ‘pack.’ I’ll do my best to instruct them.”

“In the ‘ways of honor?’”

He chuckled. “No, they’re not ready.” He grinned and leaned toward her. “Did I pass my interview?”

She couldn’t help but laugh. “Yes. I didn’t come here to grill you though. I wanted to invite them to dinner tomorrow.”

“Their schedule is pretty full. I’ll pass the message on.” He arched a brow. “What about me?”

“Huh?”

“Am I invited?”

“Oh, of course. I didn’t know you could eat.”

“I can’t, but I’d like the company.”

“Sure, you’re welcome to come over.” What was she doing? She did her best to keep herself isolated, to keep her life quiet and stress free. This struggle became harder when she’d adopted her werewolf neighbors as friends. Now she found herself lusting after a kickass vampire. Had she lost her mind?

She rose to her feet. “I should go.” On the way to the door she could sense his presence close behind her.

The visit went better than she’d expected. Not an Omega to be seen, but her conversation with Daedalus cleared a few of her concerns. She didn’t think Daedalus would lead them astray.

It wasn’t every day she got to spend time conversing with a half-naked, sexy vampire. Maybe she could be friends with him, hopefully more. Why did he have this effect on her? There were a lot of good looking men in the world, but she didn’t lust after *them* like a cat in heat.

He undid the locks and opened the door for her.

Something he’d said about the werewolf packs nagged at her. She looked back at him and tried not to get caught up into his dark blue eyes. “When you spoke of the werewolf packs’ changes over the centuries, it sounded like you experienced it yourself. You’re very old, aren’t you?”

He barked a surprised laugh. “What a horrid thing to say.”

“I didn’t mean... I meant... I’m sorry.” She touched his shoulder, then jerked her hand away. A thrill electrified her fingers where they’d touched his skin.

He continued to smile and took her hand. “I would have said ‘experienced.’” He pressed his full, lush lips to the back of it, his stare never leaving hers. The kiss felt warm and moist. The gesture sent tingles straight to her pussy, making her wet.

She bit her bottom lip to prevent a moan from escaping. The sensation of his mouth against her skin lingered on her all the way back to her apartment.

What should she do? He represented all the things she feared—adventure, violence and passion. After his kiss, she expected it to be hot, dirty, really great passion. He could easily seduce her, and although excited at the prospect, she worried that he’d steal her heart. She needed to lock it away to avoid attachment. Falling in love with an immortal being would only lead to sorrow.

She needed to keep this as a fun little fling.

* * * *

Daedalus closed the door, her taste still on his lips. He’d been pleased when he’d first smelled her scent as she stood in the hallway and debated with herself about knocking on his door. Fear and anxiety intertwined in her luscious smell, but so did desire.

Her loyalty to her friends drew him to her even more. He admired such qualities. He also admired the curves of her breasts and the way her worn jeans fit snug to her nice ass.

He needed to stop thinking with his cock when he was around her. At first, he'd thought a late night tryst would be possible, but clearly her relationship with the Omegas involved more than being just a neighbor. When she jumped up in anger at his description of tonight's mission, and the vehemence flashed from her eyes, it took all his restraint to not kiss her. Their simmering attraction could be fanned into an inferno.

He needed to cool off. She represented all the things tender and gentle he lacked in his existence. Since she'd left a hollowness filled his chest. Not a good sign, it meant he'd probably fall hard for her. None of the boys had claimed Sugar when he'd made a pass at her a week ago, and werewolves were pretty territorial when it came to mates. But these boys didn't act like traditional Weres. He'd better clear things up when they got back from their mission.

He needed to determine if he should have her before the challenge or after.

Chapter 3

Daedalus knocked once on Sugar's apartment door, and the angel of his fantasies swung it open. The messy chaos of her curls made a halo around her face and would have taken his breath away if he had any. Her gaze slid past him as if checking for someone else, and her wide smile wavered when she saw he was alone. Clearly, she expected the Omegas, and a sharp pang of jealousy surprised him. He wanted to change her disappointed look, make it something more wanton.

"I know I promised they'd be over for dinner tonight, but they're still out running, Sugar. They'll have to come over tomorrow night."

She turned to look out the French doors that led to her patio garden. Rain beat down on the flowers and the wind tore at their leaves. "It's storming."

He raised an eyebrow at her comment, unable to see the problem. The storm front didn't carry any lightning. A bit of cold rain and wind would break the monotony of the Omegas' routine.

Yesterday's raid to steal a television had become a farce. He had found the small pack hogtied on the apartment building's doorstep very late last night. Good thing the other tenants in the building had been asleep. His security team had gone easy on the werewolves in his view. If running in a storm got Sugar upset, he'd best keep this hilarious story to himself. He couldn't remember the last time he'd laughed so hard.

Tyler and Robert had yet to speak to him since the incident. Katrina never did talk to him much. Eric and Sam showed promise though. They were "manning-up" to the situation and laughed with him.

Sauntering in, he pushed past Sugar to examine the small apartment. The smells of dinner warmed the tidy little kitchen to the right. Books lay scattered and stacked on every available surface in the living room on his left. Layers of thick rugs covered the floors under a collection of comfortable, mismatched love seats. They faced the French doors overlooking her green garden retreat, setting the mood for tranquility. She didn't decorate by style but by texture.

He loved it.

Except something was missing. He sighed and shook his head. "You don't have a television either. Guess I won't be watching the football game tonight." His frustration tied a knot in his gut. First, his lack of assessing the Omegas' situation better, then Sugar's tempting presence, and now he couldn't take pleasure in his one hobby.

She giggled.

The quiet, melodious sound made him smirk and shake his head. He twisted to glare at her. Not for laughing but for being so damn adorable. They had the apartment to themselves, the cubs were out chasing raindrops, and he'd run out of things to distract him from his lustful thoughts. It looked like he would surrender to her charms sooner than later.

She'd clapped her hands over her rosebud mouth. The gesture made her tight pink blouse rise enough to reveal a peek of creamy, soft flesh. The buttons strained between her firm, full breasts. He wanted to rip the top open and let those buttons fly.

"I guess they didn't succeed in getting the television," she mumbled behind her hands before letting them fall to her sides, lowering her shirt. "There's a sports bar down the street, you can catch the game there."

"I don't like sport bars." He could imagine the trouble his presence would cause at such a place. Their business came from selling food and drink. What could he possibly purchase to watch the game? A waitress? Vampires were legal citizens, yet still not well liked.

Sugar shifted back a few steps, stifling another nervous laugh.

If he focused his hearing, he could hear her heart race. She smelled of lavender and cinnamon. A tinge of fear tainted her scent. He didn't want her to be afraid. "Do I frighten you?"

"Frighten?" She stopped her backward motion. "No, not really, more like intimidate." She gave him a shy smile, but the way her eyes traveled over his body spoke of unashamed interest.

His cock grew thick at her heated gaze. "Intimidate I can accept. That's my job." He grinned and advanced on his tempting prey. "You have nothing to fear though. I don't bite, not unless you want me to." The delightful way her eyes widened at his comment undid him.

* * * *

Sugar retreated further until she bumped against the cool metal of her fridge. She'd been disappointed to find only Daedalus at her door but didn't regret his presence one bit now. His tight, black t-shirt outlined every hard, scrumptious detail of his chest. Lust awakened. An urge to splay her hands on his delicious body, kneading those hard muscles, gripped her.

With each sinuous step he closed in on her until she found herself cornered. His body inspired all kinds of naughty ideas. She'd love to pour massage oil on his smooth head and let it drip down his naked body, so she could rub it all over him.

"I've been thinking about you." His husky voice brushed along her skin. Caged between his arms against the fridge, she felt trapped. Her heart raced with expectation, and she tried to moisten her suddenly dry lips by pressing them together.

He leaned in until his face almost touched hers. Yearning replaced his mischievous grin. His eyes feasted on her as they traced along her face to focus on her mouth.

"You have?" She wanted to drown in his half-lidded gaze.

"Haven't you thought of me, Sugar?"

The way he spoke her name, like it tasted good, sent a thrill down her spine. Every single night he invaded her thoughts, starring in all her fantasies, but she couldn't admit that to him. Even though he'd openly admired her, the desire he now displayed amazed her. She was a librarian, not some porn star, though his actions made her feel like one. "You've been on my mind once or twice."

Almost touching her, he denied her a kiss. Their lips were close enough for her to sense their movement when he spoke. "What will I do to entertain myself while your friends are gone?"

The wait for his embrace made her burn with feral passion. It grew too much. She laid a gentle kiss on his mouth in sweet surrender. A bare touch.

"I could think of a few things." Who was this bold woman using her voice? Her curiosity for him made her brave enough to lose all her discretion.

His eyes widened, amusement crinkling their edges. His tongue traced his lips where she kissed him, like he could taste her.

Mesmerized, she watched, tingles rippling along her own mouth as if he licked her lips instead. Anticipation fluttered in her stomach.

"So can I." Avid desire still shone in his eyes when he glanced down at her. His responding kiss crushed her to the fridge as he cupped her ass to lift her from the floor.

Her arms entwined around his strong neck, and her legs circled his narrow hips. All the strength of his body wrapped in her limbs made her wetter. Such savage hunger for a man was a new experience. She wanted him to ride her hard and make her scream for mercy.

Daedalus pressed against her. Even with their jeans between them, she could feel his length, hard and firm, bulging against his zipper.

His kiss became an easy, practiced slide of his mouth against hers, gently demanding. She expected skill but not the ravenous appetite he displayed. His tongue toyed with her bottom lip, then entered her mouth in a slow, sinuous stroke. He tasted of something faintly metallic, like blood.

Her stomach knotted at the slight taint, but it dissolved when his hand cupped her breast, found her hard, throbbing nipple and rolled it between his fingers. She wriggled beneath his touch, grinding herself against his hard cock.

He moaned and pulled away. "Damn, you're driving me crazy."

She reached up for another taste, craving him.

A sinful smile tugged his mouth. He undid the buttons of her blouse one at a time until he exposed her thin, white lace bra.

She bit at her bottom lip as she watched. Her head spun with need. She wanted Daedalus badly. There had been enough fantasizing about him, now it would come true. Finally.

He slipped the bra strap from her shoulder to allow one of her nipples to escape its confines, and boosted her to give his mouth access to it. The pleasure he produced, as he sucked, shot straight to her clit.

She wriggled and couldn't control the small noises of pleasure she made. The heat of his mouth and the touch of his tongue drove her wild. "Ah... Yes." She raged with fever, and he was the cure.

Daedalus rained kisses along her exposed neck while lowering her to rest against his hips again. She couldn't stop her gasp when he nipped and tasted her flesh. Those sharp fangs teased but never broke skin. She felt his lips smile at her reaction. He pinched the hard nipple under his hand and ground the growing bulge in his jeans against her groin.

Short of breath, she clung to him. "Stop teasing me." Her pussy steadily grew creamier with each grinding thrust.

His laughter rumbled deep within his chest. Demanding her mouth, he pressed his tongue inside, probing and greedy, leaving nothing unexplored. He released her breast to undo her jeans and yank them low enough to give him access. His other hand supported her weight against the fridge while he slid his fingers in her panties. They brushed between her outer labia. An enticing stroke along sensitive flesh.

She gripped his t-shirt when he plunged inside her. Pinned between his hard body and the fridge, with his fingers deep inside, she didn't have much room to move.

He pressed his thumb to her clit, making circular motions, steadily pumping his fingers inside of her. His tongue traced along her ear. "You're very wet."

Grasping his shoulders, she groaned and tried to rock her hips to his rhythm. She'd forgotten how good a man's touch could be. Pleasure throbbed and built. "Please, Daedalus...please." The pressure released in an explosion of sinful delight, sending cascades of ecstasy through to her core.

She writhed under his hand and bucked against the fridge, trapped while this passion rode her, sending thrills of bliss down her limbs. Her legs clenched him closer, her sex grinding on his fingers. The pleasure seemed to know no end.

A sigh escaped her as the passion released her from its grip. She rested her head back against the cool fridge. Sweat trickled down her neck and between her breasts. Her blouse stuck to her skin and her curls to her face. Satiated, she closed her eyes to rest. Daedalus had other ideas.

Still thunder-struck, she didn't understand when Daedalus whirled her to stand in front of the kitchen island, until he yanked her jeans and panties to her ankles.

He didn't pull off his own jeans but tugged them down enough to expose his long, thick cock. "It's my turn." His voice, rough with heat, brushed her ear as he spun her to face the island.

His cock slid against her ass. The angle was all wrong, so he lifted her to lay face down across the counter, then grasped her hips.

He ran his hard length along her ripe opening. It nudged her, proceeding achingly slow as he stroked himself into her. The agonizing stretch of her sex caused some discomfort, almost to the point of pain. He continued his gentle entry until he was sheathed deep inside of her.

He stayed there, running his hands over her ass while spasms of tenderness and excitement surged through her, squeezing around him.

“Sugar... You’re so tight.” Hands trembling, he pumped slow deliberate strokes, each one accompanied by a small groan.

She struggled for breath, panting as his rhythm grew rougher.

He pounded, pressed, and plunged deep inside of her. Hot and hard, faster and faster, stoking the fire growing in her core.

The pleasure made her back arch, tightening her muscles around him, feeling every thick inch. His noises grew louder and wilder as he thrust himself in. And in. And in.

The orgasm coursed through her, suddenly loosed by his merciless onslaught. She bucked once more to the ecstasy while he held on and rode her. Mindless in its power, she cried out, unable to stop.

He joined her in duet and cried out, rejoicing in his conquest when he spilled himself into her yielding sex.

* * * *

They tumbled to the floor in a tangle of limbs. Daedalus rolled onto his back, off Sugar, still panting from the astounding sex. He scooped her up to cuddle against his chest. She fit perfectly in his arms, as if she’d always belonged there.

The smell of lavender drifted from her silken, wavy blond hair as she murmured quiet, satisfied noises.

He grinned and couldn’t help feeling smug. That response rocked him, he’d expected something meeker from her. The passion she unleashed on him! He loved being surprised. After such a long existence, not many things astonished him anymore. More than a sweet temptation, this small, gentle neighbor symbolized a tornado of spun sugar. Now that he’d tasted it, he hungered for more. He was addicted.

To think he’d only been looking for a television tonight. He heaved up onto an elbow. “Let’s go to the bedroom.”

Looking up at him, her eyes widened. “More?”

He kissed the tip of her nose. “Of course.” He pulled up his pants, then helped her stand. Her knees buckled when she got to her feet. His smug grin returned as he carried her to the bedroom.

The thumps of feet entering the building caught his attention. He sighed in disappointment. The Omegas were back. He’d hoped to get through one more round before they returned. No football and now no more sex.

Their progress should have pleased him. They’d cut their running time significantly. The rain helped, as he’d guessed.

He laid Sugar down on the blankets, taking in her honest, open face. She wanted him, he could smell it. Too bad their time for tonight was up.

He pushed a lock of hair from her face. “Your friends are back. They’ll be hungry. Do you still want them to come over?”

Eyes wide she looked down at her half-naked body, panic clearly on her face.

He placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. “They’ll be soaked from the storm and will have to dry off first. When they’re done, I’ll send them over.” He chuckled. “You have time to clean up, and they can have the rest of the night off.”

“What about you? I want you to stay.”

Those five words made him happier than they should have. He would have loved to jump in her warm bed and make love all night, but he’d put something off for far too long. She cared for the Omegas. If they were to survive he needed to get this done.

“Another night. I have to go meet someone.” He kissed her, savoring her warmth, then left before the Omegas made their way up the three flights of stairs.

While they ate, he planned on checking out the alpha of the Ayumu pack. Damn, he hated rain.

Chapter 4

Sugar struggled through the door with a bag of groceries, surprised to find the Omegas in her living room, flipping through her books. A flood of joy poured over her and proved how much she missed them. Without the Omegas, she felt alone.

She took a breath to settle her startled nerves and closed the door. Once in the apartment, she noted there were only three of them: Tyler, Katrina and Robert. She stomped on the small spike of disappointment when she didn't spot her vampire stud among them. They hadn't hired him to entertain her, after all.

Boxes of Chinese take-out sat on the kitchen island. Every time she looked at the island a thrill ran through her. No one had ever taken her with such raw desire. Daedalus was a skilled and scrumptious beast.

The time she'd spent with him had made her feel so alive and sexy. A small part of her wished it hadn't happened, because now she thought of nothing else. Men like him didn't want relationships, and she could accept that, but a break-the-box-springs, bring-the-ceiling-down affair would be a splendid change in her life.

A week had passed—who was she kidding, ten days and thirteen hours—since their fun in the kitchen. His strong body and careful restraint made her feel secure. He could have easily broken her, instead he'd ignited her. Her poor, abused fridge sat tilted to the left, it would never be the same. Since their glorious evening, time sped and left them only passing kisses to tease her awakened libido. Her frustration mounted.

"No training tonight?" Her voice sounded too high.

Tyler grinned ear to ear and spun his chopsticks to point at their group. "No training for us anymore."

Katrina sat close to him, looking more at ease with herself than Sugar could remember. What a mismatched couple. Katrina's somber, beautiful oriental features countered his crazy red curls and goofy antics.

"What happened?" Sugar held up her hand. "Wait. Where are Eric and Sam?"

Robert towered over her as he took the grocery bag and started putting things away. "Eric is the answer to your first question."

She blinked. "What?"

Robert continued from behind the fridge door, "The night of the big storm, your *boyfriend* went and checked out the alpha of the Ayumu pack. I don't think he was happy with what he saw. Since then he's mainly been training Eric."

The reference to Daedalus as her boyfriend caused heat to rise in her face. She turned to Tyler. "You've been out training all week with them, though."

He twirled his chopsticks around his ear. "Something about keeping us as back-up in case Eric wimps out, but I'm not worried, he's doing great. Turning into a werewolf ninja. We're off the hook now."

"And Sam?"

Robert finished with the groceries and ran his hand through his short, scruffy, brown hair. "Back at our place moping. He wants to be the one to fight. Did you know your fridge is listing to the left?" He bent down to adjust a wheel under the fridge.

Katrina fluidly rose from the floor and fixed Sugar a plate of take-out.

"Why does Sam want to fight? Could he win?" Sugar accepted the plate Katrina offered. "Thank you."

Robert stood. "*Mr. Pal Robi* doesn't think so, and he's the expert."

Katrina touched Sugar's arm. "Sam want protect Eric." Her exotic, heavy accent played with her words. She lifted a box from behind the take-out. "Let play Scrabble."

Eric would fight for the Omegas. Sugar smiled to herself, imagining a ninja werewolf taking on all the wrongs of the world. He'd always wanted to be a superhero. She hoped it didn't get him killed.

The idea of Sam fuming by himself didn't sit well with her. "Set up the board, I'll get Sam." She walked down the hall to their apartment and knocked on the door.

This meant the others could get on with life. Robert and Eric worked out of their apartment on whatever computer project the company gave them, the others took time off, and Sam lost his job.

No one answered the door, so she knocked again. "Sam, it's Sugar. I know you're in there, open up."

The door cracked open and Sam peeked out with his pale gray, red-rimmed eyes.

"We're going to play Scrabble. Tyler has the dictionary memorized, and I need you to help me beat him." She smiled, but he stepped back.

"I'm not in the mood."

"Sam, what's wrong?" The sound of heavy footsteps echoed up the stair well. She could hear Daedalus chuckle at something Eric said.

"Ask Mr. Pal Robi." He closed the door in her face.

Hands on hips, she swiveled on her lover and best friend as they arrived in the hall.

"Oh, oh." Eric turned around.

"Stay where you are, ninja wolf. The three of us need to have words."

"Words?" Daedalus glanced at Eric behind him. "Is that a modern way to say ménage?"

Sugar approached him and slapped his hard abs with the back of her hand. She thought it probably hurt her more than him.

His eyes flared. "Hey."

"Words, means she's pissed." Eric peered over Daedalus's shoulder.

"If Sam still wants to train he should be allowed to."

“This is why you’re angry? They don’t all have to fight, just one. *I* need to be able to focus on Eric, and *you* need to mind your own business.”

A flash of red blinded her for a moment. She ground her teeth and attempted to form a coherent response. “My business?”

Daedalus stepped back as she came forward with her finger pointed in his face.

“You demon loving, zombie breeder. They signed a contract and paid for training. Sam lost his job because they only wanted him to work nights. The others are happy to be off the hook, but Sam still wants in. You need to keep your end of the deal.” His dark blue eyes bored into hers, and she remembered who she was confronting—a very strong and deadly vampire. She swallowed, then retreated a step.

“Eric, get your sparring partner.”

He grinned while he brushed past Sugar and went to his apartment to get Sam. As soon as the door closed, Daedalus picked her up and pressed her to the wall. His mouth found hers in a savage kiss.

She shoved at his shoulders, but she may as well have tried to push a mountain. One of his hands found her breast and pinched her nipple until it pebbled at the attention.

Her struggles didn’t last long before she surrendered to him and rubbed her hands along his smooth scalp. All her anger evaporated, its heat turned to passion.

He kissed along her jaw until his fangs rested on her jugular, firm enough to prick.

Her heart raced, and her blood went cold with terror. Trapped in his arms, she fought to get away. A scream built in her throat, but before it came out he let her go.

“I didn’t mean to scare you. I thought you wouldn’t mind.”

She steadied herself with a hand on the wall. “You thought wrong. I never considered letting you feed off me. It surprised me.”

“Next time I’ll ask first.”

“Yes, please do.” She went up on tiptoe and kissed his cheek to take the sting out of her reaction. A door opened and closed behind her.

Eric and Sam walked down the hall. Daedalus nodded at them and went down the stairs followed by Sam. No words were exchanged.

Sugar rolled her eyes. Men.

Eric stopped beside her before descending. “You okay, sugarbear? You’re pale.”

“Yeah, fine.” He hadn’t called her that since high school.

“Looks like Daedalus is helping you grow a backbone too.” He leaned down and kissed her forehead. “He’s good for you.” Then he left to catch up to the others.

She returned to her apartment with new determination to beat Tyler at Scrabble.

* * * *

The next morning Sugar basked in the pale morning light among her cherished plants on the patio. She noticed Katrina peeking around the patio door. Sugar never locked her apartment since the Omegas moved in, one of the perks with having werewolves as neighbors.

She patted the space next to her on the bench while she twirled a single red rose under her nose.

Katrina sat by her and pointed to the flower. "Is it from Daedalus?"

Sugar smiled and continued admiring the Chicago skyline. The sweet scent of the rose filled her senses. "Yes, I found it by my pillow when I woke up. It came with this poem." She offered the handwritten note for Katrina to read.

Her soft giggle, a rare precious thing, shook their shared bench. "Is nice."

Sugar took the note. She folded it carefully and placed in her robe pocket. "Who knew he could rhyme?" Their laughter sweetened the morning air. What a romantic gesture. A fire-breathing dragon sleeping in her bed wouldn't have surprised her as much as Daedalus's tender gift. She wished he'd woken her up, though.

"Things serious between you?" Katrina's question broke her reverie.

"I would've said 'no' until I read the poem." Sugar sighed, leaned her chin on her hand, and stared back at Chicago. It seemed he might want a relationship after all. The poem said he thought of her through the nights when they were apart and couldn't wait to get back to her. Maybe she read too much in his words and he meant only the sex.

She turned to Katrina. "How can I be in a relationship with someone who can't grow old with me?"

Katrina blinked, then chuckled. "You asking wrong person. Tyler is the romantic."

"Speaking of twisted relationships, you snuggled up close to him last night while playing Scrabble. Are you his mate?"

Katrina lowered her gaze.

Sugar could almost see her friend physically shrinking back inside herself. She reached out to touch her knee. "You're my friend, Katrina. Whatever happened in the past is over. Don't build walls between yourself and those who care about you. Build them between yourself and the past."

Katrina let out a shaky breath. "I know. I lucky to have such good friends. It take time. Tyler will wait, he say." She looked back at Sugar with a fragile smile. "You take some of you own advice."

"What?"

"You need build wall to you past. Daedalus strong vampire, gentle heart." She tapped her chest with this proclamation.

"Gentle heart?"

"See?" She craned her neck around, then showed her wrists. "No bite me, never touch me or feed. He no ask me but somehow know my pain. Gentle heart. Is good man."

Sugar caressed the folded piece of paper in her pocket with new insight. A tough exterior and a soft heart. It didn't change the fact she was human and he a vampire.

Katrina touched her knee. "Daedalus good for you. I see change in you."

"What change?"

"You walk different."

"Well...he's kind of big, and I did get sore..."

"Eww! Not that!" Katrina giggled while slapping playfully at Sugar. "You walk more free."

Sugar lifted an eyebrow and tilted her head. She loved Katrina with all her heart, sometimes the language barrier made things difficult though.

Katrina sighed with frustration and got up. "I..." She pointed at herself. "Am you." She pointed at Sugar, then started walking around the patio, swinging her hips as she took great strides with her short legs.

Sugar's mouth dropped open. "I do *not* walk like Betty Boop." She laughed at Katrina. Tyler's sense of humor had rubbed off on her. Sugar would do anything to have things work out for them.

Laughing, Katrina came to sit by her again. They watched as the clouds floated by the city and the planes made trails marring the sky.

"I noticed a full moon two nights ago. Where did you and the boys go for the change?"

Katrina bounced on the bench. "Daedalus take us out to woods. No tame city park but far into the wild places." She said 'wild' with awe and wonder. "You know Nosferatu clan and werewolf share the hunt in old times?"

"No. What clan?"

"Daedalus's clan, Nosferatu. He is upset we know nothing of it. He angry the packs lose the way with old law. He teach us."

The pride in Katrina's voice surprised Sugar. She'd never heard it before. Daedalus must have inspired it. Her vampire warrior with the soft heart.

Chapter 5

The window stuck as he tried to slide it open. Silence was of the essence on his mission, so he couldn't force it with his strength. Footsteps echoed in the alley below, so he became one with the brick building as he hung upside down, held by fingertips and toes.

A human male strolled by while whistling *Dixie* under his breath. The man rummaged through the trash cans as if shopping at the market.

Silently, the monster on the wall banged his forehead against the brick. His sweet, juicy target slept on the other side of the glass. Close enough to smell.

Lavender mixed with clean cotton.

On any other night he would have had the patience to wait out the homeless man. Not tonight. He built a low growl in his chest and let it vibrate through the alley. The rattle of a lid crashing to the ground was the first response, the pitter-patter of running the second.

He grinned. Mission accomplished, it was about time. With a little applied pressure to the frame, the window opened enough to slip inside.

Sugar slept soundly, cocooned in her soft, thick blankets. Probably tired after an evening spent in laughter with her friends. Quiet snores escaped her blissful repose. Unaware of the shadow that slid into her room and stalked around her bed. Ignorant of the monster who wished to feed on her sweet, yielding body.

Delicious.

He removed his underwear, one of only two things he wore, and tossed it in a corner. With preternatural quiet he untucked the covers from the mattress. The blanket flowed off her in a smooth slow motion, lest she be woken too early. She laid spread across the white cotton sheets. An undersized, blue t-shirt barely covered her generous round bosom, her midriff exposed above a pair of white panties clinging to her hips.

A beautiful midnight snack.

* * * *

The bed quivered as someone crawled over her. Sugar woke, startled, and tried to sit up, but something heavy kept her pinned and held her hands to the bed. Her heart raced. She struggled against the solid mass and kicked out. A scream tore from her throat.

"Hey, sweet thing." A husky male voice cut through her terror.

"Daedalus?" Stunned, she stopped her tussle. "You scared me!" A mix of annoyance with anticipation swept away her adrenaline rush.

The weight of his delicious body pressed her to the bed. Her irritation dissolved when he gave her a moist, deep kiss while laughter rumbled in his chest. Still pinned, she kissed him back, eager for pleasure, and joined in with her giggles.

Their embrace grew longer and deeper, the laughter forgotten.

She explored his mouth, touching both delicate, sharp fangs with the tip of her tongue, careful not to prick herself. His lips were soft, such a contrast to the rest of him. This time he tasted of... mint.

He released her hands and tangled his fingers in her curls. He kissed her like he was drowning and could only find breath in her mouth. At that moment she would have let him devour her.

She ran her palms down his powerful, sturdy shoulders, along his bare, solid back, to his round, hard ass. The taut skin covering his well-defined muscles registered in her consciousness. She pulled from his kiss. "You're naked."

"And you're not." Amusement filled his voice. Sitting up, he straddled her hips, and efficiently tugged off her shirt. He wrapped his fingers around her panties, and with a quick snap of his wrist, tore them from her hips.

She gasped at the rough treatment but didn't care. Her attention was focused on Daedalus. The nightlight on her wall gave enough illumination for her to finally see him nude. Every sculpted muscle moved visibly under his pale, translucent skin as he undressed her, his gestures fluid and precise.

The black snake eating its tail tattoo over his heart was the symbol of eternal life. She'd googled it at work and found it fit him. Her gaze trailed down to what she had only felt but not seen. His cock stood huge and erect against his hard abdomen.

When he saw the object of her curiosity he gave her a smug smile. He stroked his cock while his gaze traveled along her body. "You're so luscious, Sugar."

She wanted to taste him. Suck him hard and deep until he begged for mercy. Something silky hanging around his neck distracted her. "Are you wearing a white scarf?"

"I'm in the mood to play." He pulled it off, and then snapped it between his hands.

She jumped at the sharp pop. "How?"

A wicked grin exposed a little fang while he tied her wrists to the headboard.

She tugged futilely at her bonds out of reflex, not fear. The silk, smooth and cool, held tight. Scandalous delight coursed through her. She'd never done anything like this before.

The slow, easy way he stroked her skin sent a chill down her spine.

"Let's discuss the rules."

She dragged her eyes from those magical hands touching her. "Rules?"

His grin returned. "Can I feed?"

Sugar blinked and glanced at her bonds. What had she gotten herself into?

"You said I didn't frighten you." He lay next to her and brushed his fingertips along the edges of her belly button.

She watched him admiring her breasts. "I lied." She hated the quiver in her voice. "It's not you, I'm worried about what you are. Won't I become a vampire if you bite me?"

His gaze didn't leave her breasts. "No, the world would be over populated with us if it were so simple."

"Will it hurt?"

"I'd never hurt you, Sugar," he whispered. She could hear the ache of disappointment in his voice.

The light breath he blew across her nipples made them pebble, sending a potent snap of sensual awareness to her core. No one had ever made her feel so wanted.

He continued examining her body with heated interest as he listed the rules. "No biting, then." He glanced up at her and grinned. "No kneeing."

She nodded. "No kneeing."

"If I do something you don't like, you shout...touchdown."

"You've got to be kidding. I'm not saying that."

He chuckled. "If you don't, I won't stop."

She tugged at the scarf again and sighed. "Touchdown." Then she nodded in agreement.

With a vicious growl, his lush mouth claimed her over-stimulated nipple and made her spine arch, stretching her body along the length of his. His hand slid up to fondle her other nipple. He rolled it. Pinched it. Pulled at it.

She couldn't help but cry out. Over the past ten days, she'd yearned for his touch.

He licked, tasted, and nibbled her skin. Waves of delight made her shudder as he paused at her navel to lap around it. She hoped he would do this to her clit, and just the thought made her writhe.

His hand brushed the curly, pale hair covering her sex. He stroked down between her outer labia, to her inner, and then slipped a finger deep inside her core. Sliding it in and out, his finger petted her slick sex.

A moan escaped her at the torturous slow rhythm.

"More?" His voice sounded husky with need.

"Yes...oh yes."

He wedged his broad shoulders between her thighs and spread them wide to display her like a banquet.

Still wrapped in the silk bonds, she remained vulnerable to his every desire.

She lifted her head to gaze at him, only to meet his half-lidded, intense stare. He held her attention as his head lowered to reach his tongue down, licking between her labia. She squirmed helplessly, gasping when he lapped, then flicked her clit with his marvelous tongue. He did devious things with his mouth, and her arousal intensified, blowing any coherent thoughts from her mind.

"Daedalus!"

He raised his face to lean his chin on her pubis. "Do you need me to stop?" She could hear the amusement in his voice. One day there would be payback.

"No, please, no!"

Her pleas elicited a crooked smile from him before he dipped down to plunge his tongue inside of her. He tasted her with a satisfied rumble.

It was all she could do to catch her breath. The pleasure built and filled her core, overwhelming her consciousness. She lifted her hips to grind against his mouth as bliss assaulted her senses. It blazed through her like wildfire.

She bucked and Daedalus held her to him so he could suck harder to increase her orgasm. Only when her voice became hoarse did she hear her own cries, fading with her climax.

As she lay dazed from her near out-of-body experience, he crawled up her sweat-soaked body. Pressed against her, he kept her pinned, then slid his firm cock to the entrance of her core.

“Do you want this?” His voice had deepened.

She searched his face, looking for something familiar and found nothing but need. It went beyond lust. He allowed her a glimpse of his loneliness. “Yes.”

He thrust himself inside her, even with her wetness, he needed to work himself in. A gasp at the tormenting ecstasy fled her lips when he filled her. The feel of him, stiff and hard, pushing inside, made her thrash and pull at her restraints. The tips of her breasts jiggled with her movements. The hard nubs rubbed against the firm flesh of his chest, eliciting another gasp from her.

“Let...let me go.” She wanted to touch him. No, who was she kidding? She wanted to grab him and fuck him hard.

He ignored her plea while he pushed back in. Thrusting gently at first, he built a rhythm that got deeper and harder with each stroke. Out of control, she needed to feel the solidness of him to ground herself. “Please...please... I need...” She couldn’t remember the word he’d told her to shout.

He lifted himself off her, releasing her lower half to move with him. She met each pump with her hips, trying to grind against him, but he wouldn’t allow it.

The sound of her ragged breathing filled the room. He lowered himself, pushing up close to her face to catch her mouth in a consuming kiss. She returned it with as much heat and passion as he gave. Any touch he offered, she’d take with enthusiasm.

His rhythm grew more erratic, more demanding. It fueled her fire, and her orgasm bowed her in a spine-cracking onslaught. Her cries mixed in with his roars while he released himself inside of her, arching his back so the faint light painted dark shadows across his face.

He collapsed beside her, resting his head on her heaving chest. “Damn, I didn’t last long again. You know how to hit all the right buttons, Sugar.” He reached up to release the knots binding her, then gathered her in his arms.

* * * *

Sugar snuggled against his chest. She fit perfectly in his arms, curvaceous and tender. It had taken the entirety of his restraint to keep from sinking his teeth into her as she begged beneath him. He really liked the begging.

She ran a finger aimlessly down his body.

He sighed. He hated mixing business with pleasure, but Sugar was intertwined with the Omegas. No way could he choose between the two. Not now. Somehow he'd let his guard down and she snared his heart. He couldn't remember the last time he loved a mortal. "You care a lot about the Omegas." He felt a twinge of jealousy at having to share her, and it annoyed him.

"Yes."

Funny how such a small word could seal their fates. "The Ayumu pack has claim over Chicago. It's a large one, and their leader is powerful." He stroked her hair, to comfort himself more than anything. "He won't bother to fight Eric himself. The Omegas are too small. He'll send a lieutenant."

"Does Eric have a chance?" She twisted to look at his face. Her red rosebud lips were swollen from the crush of his mouth.

He nibbled them. She closed her eyes and gave herself to him. Oh, how he liked it.

Not once since their kitchen encounter had she complained about the lack of his attention. He'd expected it, most women he knew would have. It made him think she'd lost interest. After tonight, he knew different. She'd been waiting for him and understood his duty. It made her more precious to him.

He brushed one of her feather-soft curls from her emerald green eyes. "Eric has an excellent chance. If he wins they'll send another, then another until he has to face the pack leader."

"Why? Why do they want the Omegas so bad?" she cried.

Her distress stabbed him like an arrow. He cupped her upset face, suddenly aware her anguish became his. "The Ayumu gave Eric permission to live here, not to start his own tiny pack." He stroked her cheek. "Taking in Katrina, a fertile attractive female, crossed the line. If the Ayumu don't retaliate, they'll look weak."

"Then the Omegas are doomed."

He laughed. "Hardly. I'm here, Sugar." He continued tracing his thumb along her jaw. Her skin was satiny. Her eyes tore through a tender part of him long ago buried. She needed to learn to trust him. Have faith in him. "I'll take care of you."

"It's not me I'm worried about." She ignored his invitation. It hurt, but maybe she didn't understand what he offered.

"They make you happy?"

"Of course."

"So I'll take care of them too." Her sudden direct stare made him feel shy for a moment, like a human. He chuckled at himself. "I like the Omegas, Sugar. They cling to their humanity, like they should. Eric knows what to do. I'm teaching him well."

"In one month?"

"It doesn't take much to make a king, Sugar."

Chapter 6

Daedalus reached across the rug and set one of Sugar's books on top of a pile. Another romance. He didn't know what triggered this need to organize the mess of books in her apartment. A disgraceful habit for a librarian, but a cute idiosyncrasy.

Boredom drove him to continue. The pre-dawn was always a lonely time. The Omegas and Sugar slept. She needed to work in the morning, and the small pack rarely stayed up this late. He usually did his own training when alone, yet tonight he needed to be close to her.

She read a lot of fiction. No history or philosophy, nothing of his taste. Books with aliens, fairies, or wizards sat in the second largest stack, since the romance stuff dominated the books.

He shook his head. Whatever demon created him must be laughing his ass off right now. He'd fallen in love with a gentle, loving dreamer. At least he could admit it to himself.

She, on the other hand, still had issues. He saw her cringe every time he or one of the Omegas experienced a paranormal situation. He doubted she knew about this habit. Heck, she didn't even let him feed, one of the most intimate acts a couple could share. Instead she made him turn to the Omega males for sustenance. Technically, he could use Katrina. His stomach turned at the idea. She smelled too much like abuse for his taste. He didn't need to hear her story to know what she'd suffered at the hands of her old pack.

If Sugar conquered her prejudice their relationship could bloom. Since they'd met he'd become aware of how tired he was of his present life, of being the leader, the provider, and the warrior to his people. With her he'd become the lover, the protector, and the teacher. If she agreed to it, he'd turn her to vampire, then take her as a wife.

His wife.

It had been a very long time since he'd wanted one or even thought of having one. He sighed and placed a poetry book on a small stack by his leg. At least they held one thing in common, except she liked the modern poets.

He'd leave Pal Robi Corporation in capable hands, move to Chicago, maybe into this cozy apartment. Eric could use his advice to tread Were politics and keep from drowning in it. They could make a difference, bring the Ayumu under control, teach them the old ways, the right ways. Then hopefully, with some guidance, it would spread.

Who was the dreamer now? Maybe he and Sugar shared more in common than he admitted to himself. He laughed.

"I don't see the comedy in Frank Herbert's *Dune*."

Daedalus fumbled the book, trying to catch it before it hit the floor. It slipped between his fingers to land back in the unsorted pile.

Sugar leaned her luscious body against his back and wrapped her arms around his shoulders. "I didn't mean to startle you."

He glanced over his shoulder into her crystal clear, green eyes. Even this early in the morning they sparkled with clarity. "You didn't startle me. I heard you coming. The book slipped." He must be off center to get surprised by a small human female. He deserved to get staked if he allowed his defenses to drop.

"Sure, I always grease them up when I'm done." She kissed the back of his neck.

He sighed at the light, feathery touch of her lips. "That explains why they're always scattered everywhere."

She giggled. The gesture made her breasts bounce a little against his shoulders. He was tempted to tear her tight t-shirt open and set them free.

"Why were you thinking so hard?" she whispered close to his ear.

"Worried about tonight's challenge." The lie didn't hurt as much as the truth. Eric would do fine tonight, their plans were set solid. His plans for Sugar made him worry.

"Daedalus? You said they would be okay."

He'd chosen the wrong thing to say. She'd made him a bumbling idiot. "It will be all right. Doesn't mean I won't be thinking about it." He reached back and pulled her to face him. An idea formed to help him with his real problem. "You should come."

She shook her head. "I don't like fighting, and I don't want to watch anyone get hurt. There will be plenty of both tonight."

He ran his hand through her tangle of messy curls. Their color reminded him of spun sunlight, something he'd only seen when he was human, a very long time ago. "The Omegas could use your support."

"They have you." She rubbed her face on the palm of his hand.

The silky touch of her skin stirred his hunger. He wanted to taste the tender flesh in his mouth, feel his teeth puncture her white, milky hide.

He exhaled in frustration.

She glanced up at him. "What?"

How could he explain his need without scaring her away? He smiled, careful to hide his fangs. "Maybe I want you at the challenge." He allowed enough of his hunger in his voice to convince her of his desire. She needed to face her fears. To get over being surrounded by sentient beings other than humans, who developed different ways of surviving. The challenge would be a perfect place.

"I'm scared, I'm not ashamed to admit it." She stared down at his chest.

He lifted her chin and kissed her. She looked vulnerable, resistance was impossible with his sweet Sugar. Her eager response to him ignited his cock to a full salute, but the dawn's approach tugged at the unconscious clock built in his make-up. He groaned as he pushed her away. "We don't have time, the sun is almost here. Come tonight, for me."

She met his stare, her eyes clouded with worry, and nodded. "For you."

Chapter 7

The abandoned warehouse stood outside of town. No one in their right mind would be out there at night, including the police. What did that make them? Nuts? Sugar scanned the secluded area, left for nature to reclaim. Nobody would hear their screams if things went wrong.

“I heard the mob uses this place to get rid of the trash,” Tyler whispered to her.

She elbowed him to be quiet. He didn’t need to add to her vivid imagination or feed her fears. The crunch of gravel under her boots sounded loud as they drew closer to the warehouse. She would have felt better if Daedalus had come with them instead of with Eric. They needed to arrive later, so he sent the rest of them to represent the pack.

Eric begged her to come with them to the challenge when she started to doubt her earlier decision. He’d said, “I *need* you to be there. I won’t be able to concentrate if I don’t think the others are safe. If you’re there they’ll be too busy protecting you to get into trouble. Especially Sam.”

Sam draped his arm over Sugar’s shoulders, waking her from the memory. He gave her a squeeze. “Don’t worry, Sugar. Daedalus sent me to protect you.”

She sighed. He didn’t stand much taller than her, but the training had added some bulk to his body. Even though Daedalus released the others from training, Sam insisted on continuing. Eric told her they didn’t mind. He needed a sparring partner and appreciated his company.

The warehouse door slid open, and bright lights spilled out, blinding them.

“Who are you?” An outline of a burly man glowed in the doorway. As her eyes adjusted she saw he stood with his legs apart and his arms crossed over his muscled chest. The sleeves of his shirt were torn off to make space for his bulging biceps.

Sam stepped in front of their group. “We’re witnesses for the Omegas.”

The guard moved forward and sniffed the air, others gathered behind him. He pointed at Sugar. “She doesn’t carry our blood.” His eyes traveled up her body. “She stays here with us.” A few snickers came from the men behind him.

Sugar stepped back, colliding with Katrina. Small hands steadied her and rubbed her arms. Her stomach cramped as she imagined exactly what kind of ‘stay’ she’d have to endure with them.

“Sugar’s with us.” Sam glanced at his pack mates, a devilish twinkle in his eye. “She’s almost pack. She’s Eric’s mate.”

The guard continued to examine her. “Not for long.” He laughed and stepped back to allow them access to the warehouse. More perverse laughter followed them in.

Werewolves from different walks of life milled around. They chatted and got reacquainted. It felt like they were crashing an Ayumu party. They had even brought bleachers.

Sugar latched onto Sam’s arm. “Did they sell tickets to this?”

Sam made a slight gesture, toward a stage between the bleachers, with his chin. "The Ayumu Lead Alpha is the one sitting in the throne on the dais. His name is Michael." His chuckle carried a nervous tremor. "Eric invited him to bear witness to this challenge. He also invited neighboring packs." Sam led them away.

"Why?"

He shrugged and tried to stare down curious onlookers. "Daedalus kicked my ass when I tried talking Eric out of it. Something about bystanders keeping the Ayumu honest."

It made sense to her. She'd wondered what would prevent the Ayumu from attacking them if they actually won. Daedalus's forethought impressed her.

A voice boomed, "Are these the Omegas' witnesses?" A hush settled over the room and the crowd parted like the Red Sea, exposing the Alpha to their view.

Sugar dug her nails into Sam's arm. "We should have all come together." Katrina, Tyler, and Robert hovered close behind them.

"I'm starting to agree with you," Sam said through gritted teeth.

Michael motioned for them to come closer.

Sugar felt helpless surrounded by preternaturally strong and deadly werewolves. She was a small woman who wanted a semi-normal quiet life. "What do we do when we get there? Bow?" she whispered as the four of them shuffled together.

Sam shrugged.

Great.

They approached the dais. Michael sat on his throne and leaned forward with his elbows on his knees, his hands clasped between them. He assessed Katrina and Sugar with an indecent smirk. "How does such a pitiful pack of dogs attract such beautiful women?" He brushed a lock of his black hair over his shoulder. The inner glow of his amber eyes became more apparent.

Sam placed a hand over Sugar's, where her nails still dug in, and he patted it. His eyes pleaded with her to keep her mouth shut.

Michael watched with interest. He gestured to a bench next to him. "I've arranged special seating for you." His intense stare ensnared Sugar, and she found it difficult to break it. Where Daedalus made her feel risqué, Michael made her feel like prey.

Sam's gentle tug pulled her toward the bench with the others.

"No, not her." Michael motioned at Sugar. "Eric's mate has a seat of honor next to me." He patted a stool beside his throne.

Anger boiled inside of her, ready to pour out of her ears. "Sam," she growled. Why did she let them talk her into coming? This shouldn't be part of her life. She took the two steps to get to the stool on heavy feet.

Michael offered his hand and assisted her to the seat.

She watched the Omegas sit on the bench next to the dais.

"Sugar, is it?"

She twisted to face Michael; she'd never told him her name. The dryness in her throat made her swallow reflexively. Word from the front door guards traveled fast to their leader.

She nodded and gazed out at the crowd of Weres, trying to think positive thoughts. It was difficult since her host continued eying her like candy.

He reached out to run a finger through her curls. She flinched before she could control it. "If I knew Eric kept such a pretty mate, I would have challenged him much sooner."

She glanced at him and raised an eyebrow.

A lecherous grin spread across his face. "It means when he loses, you'll be mine."

She gulped the ball of fear that rose in her throat. "I'm not his mate, just his friend." Her heart hadn't stopped racing since she'd climbed out of the car. Now it beat double time.

"I have witnesses who heard otherwise."

A trace of sweat trickled down her neck. "I'm not a Were."

He leaned closer to whisper in her ear. "Not yet." His voice burned with hunger. "I can't *wait* to turn you."

A cold shiver froze her to the spot. She shouldn't have come, the thought kept repeating itself. Never did she desire to change, not to Were, nor to vampire, nor anything else.

Daedalus and Eric had stuck her in the middle of this situation. Had they even thought of this scenario? It took one bite, witnesses or no, she'd still become a werewolf.

Michael leaned back in his chair, never taking those fiery amber eyes from her. If they got out of this unharmed, she was going to kick Sam's werewolf ass.

Chapter 8

A commotion at the front of the warehouse caught both Sugar's and Michael's attention. She stood to get a better view, but his hand clamped down on her forearm, yanking her back onto the stool.

"Your lover's here."

Confusion clouded her thoughts, then she realized he meant Eric, not Daedalus.

Michael released her arm, and his face transformed from anger to regal calm before her eyes. He glared at the arrival of the Omegas' challenger.

An air of expectation silenced the hum of conversation.

Eric stalked with a predatory grace to the dais where they sat. The Weres who had been guarding the door surrounded him and Daedalus.

Sugar barely recognized her best friend. They'd only seen each other a few times since Daedalus had arrived. She couldn't tear her eyes away from the obvious changes. Confidence radiated around him like a beacon, and everyone in the warehouse drew closer to him.

A leather kilt hung from his lean hips, the rest of him naked. The healthy sheen of sweat covering his skin reflected the neon lights, defining his lean, newly acquired muscles. She noticed, like Daedalus, he also bore a black circular tattoo over his heart. Except his was of the full moon.

He looked like a gladiator.

Daedalus stood a step behind. His usual black jeans and muscle shirt contrasted with his pale, translucent skin. The light gleamed off his head and caused his deep blue eyes to look soulless. It made it impossible for him to hide his vampire origins. The cold, menacing expression on his face sent a shiver down her spine. Thankfully, he was on their side.

Eric's gaze flicked over to her, and she shrugged. Nothing he did at this point could help her. He needed to win. She wished Daedalus would glance her way to offer some reassurance.

Michael rose. "The Ayumu pack recognizes you, Eric of the Omegas. Who is this vampire accompanying you?"

Eric's voice rang through the warehouse. "Daedalus is my appointed advisor."

"This isn't a place for advice." He faced Daedalus. "You shouldn't be involved in this."

"The Accords state I can be present during a challenge." His expression and stance never changed.

Hushed voices hummed over the crowd at this statement. Michael's face lost its amused expression. "The Accords? No one follows those ancient laws anymore."

Eric turned to address the crowd. "That's because most of us don't even know of their existence. We've forgotten them." He returned his attention to the Lead Alpha. "We've lost our way."

Eric climbed the stairs to the dais, causing a stir among the guards. Michael held up his hand to forestall them.

“You knew about the Accords,” Eric whispered. Only Sugar and the Alpha could hear him.

Michael lowered his face within inches of Eric’s. “Of course, every Lead Alpha does. No one cares.”

“I care. They define us as a people, Michael. Without it...” Eric diverted his gaze to the floor. He paused and swallowed, then sucked in his breath. When he looked back up, his eyes matched Michael’s, amber wolf. “We’re nothing but animals.”

Sugar had never seen one of the Omegas this close to losing control of their beast. She found herself scooting back on her stool.

Eric noticed her and gave a small, encouraging nod. The amber glow of his eyes grew. He returned to the floor to announce, “I challenge Michael, Lead Alpha of the Ayumu pack, for the right of his throne.”

The outcries from the pack startled Sugar. She feared they’d run out and tear her men to shreds.

Michael waited until the noise died down before he responded with a smirk. “You have to work your way up the pack to get that kind of challenge, Eric.”

“No, I don’t, Michael. I am Lead Alpha to the Omegas pack. Leader to Leader challenge. We’ll absorb the Ayumu. At least one Accord law is still followed.”

Sugar looked to Daedalus. He grinned and gave her a shameless wink.

The arena was set in the center of the warehouse. Sugar attempted to join the Omegas on the bench when Michael left the dais, but his thugs blocked her way. The muscled brute who had wanted to keep her at the door pushed her back onto the stool. He didn’t leave her side. She looked around him to her friends. Tyler held Katrina, Robert and Sam watched the preparations.

The brute explained to her most dominance fights were to the first draw of blood, but this kind of challenge went to the death. He bent closer to Sugar. “When Michael’s done with you, he’ll give ya to me.” His teeth were stained brown from chewing tobacco, and the smell curled her toes.

“You ever heard of a toothbrush?”

The brute choked on his words while he sputtered, his eyes dilated before he grabbed her by the hair. He pulled her head back as he drew his fist to punch her. Fury burned in his dead eyes.

She raised her arms to protect herself when he stopped mid-swing.

Sam held his arm in his grip, then pulled him away. It caused them both to tumble off the dais. Sugar wasn’t sure who let the first punch go, but the brawl didn’t last long. A piercing whistle made most of the Weres cover their sensitive ears, including Sam and his fist buddy.

Daedalus removed his fingers from his mouth. “Break it up, boys! The fight’s between these two.” He gestured to the Lead Alphas of the opposing packs.

Sam pushed himself off the floor, nodded at Sugar, and sat back with his pack. The brute returned to the dais, murder in his eyes as he watched her.

Michael stripped completely. He paced the floor, unconscious of his nudity. His eyes never left Eric while he stared daggers at him.

They approached each other in the center of the cleared area. The surrounding crowd cheered. The Alphas began their change.

Sugar didn't want to look, but couldn't make herself turn away. She'd never watched a transformation before, her stare remained glued to the horror. Their skin flowed like water while fur took its place. They groaned when bones and joints popped, reshaping themselves into what looked like half-wolf and half-man. Claws grew from their fingers and toes. Lastly, they stood on their hind legs and howled as their jaws elongated, exposing the long, sharp canines.

She sensed Daedalus's presence before turning to see him beside her.

"You're pale, Sugar. Are you okay?" He lifted her chin with a knuckle.

She glanced back at the werewolf wearing a leather kilt. "I'm managing. Eric seems to be the same size as Michael in his beast form. If he didn't keep the kilt on, I'd have trouble telling them apart."

A pleased look briefly touched her lover's face. "Exercise strengthens the human body, but it's the soul which strengthens the beast." He caressed her face, then returned to his charge by the arena.

It dawned on Sugar what Daedalus had truly been doing this last month. He taught Eric to fight and built his confidence to give him pride so he could lead. He grew Eric's beast. It must have been his plan from the start, and she loved him for it.

Eric matched Michael in size. Maybe he could win if he could match him in skill.

The Alphas circled each other, testing their reflexes and speed by feigned attacks. Michael sprang at Eric, knocking them both into the bystanders. People screamed under the crush of two huge monsters as the struggle for dominance began.

They fought like the animals they'd become. Fang and claw, bite and tear, a gruesome display of strength and agility. Eric's kilt lay on the ground, torn off during the battle. Sugar couldn't tell who was who now.

The beast under assault placed his feet against the other's abdomen and shoved with great power. The assailant flew across the warehouse, landing with a hard thud on the concrete floor.

The spectators scattered, gathering around the dais. Sugar needed to stand on the stool to watch. Both Alphas raced at each other to collide in a storm of fury.

Sam waved his arm to catch Sugar's attention. "We can't see! Who's winning?" He tried to get up on the dais, but the guards pushed him back.

She stamped her foot on the stool. "I can't tell! They both look alike."

She glimpsed Daedalus. He stood alone by the front door, absorbed in the fight. Occasionally he'd shout something. *At least he can tell which one is Eric.*

One beast stood over the other, its jaw clenched around the other's throat, shaking its head with vigor. In a spray of blood, the dominant werewolf almost decapitated the other when he ripped out most of its throat and swallowed the flesh. He crossed his arms, then faced the crowd around the dais. Bloody gore dripped from its maw.

Sugar's head spun at the sight.

"You are all Omegas now." Its rough voice rolled over them. Sugar twisted to look at the Omegas. They jumped up and down in unbridled joy. She stared as the beast approached them.

Eric had won.

Sugar jumped off the dais and rushed over to the celebrating Omegas. This would be a new era. No more "Wimps of the Underworld" or "Pansies of the Paranormal." They'd be part of the Ayumu. *No*, the Ayumu would be part of them.

The Omegas owned Chicago.

That thought, the enormity of what had transpired, stopped her in her tracks. Things would change, maybe not for the best. Her simple lifestyle wouldn't survive. The Omegas' time would be consumed in maintaining dominance over their new members and worse, they thought she belonged to Eric as his mate.

Daedalus saved her friends, yet at the same time destroyed her quiet, happy life.

The touch of a hand at her elbow startled her. She frowned, expecting her lover, but instead came face to face with the muscled, rude brute. His grip tightened around her arm. Before she could cry for help, he dragged her through the crowd to a small side exit.

The cool air outside snapped her from the shock. Her lungs, stiff with fear, couldn't seem to get enough air. She tried to scream. His steel grasp prevented any escape, no matter how hard she fought and tore at his hand.

He pulled her without effort toward the surrounding woods. His eyes glowed with amber light in the dark when he glanced over his shoulder. "I'm going to fuck ya." He grinned, exposing long, sharp canines. "Then I'm going to eat ya."

She froze. None of her limbs functioned. The Omegas were too busy celebrating to notice her absence, she was on her own against this creature.

Daedalus strolled out of the woods.

Her heart skipped a beat. Relief flooded her and loosened her knees.

"Nice night to take a walk. Who do you have there, wolf?"

The brute stopped moving forward when he saw Daedalus. "None of your business, blood sucker." He squeezed Sugar's arm harder, making her cry out.

Quick as a blink, Daedalus stood a breath away with his hand on the brute's wrist. With a quick snap, he broke it. "You're hurting my Sugar." The words came from behind clenched teeth.

The werewolf cried out in pain, releasing her arm. His cries grew louder when Daedalus twisted his injured joint.

“Stay here, Sugar, this won’t take long.” He dragged the brute into the forest, where his pleading screams ended abruptly.

She lay in the dirt and cringed with each of the brute’s cries. Something innocent died within her when those shrieks stopped. Tears burned behind her eyes.

Daedalus returned, wiping the blood on his chin with a handkerchief. He crouched in front of Sugar, a small satisfied smile on his face.

Before he could say anything, she pushed him, knocking him on his ass. “Get away!”

“Hey.” His stunned response echoed off the warehouse.

She crabbed back from him, then stood. “Sorry, it’s... Well...” She gestured to the woods. “You ate him?”

He remained on the ground. “Sugar, I’m a vampire. The world won’t miss the likes of him.”

“I know. It’s just with focusing on the challenge and my own quiet...” She looked at her feet. “I’m starting to realize how naive I’ve been.”

The side exit door opened. “I’m telling you, Katrina, I smell her this way.” Tyler and his girlfriend hurried out to find their quarry. “Hey, I thought you were in trouble.”

Sugar spun, thankful for the interruption. “Not anymore. Daedalus saved me.” How could she explain to Daedalus she’d never thought of him as a monster until tonight? And now he terrified her?

He stood, brushing the dirt off his jeans. “Can you take Sugar home, Tyler?” He looked at her and sighed. “I think she’s had enough supernatural excitement for one night.”

“Yeah, sure.”

Daedalus walked up to Sugar as if approaching a frightened fawn. He lowered his face to hers, expecting a kiss. His lips lingered, soft and velvety. Eyes closed, he murmured her name.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered back.

Chapter 9

Sugar woke with a start early the next morning. Nightmares had plagued her sleep; something chased her through a dark forest threatening to eat her. Sometimes the hunter wore Daedalus's face. What a horrible night.

She rolled out of bed and rubbed her eyes. Her arm ached where the brute had squeezed it. A purple handprint was her souvenir from the challenge. When Tyler and Katrina dropped her off last night, they saw the marks on her arm and knew something had happened, but she didn't want to discuss it. She needed time alone.

On her way to the kitchen, she found Eric on a chair in her patio garden. He gave her a little smile and a weak wave. There were dark circles under his eyes. Looked like she wasn't the only one who hadn't slept well. She signaled for him to wait, then set the coffee maker to start brewing.

The crisp morning air showed signs of an early fall. She pulled her robe closed and tied it tight. The clear, blue sky brought light to everything around them.

Eric sat bent over in the chair, leaning his arms on his knees. He lifted his weary head. "Hope you don't mind my breaking in. I love sitting here. It's like a small island of solitude."

She pulled a chair next to him and looked closer at his face. It seemed he'd aged overnight. The worry lines between his brows were new. She reached out to smooth them away. "You look like crap."

He jerked in his chair with a surprised chuckle. "I got into a fight last night."

She smiled in return, finally recognizing some of the old Eric. "Really?" She allowed her voice to drip with sarcasm. "I heard it was a doozy. Did you at least win?"

His smile faded, and he leaned back to stare at her with sad eyes. "Yeah."

It tore her heart apart to see her childhood hero upset. Maybe joking about it wasn't the best way to cheer him up. He should have been celebrating. The Omegas were safe, and he ruled the Ayumu. He'd accomplished the impossible. She reached out for his hand to find it trembled under her touch.

He released a heavy sigh. "I didn't think killing Michael would affect me much. We hunt in the woods and kill regularly. I thought it would feel the same, but it doesn't." He looked away.

Helpless, she watched him suffer. His kind and gentle nature took a worse beating than his body did. It would make him a great leader. She squeezed his hand and tucked away her own selfish misgivings in relation to werewolves and vampires. Her best friend, even if he had swallowed someone's throat, needed a shoulder to lean on.

"I'm glad you feel bad."

His head snapped up to face her. "What?"

She smiled, hoping it would soften her words. “Hold on to this feeling. It’s right to suffer after you’ve killed someone, Eric.”

His eyes widened, a flash of anger reflected in them.

“You killed a monster last night. That was a good thing to do, I’m glad you didn’t enjoy it though. I think Michael would have loved killing you, and I think the majority of his pack would have loved watching him destroy you. It’ll prevent *you* from turning into a monster like Michael.” She tilted her head and pleaded with her eyes for him to understand.

He stared at her a moment as the anger melted away, then he nodded. “My suffering protects what I have left of my humanity.”

“I don’t know much in regards to pack life, but after what I witnessed last night, I’d say what the Ayumu have left of their humanity needs to be saved.” She released his hand. “Tell me about the Accords.”

A light of interest sparked in his saddened face. “The Accords were developed centuries ago by paranormal creatures, even the ones who refused to ‘come out’ with the declaration of citizenry. They’re laws to protect humans, to protect our identities, and to protect against one individual gaining too much power.” He grinned at her. “Let’s face it, you humans outnumber us. In a war you’d win. Also, without humans there wouldn’t be Weres, vampires, or merpeople.”

“Merpeople?” Delight twinkled through her, making her want to do a dance. She always wanted to be a mermaid as a little girl. Some dreams don’t die. “They really do exist?”

He threw back his head with a belly laugh. “I thought you’d like to know. Don’t be running off to a beach yet, they secluded themselves long ago.” His face split with the usual goofy grin. “Thanks.”

“My therapeutic garden is always open to your pack.”

“The pack’s grown.”

She blinked. “I guess I’ll have to start charging.” They shared an easy laugh.

His nose flared. “Coffee’s ready.”

She got up and fixed them each a big mug, then returned with the steaming hot brew. She handed him one with the logo ‘Got Blood?’ on the side.

He read it. “Daedalus give you this?”

She nodded.

He took a careful sip. “He’s pretty sweet on you.” He watched the city, and she looked at her plants.

She hated talking relationships with Eric. He knew her too well and thought she guarded her heart too much. She could never just give it away, especially after last night. She started wondering if she truly knew anyone in her life.

She could fall in love with Daedalus easily, but she wanted him to be human. Tears swelled in her eyes.

“He’s a good guy, as vampires go. I don’t think he’d lead you astray.”

Like she predicted, Eric defended the guy. “Why?”

“‘Cause he doesn’t have to. He’s got all the time in the world.” He sighed. “He could have moved out last night, Sugar. Our contract is complete. Instead he’s resting in my cramped, crappy apartment. He didn’t say much, except he scared you. That’s got to mean something.” He sipped his hot coffee.

“We don’t fit. It was supposed to be a fling. He turned it into more and expects me to...” She found herself at a loss for words.

“Accept him for what he is?”

She nodded and stared at her mug, fighting the tears.

“You have a chance at a relationship, even if it lasts a day, a month, or a year. Who cares? It’s better to have experienced happiness in life, even with a vampire, than through those stupid romance books.”

She wiped her eyes and smacked his arm lightly, it spilled some of his hot coffee from his mug onto his hand. “I didn’t buy those books, Casanova. Now I feel worse, thanks.”

He shook his fingers and splattered coffee in her direction. “Payback’s a bitch.” He grinned at her.

Chapter 10

Sugar placed a fuzzy, pink throw blanket over Eric's sleeping form. He'd curled up on one of the love seats after she filled him with scrambled eggs and bacon. Then he asked her to read him to sleep.

They'd done this before. Initially after he'd been turned into a Were, he hated to sleep. The nightmares stalked him until she found him secluded in his apartment half-crazed. She shuddered at the memory. This reading ritual began then. The sound of her voice soothed him, and the stories distracted his tortured soul. They did this for months until he met Robert and founded the Omegas.

Sugar closed the book sitting on her lap. Everyone assumed she was the romance junkie, but the books all belonged to him.

The Omegas probably still slept and Daedalus, well, he became unconscious or something with the daylight. She couldn't help the shiver which ran down her spine at the thought.

Her arm throbbed in time with her heartbeat as the muscles in her back knotted like pretzels. A hot bubble bath sounded like nirvana. The world would hold itself together while she soaked and reflected on her own troubles.

She filled the tub with near scalding water until the bubbles threatened to overflow, then eased in, enjoying every heated moment. The suds engulfed her, allowing enough space to breathe. She struggled to clear her mind of the lust, unease, discomfort, and happiness thoughts of Daedalus created. The last wistful one being, *I wish he was human*.

The small pops of bubbles hummed in her ears, mesmerizing her, and brought her to a languid meditative state. A thump in the next room startled her. Eric had probably rolled off the love seat and fell on the floor. She concentrated on thinking of nothing once more. Even though under water, she distinctly heard a yell. She pulled herself out and threw on a robe.

When she reached her living room, chaos was underway. Two men grappled with Eric on her rugs. She stared at the unbelievable scene, shock freezing her to the spot until one of the men noticed her. His eyes glowed with an inner amber light. *Not men, Weres*.

He jumped for her, but Eric grabbed his ankle and pulled him away. "Get the Omegas!" Eric's voice cracked at her like a whip. She raced through the kitchen, out the apartment door, only to get tugged back in.

One of the Weres held the back of her robe and dragged her through to the kitchen. Eric knocked his Were off, strode across the room, and kicked her attacker in the knee. It sent him howling to the floor. Unfortunately the Were pulled her robe with him.

She ran out of the apartment and down the hall to Daedalus, in her birthday suit. With the racket in her apartment, the Omegas should have come to check it out by now. Except their door looked busted in.

She peeked around the corner. The chaos in her apartment couldn't compete with the havoc in this one. Tyler and a stranger were the only ones in the room still in human form. They fought one another on the far side of the kitchen. Beasts struggled against each other within the tight confines of the kitchen and hallway leading to the bedrooms. The clash of cutlery with dishes as they shattered on the kitchen floor made her cringe.

Daedalus's closed, shiny, black coffin lay on the floor by the outside wall.

Sugar spotted a portable phone on the floor between her and the coffin. They needed help, she hoped the police could handle this. She crawled toward the phone, staying close to the floor to avoid attention.

One of the Weres approached Daedalus's coffin. She gasped when she saw he held a stake and mallet.

Katrina's high-pitched scream from the bedrooms made Sugar twist away. She saw Tyler snap his assailant's neck and leap over the others blocking the hallway to reach the bedrooms where Katrina fought.

The sound of hammering drew Sugar's attention back to the coffin. The beast banged on the stake, driving it through her sexy, sweet love. His screech froze her blood. It must have done the same to his attacker since he paused in his assault.

Daedalus needed her. Without thinking, she threw the portable phone with all her strength at the beast. It bounced off the back of his head and he stumbled forward, close enough for Daedalus to knock him out with a punch.

The Were's leg wobbled like licorice before he toppled over.

She hurried to Daedalus's side, her breaths coming in short gasps. *Please, let him be all right.* She'd never told him how she felt about him, the paranormal, or their future. Now that creature had taken away her chance to tell him. She knelt by the coffin. A boulder dropped in her stomach.

Daedalus looked at her with wide, unfocused eyes. They were dilated to black bottomless pits. The stake still protruded out of his chest. As he attempted to sit, a small stain of blood appeared on his pale blue t-shirt around the wound. He lay back down, closed his eyes, and his body went limp.

She wanted to pull the stake out but didn't know if she should. She didn't know what vampires did when they died. Maybe his reaction was a reflex of some sort. She checked for a pulse at the base of his neck. *Stupid, he never had a pulse!*

A crash behind her made her duck. When she turned she saw Katrina's limp body tumble to the floor, leaving a small dent in the wall. Someone had thrown her across the room.

Hands clasped to her mouth, Sugar watched her world fall apart. All she could hear was her blood rushing past her ears like a freight train. She struggled for breath around a sob that racked her chest. Trembling, she crawled to Katrina's listless body. *Weres heal fast.* She kept repeating this to herself like a mantra over and over in her head. This kept her urge to scream under control. If she started, she'd never stop.

A huge werewolf stomped through the Omegas' apartment door from the hallway. It paused to contemplate them, then examined the coffin before it leaped onto the remaining beasts wrestling in the hallway.

Sugar rolled Katrina over and checked her breathing. Her chest rose in a strong, steady rhythm. Sugar sobbed again, this time in relief. Her friend's right eye swelled and her lip bled. Those were the only visible injuries.

The noise of the fight faded behind her. She glanced over her shoulder to see three battered beasts come out of the bedrooms. Tyler pushed his way past them to get to Katrina. His freckles stood out on his pale skin.

Sugar touched him gently as he knelt beside her. "I think she'll be all right."

He nodded, but examined Katrina anyway.

The remaining beasts changed back to human form. It was Eric who had passed them earlier in his wolf form. He slumped to the floor by the hallway while Robert and Sam rustled through the fridge getting what looked like food and drinks.

Her sense of incredulity must have shown on her face since Eric explained, "I've changed twice in one day, Sugar. I need the calories to recuperate and so do they." He turned his gaze to the living room. "Tyler, how's Katrina?"

"She's hurt, but I can smell her injuries healing." He glanced at Sugar. "Why are you naked?"

She looked down at herself, horrified. Flames of embarrassment burned her cheeks. "Give me your shirt." She helped pull it off his back, then slipped it over her head. The t-shirt reached her mid-thigh and acted as a small dress. "They tore my robe off."

She stepped over the unconscious Ayumu Were lying by the coffin. "He staked him, Eric." Her chest tightened around another scream. A tear spilled from her eye, tracing its way down to her chin.

Eric attempted to stand, but his legs buckled, causing him to stumble to his knees. "Is he dust?"

She shook her head.

"They're supposed to turn to dust when they're staked. The Were must not have hammered it all the way through."

She ran her fingers along Daedalus's face and paused to trace his lush lips. Her tears dripped silently from her chin, splattering one by one on his shoulder. The passion, the violence, and the sorrow, she couldn't handle anymore.

Something brushed her ankle. When she tried to swipe it off with her other foot she met resistance. Cold terror gripped her chest when the touch tightened. She glanced down to make eye contact with a pair of amber glowing eyes.

The Were who had staked Daedalus pulled her leg, and she fell to the floor. It crawled on top of her. The screams she'd held back came out as a herald of anguish and fear.

Tyler wrapped his arms around her aggressor's chest, but the Were back-handed him away like a fly, while its long fingers wrapped around her throat. "At least I'll get your mate, Eric."

She gasped for air, nothing passed through her throat. Her vision tunneled while she grappled with his hand. All she could see were his hate-filled wolf eyes.

This was the last thing she'd experience? Getting killed over werewolf politics?

Suddenly, the Were's weight jerked off of her.

Daedalus grasped the back of its shirt and lifted the Were in the air. Her neck remained clenched in the creature's hand when it yanked her off the floor. The angle of the Were's grasp, as she dangled, gave her enough room to wheeze in a breath. Relief swam over her. Daedalus would save her, he'd protect her, like he'd promised her.

She kicked and twisted mid-air until the Were's grasp broke loose. Crashing to the floor, she gulped for air.

Daedalus pulled the stake from his chest, and in one swift move, jammed it through the Were's head.

A spatter of blood landed on Sugar's cheek. She watched in horror as he dropped the corpse, then staggered to his coffin. Sam and Robert appeared at his side to assist him.

She pushed between them and grasped his hand. "Please don't die." Her voice sounded hoarse.

He tried to touch her face, but his hand fell back to his chest. "Tell Eric to call my office." His eyes closed, and his body became limp once more.

She stumbled back a step to look at Sam and Robert. They only offered her a shrug.

She found the portable phone by the coffin and handed it to Eric. "Call."

Chapter 11

Sugar watched them carry him away in his coffin.

Eric had called Daedalus's office, informing them of the attack and of his injuries. They sent their local men. The same ones, according to Robert, who had caught them stealing their television and hogtied them. Even though they looked human, she knew they couldn't be.

They reverently angled the coffin over the stair rails. Who was Daedalus Pal Robi? Someone who traveled with security yet housed them somewhere else. Someone who's company removed seven dead werewolves without question and told them not to worry about it. Someone who taught underdogs to stand up for themselves and stole her heart.

She stared at nothing now, they were gone with him.

She felt empty inside, wrung out, and nauseous.

Katrina moaned behind her, and Sugar returned to the others.

The last of Daedalus's men removed a blood pressure cuff from Katrina's arm. She rested on a couch the boys had righted back up, an ice pack over her right eye. "She probably has a concussion, nothing her immunity can't handle. She'll be healed up by tomorrow. Tylenol for the headache, no anti-inflammatories."

Sugar stood by the security guy, he glanced her way, and his eyes scanned her face. "Daedalus has survived worse." He handed her a business card and closed the apartment door as he left.

The card showed a toll-free number with the Pal Robi logo. She snorted. Un-freaking-believable, her life belonged on *Tales from the Crypt*. Next thing she'd know, one of the merpeople would swim out of her toilet. Did she want this kind of life?

Most women her age had found a stable, charming husband, bought a house with a picket fence, and started having their 2.5 children. She'd dreamed that dream once but placed it on hold to help Eric out.

He'd found his place and didn't need her anymore. The Omegas would be his life, he would make a great Alpha. Maybe he'd settle down with a mate, then they could have puppies. A giggle escaped her, and it held an edge of hysteria.

The subject of her amusement stared at her. "Are you okay?" The frown and hard glint in Eric's eyes told Sugar there would be hell to pay among the disgruntled Ayumu turned Omega. Life would be difficult until they accepted him, which meant more fighting.

She lied and nodded. Thanks to Sam, the Ayumu thought her to be Eric's mate, and it painted a bull's eye on her back. More violence. She'd need to hire Daedalus for combat training to survive being their neighbor. Daedalus. Her thoughts circled back to him.

The situation could be turned into an opportunity to begin fresh, a clean break from the paranormal and its kind, a chance to explore her own future. Maybe find her American dream.

"I'm going home." She planted a gentle kiss on Katrina's forehead. "Take care."

Eric followed her out of his apartment. "I'll stay with you."

She shook her head. "I need to be alone. Just give me some time to absorb what happened." She glanced at her feet, unable to meet his piercing gaze.

"You heard the guy. Daedalus will pull through."

She sighed. "I know. I don't doubt it, not after watching him fight in daylight with a stake in his heart." He was everything she'd ever wanted in a man, except actually being a man. "I don't know if I'll pull through." A sob applied pressure to her chest but she held it. "You need to give me space. Everyone. For a little while."

"Sugar," he whispered. "Please don't shut me out of your life. You're my best friend."

She walked down the hall with him and entered her apartment. "Give me time." Then she closed the door. The bolt stuck as she struggled to twist the knob, but it finally locked. This was the first time since the Omegas moved in next door she'd needed it.

Chapter 12

Daedalus sat in his study and contemplated the roaring fire in the hearth. No matter how much he fueled the flames, his heart remained cold. Centuries old but still stupid enough to fall for a pretty girl. He held the poem he'd written to her and threw it in the fire. She'd returned the others unopened as well.

He needed to reminisce on happier times, it sometimes eased the loneliness. His thoughts always betrayed him, eventually leading to her. The only good times he wished to remember involved Sugar, and they were a painful reminder she wanted nothing to do with him.

It drove him mad. He *knew* she cared. He *saw* her tears when they tried to stake him. Yet, she refused his calls and his letters. She refused him.

How many times over the last two months had he caught himself making plans to steal her away from her new home? He shook his head and rested it on the back of his favorite worn leather chair. Too many. It would be a mistake. Holding her prisoner would make her hate him more, not to mention kidnapping was illegal.

His chest ached, but not from the wound.

The CB mike on his cellphone beeped. He glanced down at it, annoyed. He'd told them not to disturb him. It beeped again. He sighed and unattached it. "What?"

"Did you order a pretty blonde for dinner, sir?"

What? He unfolded himself from the chair and went to the computer to access the camera outputs. A woman with blond curls got out of a cab, then came to stand by the guardhouse at the gate. His heart beat. One sharp, painful squeeze.

It was her.

"Bring her to my study." Now she accepts his invitation? Two months later?

He tried to hook the phone back to his belt but missed, and it clattered to the floor. "Fuck." It skittered under the desk as he tried to grab it. He straightened and brushed any wrinkles in his pants. *Get it together, man.* Whether she stayed or went, at least it would be resolved.

He strolled to the mantle where he would greet her. The dark granite under his hands offered a sense of solidness, a reflection of what he'd like to appear when she walked in, cool and strong.

An ember popped to land on his shoe. He scuffed it out and leaned against the stone, his eyes focused on the door. A faint mumble of greetings floated from the foyer.

This was nonsense.

He strode to the study's exit so he could greet her in the foyer, then stopped. That would seem too eager.

He paced the room, running his hand over his smooth head, and wondered how to receive her. It would land him in jail or worse if he did what he wanted to do—tear her clothes off, confine her to his bedroom, and never let her go.

When had he become so insecure? Not even a minute in his home and she reduced him, Daedalus Pal Robi, a prime of the Nosferatu clan, to a teenager. A small growl rumbled deep inside a well of frustration that had gathered over the last weeks.

The knob turned.

He faced the door and crossed his arms over his chest. She needed to accept him for what he was, no compromises, no apologies.

The door opened, and the sight of the breath-taking enigma gliding into the study nailed his feet to the floor.

Their relationship started in an unconventional way. They didn't have a chance to go out on dates or mingle socially. It remained confined to wonderful moments at her apartment, in between their busy schedules. Never an occasion to dress up.

She cleaned up nice. He'd always thought her beautiful, now she made him take the saying "eye-candy" literally. The black, knee length, spaghetti strapped dress flowed along her lush curves. It contrasted with her milky white skin and enhanced its smooth softness. Her pale blond hair fell in big, bouncy curls around her face like silken threads.

"Sugar," he breathed.

Her stilettos clicked on the hardwood floor.

The gloss of her dark red lipstick drew his attention with visions of them wrapped around his cock. He mentally slapped himself. *Think with the big bald head, not the little one.*

Smiling, she approached him. "I'm happy to see you've recovered."

He touched his chest where the stake had penetrated him. "It didn't go all the way through. If I'd been a younger vampire, it would have been the end of me." He resisted the urge to twirl the wayward curl on her cheek.

She tilted her face up to him. "We never talked after the attack." The tips of her fingers brushed his shirt over his wound, and it softened his resolve to be stoic. "It surprised me you could wake in the day, let alone fight and save me."

Those crystal green eyes weakened his knees. They were the most honest eyes he'd ever seen, nothing hid in them. "Most can't."

She stepped closer, her intense stare making him nervous. "Only the oldest of your kind have those abilities."

He swallowed, she knew. "Where are my manners?" He gestured to the chairs. "Please, sit with me."

With a hand on his chest she stopped him as he began to move toward them. "How old are you?"

"You came across the country to ask me that?"

She gnawed at her lower lip. “No. It’s just...” She sighed and let her hand fall, then made her way to the chairs.

He pulled his in front of hers so their knees almost touched. Leaning forward, he answered the question he always hated. “I lost count after eleven hundred years.”

She sat up straighter. “Wow.”

He caressed her knee. “Does it matter, Sugar?” He couldn’t resist slipping his hand under the hem of her dress to touch her skin. “I-I’d do anything—”

She placed her fingertips to his lips to silence him. “I love you, Daedalus. That’s never been the issue.”

He sat back. His fingers still tingled from the touch of her skin. “I wondered. It’s nice to hear.” They were about to have the conversation he’d wanted since he healed enough to rise to consciousness. His courage dwindled for a moment, but why would she travel across the continent to blow him off?

Her grin faded. “I needed time to figure things out. Where did I want my life to head? If I stayed with you and the Omegas, life would be...”

“Difficult?”

“Out of the ordinary.”

He stared at her. “And your verdict?”

She stood, then sat on his lap. “I’m here.” Her hands ran over his scalp.

As her supple fingers caressed his head he closed his eyes, afraid she’d see the tears that threatened to spill. “I noticed.” The urge to ignite this spark she’d planted made him on edge. He didn’t want to initiate anything. *She came to him.*

“I moved,” she whispered in his ear.

He raised an eyebrow, and his mouth twisted in a smile. Like he didn’t already know this. “Eric informed me.”

She stretched herself along him. “I spoke with him.”

“It’s about time. They’ve been concerned about you.” The warmth of her body seeped into his.

“He has control of the Ayumu now. I know he asked Robert and Sam to follow me. I told him to stop. He needs them more than I do.”

Daedalus told Eric to stop for the same reason. His security had protected Sugar since the day of the attack, keeping her safe from any other retaliation.

The overwhelming emotions which almost drowned him receded. He opened his eyes to a wonderful sight. Exposed generous, round breasts almost spilled out of Sugar’s dress as she stretched forward. “Officially, I’m still his advisor,” he stated. They were very close to falling out. He couldn’t help but silently cheer them on.

She took a deep breath. “It must be hard to advise when you don’t even live close to Chicago.”

“Yeah.” Maybe if he pulled on the fabric.

She traced her fingers along her collarbone, then around her cleavage. "I bought a house."

"Uh-huh." His eyes followed the patterns she drew on herself. The Sahara settled in his mouth, and everything he thirsted for sat on his lap. He licked his lips. She had no idea how she affected him. The hunger she produced.

One of the dress straps slid off her shoulder and exposed more tender flesh. "The original Omegas are moving in while I'm here visiting."

"Yeah?" She wasn't wearing a bra.

"There's room for one more."

He tore his attention from her flesh and lifted his face to meet her eyes. "You want me to move in with you and live with the Omegas again?"

She nodded, eyes wide and earnest. "I've missed you. After the attack I was afraid. I didn't know what to do, where I belonged, or how to stay safe."

"So you left." It came out harsher than he intended.

She straightened and pulled up the dress strap. If he could have taken those words back, he would have.

"Yes, I needed space."

He chuckled at himself. The thought of living with the Omegas again caused him a little trepidation. It had gotten crowded in their slight apartment, yet he'd enjoyed their company and had some fun. Boundaries would have to be set. They wouldn't be allowed to use his coffin as a coffee table again, and there would be a television. A big one. But he'd have his Sugar.

He wrapped his hands around her waist and pulled her to him. With a brush of his lips on hers all was forgiven. None of it mattered, adjustments could be made, his existence would continue on a happier path. He'd given much of his time to his people over the centuries, Sugar would be his reward.

She moaned after she retreated from his kiss. "Is that a yes?"

"Yes."

Bouncing on his lap, she hugged him and pressed against his hard-on. "I'm glad this hasn't changed," she whispered as she ground her ass on him. She glanced over her shoulder at the white fur rug spread in front of the hearth. "Nice rug. What kind of animal is it?"

"Polar bear."

She glanced at him, eyebrows raised.

He shrugged. "I'm a natural predator and a competitive man."

"A predator of predators?"

"Not so much anymore." He couldn't stop watching Sugar as she removed her shoes and ran her toes through the thick, pale fur of his rug.

“It’s soft.” She slid off his lap to walk to the middle of it. “I’ve missed you.” She reached back and unzipped her dress, baring her skin an inch at a time. “I want to show you how much.” The heated gaze she offered him over her shoulder melted him to the chair. The dress pooled at her feet. Naked, she dropped to her knees and crawled across the fur.

The flames in the hearth created the only light in the room. It reflected off her smooth skin, highlighting every luscious curve. She stretched her abdomen along the fur. It barely brushed her taught stomach and ripe nipples.

The blood rushed from Daedalus’s head straight to his cock, turning his erection painful with need. He’d denied himself any kind of release since they’d last been together two months ago. It took every ounce of his will power to control the urge to bury himself to the balls in her. Instead, he undid enough buttons to be able to pull his shirt over his head, then struggled out of his pants.

When he approached to stand in front of her, she came to her knees to receive him, touching the length of his legs with her hands. The gentle contact of her kisses as they traveled up his thighs made him quiver in anticipation. She knew what he needed, what he wanted. She lapped at his balls with the tip of her tongue and ran her hands over his hard ass. Torture seemed to be her game. Wanting a better view, he pushed her sunlight spun hair from her face.

Boldly she ran her tongue up his cock, like a lollipop.

He gasped and threw his head back, catching himself when he stumbled since his knees turned to jell-o. The onslaught of pleasure almost caused him to lose control. Almost. He tangled his fingers in her hair.

She gazed up at him. Her breath came in heated puffs over his tip. The hunger in her eyes matched his.

“Sugar.” Her name came out as a groan from the pit of his stomach. She would grant his earlier wish.

Her sumptuous, glossy red lips covered him. She took her time to slide all the way to his base. Dewy, moist, warm. She angled back so he could watch himself slip out while she pulled away.

A sound of ecstasy rolled off his lips before she started to suck him in and out. And in and out. An intense fast rhythm, taking him deeper and deeper with each stroke.

His breath grew ragged with the pace. He twined his fingers in her curls to thrust himself with her rhythm. Passion surged through his body, and the depth of it staggered him. Control slipping, he concentrated to slake off some of this intense desire.

It wasn’t working.

“Sugar... I can’t... Oh...yes...”

She slowed the rhythm and swallowed him deep, then sucked hard as she withdrew.

He breathed in short, sharp gasps as she repeated this over and over, drawing animalistic grunts and groans from him. Unable to hold back any longer, he slid himself down her eager throat to feel her swallow his seed.

Her hands slid around his ass, clasp him there until he was spent.

He slipped out of her mouth as he came down hard on his knees, then wrapped her in his arms tight. "Sweet, sweet, Sugar," he whispered. Laying her onto the white fur, he looked over the body of the woman who'd haunted him. Round, voluptuous breasts with their pink, ripe nipples, smooth creamy skin, and pale yellow curls damp with her dew. So many choices he couldn't decide where to start.

"Feed on me."

"I plan to." The decision made for him, he spread her legs.

"Not that. Bite me."

"Really?" A thrill of malevolent delight ran up his spine. Sex was great but with blood it became mind-blowing.

A slight tremor shook her. "I want you."

He could smell her fear building. It would make her delicious, yet he'd learned by past mistakes fear was stronger than love. It would destroy anything between them.

"You don't have to do this. You had me when you stepped out of the cab." He added as much reassurance to his smile as he could.

She returned it, and the scent of fear vanished. "Be gentle, you're my first."

He crawled up her body in one fluid motion and stared deep into her clear green eyes. This experience was important to him. If he screwed up, she'd never let him do it again. How long could he stay with her without it?

He caught her mind like all his prey, then willed her to feel no pain, to relax and enjoy the feel of his body against hers. She wrapped him in her arms and legs, a low moan whispered in his ear. He was surprised to feel his cock responding already.

She turned her head to the side.

As he kissed down her throat, he could hear the drumming beat of her heart. It intoxicated him. He fondled her breast, teasing the nipple, eliciting a moan when she arched against him. His sharp fangs closed over her neck to pierce her tender, salty skin.

The initial spill of blood flowed down his throat. He wanted to savor it and remember this taste forever. He let it trickle out on its own, trying not to be greedy, not wanting to take too much. Later it would be harder to control this hunger.

She writhed under him and made mewling noises.

It drove him crazy. He released her breast to slide his fingers along her wet slit. Her scent drifted up to him, adding to his excitement. His fingers slid inside her to touch the silky cushion of her sex. The nub of her clit brushed his thumb and caused her to cry out. He ground it in circular motions.

She scratched his shoulders when her nails bit in his skin. "Oh... That's...that's good..."

His cock throbbed with fullness. He positioned himself so he could have her both ways, with his cock and his mouth. He pressed his tip to the entrance of her sex to tease her opening.

She groaned and raised her hips, inviting him in.

He clamped down firmer onto her neck as he began pressing himself into her tight, soaked pussy. The hunger drove him and grew stronger; he became a creature more of sensation than of reason. He drank deeply while pumping harder.

Her incomprehensible cries grew louder, more labored. She clawed at his back, grinding her hips with his rhythm, panting with each deep, hard stroke.

She felt wet and velvety. Her blood tasted sweet and tangy.

He pinned her down so she wouldn't tear herself on his fangs.

She struggled.

This prey behavior excited him, but he had to be careful to not draw too much blood, not to scare her. The demon housed in his soul wanted to be released. Not this time, never again. Instead, he focused on her hot, wet opening as it convulsed around him.

She squeezed him when her climax crested. His guards out by the gate probably could hear her cries.

He pumped as deep as he could until he came inside of her, then withdrew the bite to roar his own finish.

* * * *

Sugar rested in Daedalus's arms on the polar bear rug in front of the fire, thrilled she'd made the right decision in coming here. The move and the house didn't solve her problems.

Daedalus did.

She loved the expression on his face when she'd walked into the study. Never had she been with any man who made her feel so beautiful, sexy, and safe. Who cared if her best friends were werewolves and her lover a vampire?

She flushed away those hang-ups once she'd been on her own. Danger lurked everywhere, not only from paranormal beings. Humans were violent and unpredictable too. She could isolate herself more but for what? To survive? She wanted to live and to be with the man she loved.

None of her human friends worried about her, sent guards to try and secretly follow her, or wrote her atrocious poetry.

Daedalus whispered in her ear.

"That was a very moving poem."

"It's a limerick. I'm a treasure trove of dirty limericks." He leered at her and wiggled his eyebrows, then leaned in to whisper another.

She giggled. "More."

He whispered again.

"That's the best one of all. I love you too."

About Annie Nicholas

http://www.lyricalpress.com/annie_nicholas

From my home in the Vermont mountains, I spend many hours in front of the computer creating many worlds. Armed with a back pocket full of wonderful influences from decades of reading, I write paranormal with a twist.

I am struck by the similarity people have to wolves. While on a long drive to Canada, I dwelled on our common behaviors and my story came to life.

Every high school has clicks. There are the jocks, the valley girls, the *in* crowd, and nameless other groups, but each school has their nerds. So do wolf packs. They call them Omegas. The lowest of the low, all the other wolves pick on these poor fellows.

Just like we do.

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