

COBBLESTONE PRESS PRESENTS



# SHIFTERS

C.L. Casey



SCARLETT'S  
WOLF

*Scarlett's Wolf*

*By*

*C.L. Casey*

## **Scarlett's Wolf by C.L. Casey**

---

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

### **Scarlett's Wolf**

Copyright© 2009 C.L. Casey

ISBN: 978-1-60088-449-8

Cover Artist: Bree Bridges

Editor: Brandi Loyd

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced electronically or in print without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in reviews.

Cobblestone Press, LLC

[www.cobblestone-press.com](http://www.cobblestone-press.com)

## **Dedication**

To my friends, Chris Braeger and Cyndi Breau, for their support and encouragement right from the beginning.

To my editor, Brandi Loyd, for all of her wonderful suggestions, her patience, and all of her hard work. I can't thank her enough.

To Jim Rogers, for his support, his humor, and especially his friendship. You mean the world to me.

## Chapter One

His mangled body lay in the middle of the street just outside the glow of the street lamp, and it twitched as his mind clung onto consciousness. He could feel his life slip from his body as he tried to take his last breath. Blood gurgled from his ripped throat. The last thing he saw was the golden orbs of a little black cat that stared at his face.

Though he knew his body was dead since he could no longer feel his heartbeat, he was still aware of his body and surroundings. He could feel something inside him that wanted to come to life, some primal animal-like being.

His lifeless eyes settled on the unblinking little black cat. Was that pity or compassion in its gold, almond-shaped eyes? Did it want to communicate with him? Or was it just curious, like all cats are, about the dead body in the road?

When the ambulance backed up, the cat silently padded out of the way. He wanted to reach out and stop it, to stroke its soft fur, to know all would be okay. At the same time, whatever this savage thing was inside him, it wanted to rip the little kitty apart and feast on it.

The urge to cry out to the EMT's as they jostled his body while zipping up the bag was profound. He wanted comfort from the little black cat, wanted to tell someone to let it ride along with him, yet he couldn't make a sound.

His thoughts were so consumed by the little black cat that he didn't realize he had been transported elsewhere until his body was dumped on

a cold, hard metal table.

He figured they had taken him to the morgue. Since he had no vital signs, they would consider him dead. The coroner would want to determine what mangled him up. He would've told them if he could talk. The sound of voices and footsteps filled his ears, but he couldn't understand what was said. He recognized the silence though when they left him alone. He wasn't sure how long he was left there.

All he could feel was the beast within him as it grew in strength and life.

He wondered where the little black cat went. Whether he wanted to pet it or eat it, he wasn't sure.

Then he heard the door swing open. Heard the soft footsteps of someone approach. Saw the face of a beautiful woman come into view. She looked into his eyes as if she knew he was still alive in there somewhere. The kindness and empathy she showed made him fall in love with her right there. Something about her reminded him of the little black cat.

He must look terrible. He wished he could have at least straightened out his clothes and introduced himself.

"I'm so sorry this happened to you," she said, her voice a soft whisper.

*It's okay. It wasn't your fault* is what he wanted to tell her.

She smiled at him. "I'm going to help you. Unfortunately, I don't think you'll consider it help."

She reached into a small black bag and pulled out a bunch of violet blue flowers. He watched as best as he could while she laid them all around him on the table. He wished he could take her to dinner and a movie—hold her hand, kiss her lips, make love to her.

The animal in him wanted to grab her and fuck her until she cried out in pain. Then it wanted to rip her apart and taste her blood.

She pulled out a small bottle with a clear liquid inside then took a deep breath before she said, "I'll explain what I'm about to do, what will happen to you if I don't do this."

She looked worried, and he wanted her to hurry and get on with

whatever she had to do. The beast was gaining control; it could smell her wonderful perfume.

"You were attacked and bitten by a werewolf." She stopped right there and waited as if she wanted to give him time to absorb the information.

*A werewolf?* Werewolves weren't real. They were myths. His heart would have sunk if it could've. She was a whack job, a beautiful whack job.

"I know you think I'm crazy, and I don't blame you. The flowers I placed around you are wolfsbane. Even as we speak the monster inside you is gaining strength as it comes to life."

How did she know? What could she do to help him?

"What I will do is reverse this curse in you. I will perform a ritual that will reverse this, and it will work because you haven't tasted human blood, yet."

The animal inside him understood what this meant and knew its time was short, but it was powerless in speeding up the process of its transformation.

She appeared sad as she continued, "If I don't perform this ritual, you will live in torment as a werewolf. You will kill innocent people and eat their flesh. I can't let that happen."

He wanted to die, to be truly dead, not in this retched state of limbo. What had he done to deserve this type of punishment?

She looked deep into his eyes, into his soul, if he still had one. "Because you died in human form, once this ritual is complete and the monster is dead, you will be dead as well. I'm sorry, but at least you will be able to rest."

She removed the cap from the bottle and sprinkled some of the liquid over his body as she chanted words he could not understand. The beast within was in a rage and caused him to feel pain in his lifeless body.

She then tilted his head back and poured the liquid into his mouth, an obvious attempt to get as much as possible down the portion of his throat that hadn't been ripped out. All the while, she continued her chant. This sent the beast into a psychotic rampage inside him.

## Scarlett's Wolf by C.L. Casey

---

The pain the man felt was horrific and, yet, he knew it meant his release. He wanted to thank her for setting him free.

His awareness was rapidly growing dim, the monster was weakening in its loss; he felt her lips touch his forehead as he slipped into death and rest beyond.

\* \* \* \* \*

The wolf hid in the shadows, his black fur a perfect blend with the night. His blue eyes were all that was visible when the light bounced off of them.

There was no mistaking the scent of the dying man in the street. It wouldn't be long before the man breathed his last breath, and then the wolf could venture out from the shadows and investigate the situation.

The wolf was patient, his gaze following bits of paper blown in swirly, zigzag motions on the mild night breeze. He was about to leave the safety of the darkness when he caught another scent in the air—soft feminine perfume, expensive stuff.

He stared as a little black cat, cautious but casual, padded its way toward the man who lay prone and wounded in the street. The cat trotted forward without sound, almost as if it floated just above the surface of the ground. The cat stopped and looked at the man's face. Was it communicating with the man?

The wolf stayed hidden to observe the odd exchange between man and little cat. He could hear the man's heart beat slower as his human life was at an end. He could smell the blood gurgle up from the mangled throat in the man's last effort to speak. Speak to whom, the cat?

When the man's human life was gone, the wolf could sense the existence of the beast within, could sense the beast as it struggled to come to life and grow in strength. Soon the beast would come forth and need to feed. Maybe the beast would eat the cat. The wolf wasn't fond of cats.

Two police officers showed up and taped off the area to keep people away. One guy tried to scare the cat away with no success. The exchange between the little black cat and the dead man was too intense.

When the ambulance backed up, the cat ran over and sat on the garbage cans, almost as if to make sure the EMT's did their job right, as if it needed to watch over the dead man.

The more curious of the EMT's noticed the cat and asked one of the officers, "Hey, you think that cat belongs to this guy?"

The officer looked over his shoulder at the cat perched on the trashcan and replied, "No, it's just a stray. Why would a guy bring his cat out here? It's not like he was taking it for a walk."

The EMT shrugged his shoulders and bent down to zip up the body bag. "Just thought I'd ask. It has a collar."

They watched for a moment as the cat leisurely washed one of its front paws. All of a sudden it stopped and looked in the direction of the shadows.

The cat narrowed its eyes and stood up on tiptoes. It arched its back and puffed out its fur as it laid its ears flat against its head and let out a loud hiss. The men turned in the direction the cat faced.

One of the officers took a few steps in the same direction. "There's something over there."

The wolf stepped out of the night, lowered his head, and raised the hair on his hackles as he curled his lip back to bare long white fangs.

All of the men stopped and stared, unable to believe what they saw. The EMT's were the first to jump into action. They grabbed the gurney and slipped it into the back of the vehicle; each made a comment about the need to not stick around long.

The officers drew their guns, and one asked, "What the hell is that?"

The braver of the two took a few cautious steps forward. "Stray dog."

"That's no stray dog. Look at it."

The wolf stayed a good distance back while he watched the medical crew load up the gurney and drive off. The cat had already left. He backed up when the officer moved toward him, then vanished into the night again, leaving the men stupefied as to his whereabouts.

He followed the scent of the dead man, sticking to the shadows

whenever possible, as the ambulance sped down the streets to the morgue. The wolf arrived soon after the man's body had already been taken into the building.

He made his way as close to the building as he could without risk of discovery. There were just too many people in the area. He was about to turn away when the familiar scent of the cat struck his nostrils. He would like to teach that pussy a lesson by devouring it, so the wolf waited and watched, but what he saw was no feline.

She had dark hair, nice legs, and curves that made him lick his chops. She didn't see him but went into the building. There was no mistaking the soft perfume mingled with the scent of womanhood.

Whatever her connection to the cat or to the dead man, he would have to find out another time. He had to get back.

After he made his way through the city, he arrived at the condominium he called home. The wolf silently padded its way up the fire escape on the back of the building and leaped into the open third floor window.

He wound his way through the room and down a short hall to stand before a full-length mirror. The reflection showed a huge wolf with shiny black fur, long white fangs, and pale blue-gray eyes. The wolf tossed his head and arched his back as it made a bone-crunching shift from animal to man. Now the image was one of a naked, six-foot-two, muscular man with dark hair, a closely trimmed goatee, and tattoos on both biceps. The pale blue-gray eyes were the only feature that remained unchanged.

## Chapter Two

Blake de Marco looked at the clock on the nightstand. He had just enough time to eat and shower before he had to leave for the restaurant. As he zipped his jeans, his stomach growled. He hadn't eaten anything yet today, although the cat would have been a nice morsel.

He made his way to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. There was nothing but water, juice, and a couple bottles of wine. He sighed as he closed the door, and decided to head down a floor to his friend's place. Case always had fresh meat.

Blake didn't bother to put on a shirt or shoes, just headed out the door and took the stairs to avoid any of the "wealthy" people that lived in the building.

Case's door was swung open as he approached, and a very angry blonde pushed past him to make her way to the elevator. Blake entered his friend's place, closed the door behind him, and headed for the dining room where, instead of a table and chairs, there was a richly carved mahogany pool table. His friend was walking around it as he tried to decide on what shot to take.

Casey Delaney was Blake's closest friend, both bitten by the same alpha werewolf. Case, as he liked to be called, was from Texas and had a way with women; they found him dark and mysterious. All Case had to do was look them in the eye, call them "baby doll" with that Texas drawl, and they were spellbound. They melted like butter at his dark southern charm. *Usually...*

Blake saw his friend line up a shot and asked about the angry blonde, "What was wrong with this one?"

Case took his shot, and the ball just missed the pocket. Swearing under his breath, he looked at Blake across the table and replied, "Wouldn't ride on the bike. Said it would mess up her hair. A woman has got to like a man's bike."

Blake shook his head. "That motorcycle is going to make you a lonely old werewolf."

Case leaned on his pool stick and smiled. "There's a woman out there somewhere who loves to ride as much as I do. I'll find her. Speaking of lonely old werewolves, what's your excuse?"

Blake rounded the pool table and headed for the kitchen. "I'm picky. Do you have any meat?"

"Yeah, in the fridge. There are a few steaks and some chops. Help yourself."

Blake opened the refrigerator and was amazed at the amount of meat stuffed inside. He shouted over his shoulder, "A few steaks and some chops? It looks like you have a whole cow in here." He grabbed one of the big steaks and stood in the doorway to eat it while he watched Case take another shot.

Case lined up his stick, hit the ball, and it glided across the green. He straightened and watched his decision play out before he turned to Blake. "So how did it go tonight?"

Blake contemplated his steak before he said, "There was another. Badly mangled. The brutality is escalating."

"What happened?"

"I couldn't get to him. Ambulance and cops showed up, but there was something else. I watched a cat go up to the guy as he was dying, and when I followed the ambulance to the morgue, a woman walked in."

Case chalked up his cue and lined up another shot. "So, what's so strange about that? A stray cat was in the area. Did you go after it? It would be the first pussy you've eaten in a while." He smiled at Blake over his shoulder as he took his shot. "I'm sure there are women at the morgue quite often."

"They had the same scent, same perfume."

"Well, if the cat smelled like her perfume, maybe it was her cat."

Blake gave Case an intense look. "Not just the perfume, Case. The same scent." He just couldn't get her out of his mind. She smelled so good. The combination of her perfume and her pussy was something he didn't want to forget.

Case leaned against the table and studied his friend. "There's something more you're not telling me. What next?"

"I'm not sure. I have to work tonight, but I'll go over to the morgue early tomorrow before Jimmy leaves for the day. Maybe he'll have some information for me."

"I wouldn't trust that Jimmy. He's one of *hers*."

Blake grabbed another steak and walked through the dining room past Case as he headed for the door. "Jimmy's okay, but I'll be careful nonetheless. If you're not busy later, stop by the restaurant." Blake smiled over his shoulder as he continued, "I'll make sure they put scraps out back for you and your stray friends. Thanks for the meat."

Later, when Blake was in the shower, he thought about the woman. There was something familiar about her. He only caught a glimpse of her profile, but he was sure he had never met her. Her scent was what he couldn't get out of his mind. Case was right; it had been a while. If there was one thing that werewolves and wolves had in common, it was mating, and both mated for life.

That's what ended his last relationship. The fooling around was nice, but when Michelle brought up how she wanted to take the relationship to the next level, well, he couldn't see spending his life with her. Sex would have bound him to Michelle forever, and he knew she wasn't the right one for him.

Now, the woman at the morgue was a little different. He'd follow that scent to the fires of hell and back. Just the thought of it made his heart race. He had to stop thinking about licking that pussy and get his ass in gear. He had to work.

\* \* \* \* \*

She sat at the bar and waited for her two friends. It had been a rough night, and she was hungry. Ashling Scarlett sipped her wine and studied her surroundings.

The bar area of *El Fuego Restaurante* was warm and cozy as well as expensive, with brass fixtures, polished oak bar, huge stone fireplace, and a beautiful mosaic tile floor. It gave an air of intimacy with soft illumination as if lit by candlelight. She always loved this Spanish restaurant but seldom came. When her two friends asked her to join them for dinner, she jumped at the chance to treat herself.

She leaned over to fix the rhinestone ankle strap on her shoe when she caught a glimpse of an exceptional looking man. She guessed he had to be one of the waiters by the way he was dressed—black pants and vest along with a crisp white shirt that contrasted with his nice olive skin. His sleeves were rolled up to mid forearm.

Ashling let her gaze roam over him and appreciated all she saw. He was a bit taller than most, short dark hair and trimmed goatee, strong masculine jaw, and had a nice muscular lean body. When she looked up at his face again, he was watching her. That she hadn't expected. He arched one eyebrow and gave her a lopsided grin before he turned and headed back into the kitchen. She could feel her cheeks flame and hoped with the dim light he hadn't noticed.

She caught sight of Suzanne and Marie at the coat check. Ashling prayed her cheeks would cool off by the time she met them at the hostess desk.

The hostess waited with patience as they hugged and complimented each other's outfits, and then led them through the restaurant to a table near another fireplace; this one was big enough to fit a table and chairs inside of it. After she handed them each a menu, the hostess told them their waiter would be with them shortly. All three sat in silence as they scanned through the menu.

"Good evening, ladies." The rich masculine voice made Ashling's nipples tingle. When she looked up, she saw the handsome waiter. She could feel her pulse race and her cheeks begin to warm again. There was

no way Suzanne and Marie wouldn't notice him, not after hearing a sexy voice like that.

"Welcome to *El Fuego*." He looked directly at Ashling as he continued speaking. "My name is Blake, Blake de Marco, and I'll be your waiter this evening. If there's anything you want, be sure to let me know." As if he just remembered there were two other people at the table, Blake looked at each of them and asked if there was anything he could get them from the bar.

After he left to get their drinks and to let them look over the menu a bit longer, Suzanne and Marie studied Ashling.

"I think someone is interested in you." Suzanne smiled as she made the statement. "Very interested."

Marie nudged Ashling. "I agree. We almost had to get up and dance before he noticed us here. Do you know him?"

Ashling pretended to look at her menu as she tried to keep her cheeks from flushing. "No, I've never seen him before. He's not interested, though. I don't know where you two get that stuff."

Suzanne sat back in her seat and rolled her eyes. "Oh please. If that were true, then why are your cheeks so red? And don't tell me it's because we're near the fireplace." She leaned in as if to tell some dark secret. "If it continues through dinner, you should give him your number or get his."

"That's a good idea," Marie commented while she browsed her menu. "You haven't been out much since Josh's funeral. We worry about you."

Before Ashling could respond, a young girl brought their drinks along with their water. Ashling waited for her to leave before she said, "I'm not about to go out with someone I don't know. What's there to worry about? I'm fine." She shifted a little in her chair and hoped they couldn't read her mind, but the first thing that popped into her head was being in bed with Blake. She thought of him on his back, his hands caressing her breasts as she rode up and down the length of him. Ashling could feel herself getting wet at the thought.

Suzanne gave her a wicked grin. "If you give him your number and talk to him, you'll get to know him, and then he won't be a stranger

anymore."

Marie picked up where Suzanne left off. "Josh's funeral was over a year ago. Aside from work, you don't go out except with us. You need a man. You should blow off some steam."

Just then, Blake showed up with a vase that contained three roses, two white and one red.

"I thought you ladies would like some flowers for your table." After he set them in the center, Blake looked at Ashling.

She looked up at him shyly through lowered lids and said, "Thank you."

He responded with a soft, "My pleasure." His eyes got more intense and bluer with apparent desire.

Suzanne and Marie exchanged knowing looks, but kept their mouths shut about the obvious transaction between her and the waiter.

Through dinner, the conversation centered on work and family, but Ashling didn't dare tell them what she was up to earlier that evening. They wouldn't understand.

She did have to admit they were right about one thing. She needed a man. It had been too long. After Josh's death, she hadn't had the opportunity or the interest since other things took precedence. However, Blake presented the first interest she had in a long time. She didn't want to blow off some steam like Marie had suggested. She wanted more but knew, with the situation as it was, it couldn't be more.

After dinner, Ashling perused the dessert menu with little interest, stealing a glance at Blake who was at another table filled with women swooning over him. He seemed to take it in stride, probably used to it, and then he turned and looked directly at her. How did he know she was watching him?

After dessert, Ashling and her friends decided to get drinks elsewhere. She didn't mind the distraction since going home meant spending another night alone. Maybe she should let off some steam.

Blake brought the check and watched Ashling take the red rose out of the vase before she left the table. He arrived at the hostess desk as they were putting on their coats. "I hope you ladies enjoyed your meals."

Suzanne looked him up and down. "It was very enjoyable. Emphasis on the very."

Marie hooked her arm through Suzanne's and started to lead her toward the doors. "Come on, Suzi." She looked at Blake and continued, "Everything was wonderful, thank you."

Blake looked at Ashling, his voice soft, as he said, "Be sure to come back again soon."

She smiled shyly at him. "I'm sure we will." Then she turned and followed her friends out the door and down the street.

### Chapter Three

Blake helped clear the dining room after the restaurant closed. He wanted time to think before he met Case outside.

As he cleared debris from the tables and pulled off the table clothes, he thought about the girl from the morgue. He was a little surprised to see her at the bar, but when he caught her looking him over he not only became more curious about her, he became aroused.

It was dumb luck that she and her friends were seated in his section. He wanted to make sure she knew he was interested in her as a woman; finding out her connection to the dead guy and the cat would come up along the way, if there were a connection.

Her scent was intoxicating, it drew him like no other woman had, and she was gorgeous to boot. Her dark hair was pulled back into some sort of clip. He could imagine that it was long and would cascade down around her breasts. Her breasts, the perfect handful. She had brown eyes with flecks of gold that picked up the light of the fire, soft white skin, and those legs... The thought of them wrapped around him made him hard.

Someone in the bar area dropped a glass, and the sound of it shattering when it hit the tile floor brought him out of his reverie.

Blake didn't get the opportunity to ask the woman for her name, but he did overhear her friends mention plans to get drinks in the Diamond Room at the Crystal Hotel. Since it was just a few blocks away, he decided it would be a good idea to show up.

He said his good-byes to everyone and stepped out the door of the

restaurant into the cool night air. He breathed in deeply. There were so many smells in the spring breeze it was impossible to single out her scent.

Case had parked his motorcycle on the other side of the street under the glow of a nearby street lamp. He was half sitting and half leaning on the soft leather seat, arms folded over his chest. Blake darted across when he saw his friend.

Case straightened as Blake approached. "I thought you were going to bring scraps for us strays."

Blake pulled a Styrofoam container out of his coat pocket and handed it to his friend. "Here, I brought you some glazed spareribs."

Case took the container and opened it. "No extra glaze?"

Blake smiled and ignored the smart comment. "Will your bike be okay parked here for a while?"

Case's answer was muffled as he tried to keep the bits of meat in his mouth and off the front of his leather jacket. "Yeah, sure. Why, where are we going?"

"Diamond Room."

Case followed Blake as he started down the sidewalk, licking glaze off his fingers. "At the Crystal? I'm not exactly dressed for that place. What's there?"

"A woman. The woman from the morgue to be exact."

"How do you know that?"

"She was at the restaurant tonight with a couple of her friends. I overheard them say they were going there after dinner for some drinks."

"How long ago was that?"

"Couple of hours at least."

"And you think she's still there?"

"Only one way to find out."

They walked along in silence until Case's curiosity could no longer be contained. "What does she look like? Is she pretty?"

"She's gorgeous. At least I think so."

Blake started to rethink his idea of going to the hotel with his friend. If the woman were there, he would have to introduce her to Case, and then any idea he had of getting together with her would be lost. He

didn't know what it was about Case, but women fell under a spell with him. Not even Michelle had been immune, which was another reason he couldn't see spending a lifetime with her. Well, there wasn't much he could do about it now. They were about to walk through the front doors into the lobby.

Case grabbed a hold of Blake's arm to stop him. "How do you know there's a connection between her and the guy at the morgue?"

"I don't."

Case was dumbfounded. "Then why are we here? Please don't tell me you're going after her because that cat had on the same perfume. There's something else that you're not telling me."

Why was he here? It was her scent. He didn't care about the damn cat. He could certainly tell that to Case. He'd understand that. How do you tell your best friend you don't want to introduce him to a girl because you're afraid he'll steal her away from you?

Blake started to explain about the woman's scent, but when he looked at Case, he realized Case hadn't heard a word that he said. He turned in the direction that Case faced and found what had captured his friend's attention—a cute brunette behind the reception desk. The girl had no idea she was being hunted or that she would soon fall prey to Case.

Case's eyes never left the girl as he asked, "You'll be okay on your own from now on, won't you?" Even before Blake could answer, Case started to walk away.

Blake stood and watched for a moment. The girl was polite and smiled, but seemed unaffected by Case's charm. He knew full well Case would be equally unaffected by her lack of interest and would consider it a challenge.

After the thumbs up from his friend, Blake turned and was about to walk into the Diamond Room when the woman he was there for walked out, still carrying the rose from the restaurant. She came to an abrupt halt when she saw him.

He didn't want to frighten her, so he smiled and said, "Hello."

She cocked her head slightly to one side and looked up at him. She studied him for a moment before she smiled and said, "Hello," in return.

Blake stepped forward. "I'm Blake, from the restaurant."

"Yes, I remember. You were our waiter."

He needed to get her name, but his tongue felt awkward and leaden. "I'm afraid I didn't get a chance to ask your name earlier."

"It's Ashling."

Just then her two friends poured out into the lobby. The petite blonde made a fuss over Ashling walking home alone at that hour until she noticed Blake standing nearby.

"Well, if it isn't our handsome waiter," she said too loudly. She winked at Ashling and continued in a loud whisper. "Get him to walk you home. Invite him in and jump his bones."

Ashling looked as if she wanted to crawl under a rock as her cheeks flushed.

The other friend grabbed the blonde's arm and looked at Blake. "Sorry about that. She's had a little too much." Then she looked over at Ashling and asked, "Are you sure you're going to be okay?"

"I'll be fine, Marie. Honest."

Marie hugged Ashling before she steered the blonde out the doors and down the street to the parking lot.

Ashling and Blake stepped out of the hotel and onto the sidewalk. She took a few steps before she turned back to face Blake. "It was nice to see you again."

"Would it be okay if I walked with you? I live in the same direction." He lied, but he didn't want her to walk home alone at this hour any more than her friends did. He also didn't want her to think he was some sort of stalker. Besides, it made a perfect opportunity to talk and get to know her better.

She hesitated with her answer and studied him again, almost as if she were trying to read his mind or see into his heart. Then she gave him a smile and said, "Sure. It would be nice not to have to walk alone."

They walked a couple of blocks in silence then turned a corner and headed into a more residential area with apartments and townhouses.

"Ashling. That's an unusual name. You must hear that a lot." Blake couldn't understand why his mind was so numb. He was usually much

better at conversation than this, and he was never so shy about hitting on a beautiful woman before.

Ashling smiled and looked into his eyes as if she sensed his uncertainty. "I do, but it is usually asked by people that have a genuine interest. Ashling is an old family name. I'm named after my Irish great-grandmother." She glanced at him briefly before continuing with, "The name Blake doesn't sound Spanish like de Marco."

"My father was from Spain. He taught music history and Flamenco guitar at the university. My mother was from around here, a small town about thirty miles from here. She was what some would call the all-American blonde with blue eyes, while my father was considered the stereo-typical dark and swarthy Spaniard."

She gave him a sexy look as her gaze swept over him, and she quietly remarked, "That explains the blue eyes. The rest is definitely Spaniard."

"That's a pretty pendant you have on." He noticed it earlier—a small silver filigree heart on a red velvet choker.

Ashling reached up and fingered the delicate piece before she said, "Thank you." Then she stopped in front of an old Victorian home that had a wrap-around porch and gingerbread accents. "This is my place."

Blake saw her name on one of the mailboxes at the bottom of the steps. *Apartment A*. That meant she lived upstairs. Then he saw her last name. "Your last name is Scarlett? Are you related to a Josh Scarlett?" He hoped she would say no—hoped she wouldn't say Josh was her husband.

She gave him a surprised look. "Yes, I am."

Blake's heart sank. However, Ashling wasn't finished. "He's my brother. Did you know him?"

He breathed a sigh of relief before he answered, "Not really. I met him a few times briefly, but that's about it. I haven't seen him for quite some time. How is he?"

The look she gave him before she quietly answered tore at his heart. "He died over a year ago. He was killed in a hit and run."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I feel like such an asshole."

Ashling gave him a brief smile. "It's okay."

They stood there in silence. Blake could hear the beat of her heart, could sense the arousal of her body as her gaze once again roamed over him.

"I guess I should go in. Where is it that you live?"

Blake hesitated a moment before he answered, "La Belle Manor."

She chuckled. "La Belle Manor? That's in the opposite direction from the Crystal."

He shifted his weight from one foot to the other then back again. "I know. I wanted to walk with you, get to know you a little bit." Blake looked into her eyes and was relieved to see she wasn't about to run away in fear for her life. "I was wondering if you would like to come to the restaurant again tomorrow night around eight-thirty. I can meet you at the bar."

Ashling's cheeks flushed despite the cool air. She reached into her purse and handed him her card. "I'd like that. If something comes up just give me a call. My work number and home number are on here."

After he took the card, she stepped in closer and gave him a soft kiss on his cheek, her breath warm on his skin. "Thanks for walking me home, Blake."

Before he could respond, she was up the stairs and through the door, leaving him on the sidewalk alone.

Blake's heart pounded hard in his chest, and his blood rushed through his veins. He could feel a shift starting to happen and quickly took off in a jog down the street then ducked in between two buildings. Not one ray of light from the street lamps reached him. He had to gain control.

He leaned up against the building and took slow deep breaths. His body was aroused, his dick so hard it could slice through brick like a hot knife through butter. It was difficult for him to gain control of his shift, something that hadn't happened to him since he was first bitten.

The popping and grinding pain of his bones as they struggled to shift took his mind off his erection, but he could still smell Ashling, smell her perfume, and smell her wet luscious pussy. He could still feel her soft lips on his cheek as a vision of her naked body formed in his head—the

thought of his hands running over her soft skin while his mouth descended on one of her nipples. He growled his frustration and knew he had to get away, get somewhere that he couldn't smell her until he gained control of his body.

He stuck to the shadows as he made his way back to his condominium.

\* \* \* \* \*

The she-wolf hid in the shadows too far away to hear what was being said, but close enough to see the attraction of the two people.

She was surprised that the male didn't pick up her scent. He must really be hot for the Scarlett woman. She should have known this male would play the gentleman and walk the bitch home, especially since it was so late. She was almost angry enough to attack in front of him. Almost.

She had set out to teach this Scarlett a lesson. She was tired of the woman's constant interference. Another male lost because of this woman. She wanted to know how the tiresome little bitch could find her victims and get around without being noticed. Oh, she wanted to rip her to pieces, turn her into the very thing she despised. Unfortunately, it would now have to wait. If she moved now, there was no doubt de Marco would pick up her scent, and he might alert Scarlett to her presence. She watched the exchange of the two people and would have been amused if it wasn't so pathetic.

Putting her nose in the air, she picked up the scent of the Scarlett woman's arousal and then watched as the male struggled for control. Once he darted down the street and was out of sight, she felt it safe to move about and headed in the opposite direction.

She found it odd that he would try to control his shift in front of the female. Unless, of course... That was it! The female didn't know he was a werewolf. It was obvious he didn't know her little secret either. This could be interesting. She would have to watch them carefully in the coming days. She may be able to use this information to her advantage.

## Chapter Four

Blake walked into Jimmy's office at half past five in the morning. The desk had numerous piles of papers and folders. Actually the entire office looked as if it was in some sort of limbo.

Jimmy looked up from the papers he was filling out. When he saw Blake walk in, he grunted a greeting and went back to work.

Blake pulled up a chair, sat across from him, and waited. They played this game every time Blake showed up. Blake would walk in, Jimmy would grunt, Blake would sit and wait, and Jimmy would ignore him for a bit.

He knew Jimmy wasn't comfortable talking to him. Although Jimmy had no love for Lynette, he didn't like the punishment she doled out for any information he gave, especially to Blake.

Jimmy put his pen down and looked up at Blake. "I know why you're here. It's about that mangled guy that was brought in last night."

"Is it one of hers?"

"Oh definitely. There's no mistake about it. But he didn't make it."

"What do you mean, 'he didn't make it'?"

Jimmy sighed and sat back in his chair. "You were right about the brutality getting worse. I'm running out of explanations to put on my reports. If she isn't stopped, we won't be able to walk around. There will be a hunt out for wolves, and that will include us werewolves. Anyway, this one didn't make the transformation. There were two others as well that were reversed in the last few months."

Blake didn't understand and shook his head. "What do you mean reversed?"

Jimmy thought for a moment before he started to explain. "Someone performed an ancient ritual that reverses the curse."

Blake stared at him in disbelief. "You mean this can be reversed? I thought the only way to do that was to kill the Alpha."

Jimmy stood up and took off his lab coat while he continued, "That *is* the only way to reverse the curse after the bitten one has tasted human flesh. If they haven't eaten human flesh, the curse can be reversed with this ritual. It consists of placing wolfsbane, mistletoe, or mountain ash around them and then sprinkling them with a brew, like a tea, made of wolfsbane or mistletoe."

"So what happened with the guy from last night?"

As he gathered his things, Jimmy replied, "I couldn't go into the exam room. I had to have some orderlies clean out the stuff. There was wolfsbane placed all around the body. Lucky for me I wore gloves during the examination because he was sprinkled with a liquid that was a high concentration of some mistletoe concoction. As you know, all of those things are safeguards used to protect someone from werewolves. Of course, they haven't been used since the early twentieth century, but all three victims were the same. It's unfortunate that the brutality inflicted was so fierce, but once the curse was reversed, they were truly dead."

Jimmy held the door and motioned for Blake to get up and leave. As he passed Jimmy in the doorway, Blake asked, "Did you see anyone last night that could have done that? A woman maybe?"

Jimmy closed the office door before he turned to face Blake. "No, why?"

"Just a thought. Ever notice a little black cat around here?"

Jimmy chuckled. "Not at all. It wouldn't have a chance here, anyway. I would eat it before it got too far."

Both men walked out of the building. Blake stood on the steps and watched as Jimmy headed to the parking lot and drove off.

As he walked down the steps, he passed a woman, and her scent hit him like a bucket of ice water. He spun on his heel and stared at

Lynette, an alpha she-wolf. She smiled sweetly at him, hatred dripping from her voice. "Well, Blake de Marco. What a pleasant surprise."

Blake's voice gave back the same sarcasm. "Always a pleasure, Lynette. What are you doing up so early? I would have thought you'd be tired from fucking yourself all night."

Lynette narrowed her eyes and gave him a hard look. "Such a gentleman. I came here because I figured you would be sniffing around Jimmy."

"So you came for me? I'm honored." He hoped she would drop dead.

"Yes, I came to give you a bit of advice. Stay out of my way." Her voice was almost a growl.

"Stay out of your way? Why, whatever do you mean?" Blake knew exactly what she meant. He had been trying to stop her for months. She was getting out of hand and needed to be set straight or taken out. However, she was an alpha and had the arrogance and strength to go with it.

Lynette kept the sweet smile on her face, but the hatred and derision deepened. "Just be careful, or your new girlfriend will find out your dirty little secret."

Blake went back up the three to four steps to stand directly in her face. He grabbed her arm and hissed, "How do you know Ashling?"

Lynette shoved him back and continued to climb the steps, unfazed by his anger. "I just do. Now back off." She tossed the command over her shoulder as she stomped up the stairs.

Blake stood there a moment. "God, what a bitch." He headed home to get some sleep. He couldn't help but wonder what connection there was between Ashling and Lynette.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ashling was almost finished wrapping a gift for the elderly man when the bell on the door rang to announce the entrance of yet another potential customer. She had a steady flow of people coming in. Most were

small sales, but every one of them was a sale. Mr. Wagner had taken the day off and would be pleased when he saw the sales figures tomorrow.

She placed a purple bow on top of the small, prettily wrapped box and handed it to the customer. "Be sure to keep your receipt, Mr. Braeger, just in case she doesn't like those earrings. That way you can exchange them for something else."

The gray-haired man winked at her as he said, "Thank you," and left the shop with the gift for his wife.

Ashling walked around the show cases toward the new customer about to issue a cheery good morning, but when she saw who it was, she stopped in her tracks. "What are you doing here? What do you want?"

Lynette Barber was a beautiful brunette with green eyes, average height and huge breasts—probably fake. She was beautiful on the outside anyway. Once she opened her mouth, however, her true nature was revealed, and she was as evil, selfish, and hurtful as anyone could be. She acted as if she were proud of being such a person.

Lynette was always dressed fashionably, and today was no exception. She wore a pair of white wide-legged pants, gold chain belt, black and white scroll pattern blouse and, to finish it all off, a white fur-trimmed shawl. Her dark hair was cut short to accentuate her delicate features, which made the wide rim of her sunglasses seem too big for her face. After she removed the glasses, she bestowed a hard look upon Ashling.

She looked around her with disgust, as if surrounded by garbage. "I've come to give you a warning, Miss Scarlet." Her statement was thick with derision as she added, "Stay out of my way."

Ashling knew if she showed any sign of fear, Lynette would sense it and pounce on it. She lifted her chin and stood her ground. "No." She didn't know where the sudden surge of bravery came from, but she was going with it. "As long as I am able to, I will help as many of your victims as I can."

Lynette smirked. "Your brother didn't seem to mind being one of my little pets. It's too bad you couldn't help him."

Ashling wanted to wipe that smug look off Lynette's face. "You

killed Josh even before he was hit by that car."

Lynette slipped her sunglasses back on. The smirk never left her face. "Stay out of my way, Ashling, or you'll be my next victim."

Ashling's hands balled into fists as she tried to control her anger. "Get out of my shop before I call the pound and tell them there's a stray dog around."

Lynette gave an unconcerned shrug of her shoulders, then turned, and left the shop, leaving Ashling red-faced, mad, and speechless.

## Chapter Five

Ashling stood in front of the bathroom mirror as she combed out her wet hair. She was nervous about meeting Blake at the restaurant. Unfortunately, every time she would try to enjoy the thought, her encounter with Lynette would pop up into her thoughts and destroy it.

She slammed the comb down on the counter, wiped the steam from the mirror, and gave her reflection a serious look. "Stop thinking about that bitch, Lynette! You're about to go on a date, the first in a long time, with the oldest cliché in the book—tall, dark and handsome. Get a grip!"

Ashling walked into her bedroom and opened the closet door. She reached in and pulled out her dark red satiny dress with the rhinestone band under the bodice. She held it up, and looked at herself in the full-length mirror in the corner of the room. "I hope it's not cold out, since this thing only has these little straps." She gave her reflection a wicked grin. "But then, wouldn't it be nice to have him wrap his big strong arms around you when you get a chill?"

After laying the dress across the bed, she turned and pulled out a pair of red stiletto shoes—the ones with the silver heels. She lifted one shoe up, and examined it. Blake was nice and tall, so wearing these would be no problem.

As she walked around getting ready for the evening, she thought about Blake. Last night she had placed her hand on his bicep as she leaned in and kissed his cheek. His arm muscle was rock solid, and all she could do was dream about those arms around her. The red dress was a perfect

choice, even if she had to fake a chill.

As she stood in front of the mirror, she stopped putting her makeup on and looked blankly at her reflection. She envisioned his warm skin under her fingertips as her hands slid up his well-chiseled, naked body. God, he was luscious. Her heart started to pound a little faster as her next thought was of his hands as they moved over her naked skin, the feel of those lips as they left a trail all over her body. She was startled from her daydreams when the makeup brush she'd held slipped from her fingers and hit the sink. Once again, she spoke to her reflection in the mirror. "That's enough. We need to get ready."

Ashling managed to finish getting ready and walked through the front doors of the restaurant on time. She stopped just inside the entry to the bar area. The place had been set up with some extra smaller-sized tables with chairs.

Blake made his way past a few people to greet her with a smile. Ashling couldn't help but admire how gorgeous he looked in a pair of black dress pants and dark burgundy dress shirt that made the pale blue of his eyes stand out.

He leaned in and kissed her cheek. "You look beautiful."

Ashling was immediately aroused by his deep voice coupled with the scent of man and cologne mixed together. She smiled brightly.

"Thank you. You look very nice as well." She looked around at all of the people in the room. Curious as to what was going on, she asked, "There seems to be a lot more people here than what I expected. Is there something special happening?"

Blake took her hand, led her over to a table near the fireplace, and helped her off with the wrap that she decided would be a good idea to wear. Once she was seated and comfortable, his gaze roamed over her, and he replied, "A few nights a week, the restaurant will have musicians play here for the guests. Tonight is a classical, flamenco guitar player. I didn't think to ask if you liked that type of music, but I didn't want to give you the opportunity to say no to going out with me."

Ashling smiled shyly and played with the heart pendant she wore around her neck. She looked into eyes. "Actually, I like that type of music."

It can be quite emotional and passionate."

Blake returned her smile, and replied, "I'm glad. I hope you like this performer. I have to go for a bit, but I'll be back." His soft lips left another kiss on her cheek before he disappeared among the crowd.

As Ashling tasted her glass of wine, which he'd had sent to their table moments later, the room quieted down. An older man stood at the microphone and announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, Blake de Marco." With excited bewilderment, she watched Blake carry his guitar and sit on the stool behind the mike. He gave her a wink before he started to play.

She sipped her wine and watched in wonder as his fingers deftly moved over the strings. He played pieces that ranged from up-beat and happy to painful heartbreak, from pulse-pounding angry to passionate. He not only played the notes, but she could tell he deeply felt the emotions. Everyone sat in absolute silence while they watched and listened to the talented musician. Ashling, too, could only sit and admire the performance. Nothing else seemed to exist or matter for the couple of hours that Blake played.

When he finished, there was a loud applause. Ashling sat and watched Blake talk to a few people. She felt in awe of him, of his talent. She wanted to know the man deep down, the talented and intelligent man inside. However, there was her curse. If things were different... If this curse could be lifted, she could see herself enjoying Blake as she got to know him on a deeper level. She wanted to enjoy making love with him, risk the possibility of falling in love.

\* \* \* \* \*

Blake had finished his set and was surrounded by enthusiastic fans. He caught glimpses of Ashling as she sat at the bar watching him, a ponderous look on her face. He was glad she came.

He never invited women to see him play. Even Michelle only came a time or two. There was something different about Ashling, something that made him want to share things about himself that no one else knew. That included his being a werewolf. How could he feel like this about

someone he just met?

He went over to the bar and sat next to her, a smile on his face. "Well, what do you think?"

She thought for a moment before she answered, "I'm impressed. You're very talented, wonderfully talented. Thank you for inviting me to see you play."

Blake sat there and just studied her. She wore her hair down, and he was glad to see it fall in soft waves around her shoulders and breasts. The red ribbon with its silver filigree pendant was once again around her neck and went well with the dress she wore. The dress, although not tight, accentuated her curves. He gave her a smile and asked if she would like to come along to take his equipment home.

"I'd love to," she responded.

After he packed up his guitar and footstool, they headed out. As he held the door open for her, he said, "I hope you don't mind walking. I don't drive to the restaurant since I'm just a few blocks away."

Ashling walked past him through the open door and told him she was fine. Blake admired the curve of her ass as she walked past him and was tempted to drop guitar and footstool just to cup her shapely backside.

They walked in silence for a few blocks before Ashling asked, "How long have you played the guitar?"

"Not as long as most people think. My father started to play when he was very young. I dabbled with it. I mostly played hard rock and heavy metal just to piss him off, but I didn't take to it seriously until about ten years ago. I was lucky enough to still have my father around to teach me."

"Your father passed away?"

"Yes, both my parents have."

Ashling's voice was soft and sympathetic. "I'm sorry to hear that."

"Thanks. As much as I miss them, they're both at rest now. What about your parents? Are they still around?"

Blake could sense her anger and pain, her voice cool and distant. "I met my biological father only once, and it was brief at that. I don't know if he is still alive or not." She took a deep breath before she continued with,

"My mother is still alive. She lives on the other side of town with my stepfather."

He could tell this was a touchy subject and was glad they were now outside the building he lived in. "Well, this is me. I'm up on the third floor."

La Belle Manor was a luxury condominium. The door attendant held the door and said, "Good evening," as they passed through into the marbled floor lobby. Blake watched Ashling take in her surroundings with the look of awe on her face.

She smiled at him as they got onto the elevator. "This lobby is bigger than my whole apartment, and my apartment isn't small. The furnishings are beautiful. It's like we're in someone's home."

The elevator doors slid open on the third floor, and Blake led the way. He unlocked his door and held it for her as she entered.

After he set his guitar case and footstool down, he followed Ashling into the wide-open living room, then stood back, and admired her as she continued on to stand in front of the wall of windows that gave a beautiful view of the small city.

She slid the wrap off her shoulders and held it in front of her as she started to take in the rest of the room. Though her hair was down, he admired the sexy shoulders that peeked out from underneath the dark waves. His gaze next moved to her legs; she had great legs.

Ashling turned with a puzzled look on her face when she heard the door of the apartment open and close. Blake knew it was Case coming in to see how his set went. He hadn't told his friend about Ashling.

He dreaded this moment—introducing Ashling to Case—but there was no way around it now. He told himself it was better to know sooner rather than later if she was going to fall under the mysterious Casey spell.

Case walked into the room. "Hey, Blake, how did it go with...?" Case stopped in mid sentence as the sight of Ashling caught his attention. "Oh, I'm sorry. I guess I should have knocked first." He turned back to Blake and continued, "Or maybe, you should learn to lock your door so unruly neighbors don't just barge in."

Blake smiled. "Ashling, this is my best friend and unruly neighbor,

Casey Delany." He looked at Case as he finished the introduction. "This is Ashling Scarlett." Then he stood back and watched.

Case and Ashling walked toward each other, shook hands, and said the usual how-do-you-do's and nice to meet you. Case smiled at Ashling. "My friend likes to be formal when around ladies. You can call me Case like everyone else."

Ashling was polite, smiled, and shared a bit of chitchat with Case, but appeared unaffected by the spell other women have fallen under. Blake was surprised and relieved at the same time.

Case started to act uncomfortable as if he sensed he was a bit in the way, so he made his exit, telling Blake he would talk to him tomorrow.

Blake made his way over to Ashling and stood before her. She looked up into his eyes, her voice soft. "It's getting late, and I should go."

"I'll walk you home." He brought his lips to hers for a brief kiss. He pulled away to see Ashling's face turned up to him, eyes closed—her soft lips waiting for another kiss that he was more than willing to give.

Again they kissed, and a tender passion grew between them. Ashling's hands moved up Blake's muscular chest to his shoulders, and her arms wrapped around his neck.

Blake's hands were on the small of her back, and he hugged her closer to his body. He could feel his cock rapidly grow hard, and he pressed his hips to hers. His hand moved up to cup her breast, and his thumb began to work the nipple through the fabric. He could feel it come to life and poke against the fabric in its quest for his thumb.

With his other hand, he tugged her dress up and then found his way down the back of her lace panties to give her ass a tender squeeze.

He broke from her lips and started to leave a trail of soft kisses down her neck when he ran into her silver pendant. He pulled away from it as a vampire would from garlic, he felt her stiffen at his reaction. He decided it would be best to wait for another time. His heart was beating faster than it should, and his blood was rushing through his veins. The last thing he wanted to do was fight off the urge to shift in front of her. He leaned over and kissed the tender spot on her neck just under her earlobe. He could feel her body relax again before she stepped away.

She looked into his eyes, and he could see the struggle in them—the want to continue, but she knew she should wait. Her voice was a whisper. “Blake, I’m sorry.”

Blake took her hand and brought it to his lips. “You have nothing to apologize for. I want this as much as you, maybe more, but you’re right; we should wait for another time.”

She smiled shyly. He could smell her arousal, hear the rapid pound of her heart, and he wanted more than anything to have her in his bed, to taste her sweet pussy.

Ashling put a hand up to caress his cheek. “Thank you.”

He reached for the wrap she tossed over the back of the sofa, placed it around her shoulders and followed her out into the hall to the elevator.

Blake held her hand as they walked along in silence, bringing it to his lips on occasion to feel the softness of her skin on his lips.

Eventually they stood outside the Victorian home she lived in. He didn’t want to leave, wanted to go up to her place and spend the night enjoying her body, her voice, her lips, her kisses. He studied her face as he said, “I have to work tomorrow night at the restaurant. Would you like to have dinner with me the following night? I promise to take you somewhere other than El Fuego.”

She gave him a soft laugh. “I’d like that.”

He gave her a big smile. “Good, I’ll pick you up around seven thirty.”

## Chapter Six

Ashling stood on the thick carpet of grass and looked at the gravestone in front of her. It was late spring and still cool in the mornings, the grass had just started to turn its vibrant green color. She tilted her head back, eyes closed, and enjoyed the feel of the warm sun on her face.

She remembered times when she and Josh were just kids—they would run to the park to escape from their stepfather, and she would lie next to him on the hill in the sunshine, laughing and telling jokes to each other. Even as an adult, Josh would sometimes come by and take her to the park on a sunny day, just to tell her jokes and make her laugh. At least, up until Lynette sank her teeth into him. Her heart ached with how much she missed her big brother.

Ashling sat down on the ground and placed the bouquet of flowers down between her and the marker. She sighed heavily before she started to talk. She didn't care if anyone saw her.

"Oh Josh, I wish you were here. I miss being able to turn to you for advice. You always knew what to say." She looked up at the sky again. "It's a beautiful day today, like when we were kids and would go to the park."

The gravestone sat across from her in silent repose. It heard nothing. It said nothing.

"I've met someone, someone you would like. His name is Blake. He's a very talented musician." Ashling forgot her surroundings as she dreamily continued her conversation. "Blake is tall and built like every

woman's erotic dream—dark hair and the most amazing pale blue eyes. It's almost as if they could look right through me and see into my soul. There's something about him that draws me."

The loud chatter of birds complaining about a squirrel brought her out of her daydream.

"I know what you would say. 'So what's the problem?' You know the circumstances. Until this curse is lifted or has run its course, dating is just not in the cards. I shouldn't have let it get this far, but it has been so long, Josh, so long since I felt this way for a man. It has been so long since I've felt a man's touch, his kiss, his appreciation. I want...someone to love and to love me in return."

She looked at her watch.

"I have to leave. It's almost time for the shop to open. I'll stop back again."

Ashling got up and dusted off her pants. She stood and stared at the marker for a moment before she turned and walked away.

\* \* \* \* \*

Case flipped through the newspaper catalog on the library computer until he found the papers he wanted. After he gave the girl behind the desk his library card, she pulled the newspapers from their file and handed them over to him.

He sat at a table and scanned the first paper until he found the story he wanted, which he read aloud to himself.

"Josh Scarlett, 37, killed by a hit and run late Monday night at the intersection of Main and Broadway. Witnesses stated the car appeared out of nowhere and never slowed down after it hit the young man. Police are looking for a dark gray sedan with tinted windows that has damage to the front passenger-side panel. Anyone with information should contact Detective James Rogers."

Case hadn't known Josh very well. They had met briefly on a few occasions, but he did know that Josh was one of Lynette's. Josh was causing trouble for her—hated the curse so much he went out and hunted

Lynette.

Case picked up the other paper and turned to the obituaries; the first one listed was Josh Scarlett. "Beloved son and brother," it started out. Case skimmed past most of it until he found, "...survived by his mother.....sister (Ashling)..."

So, Ashling was his sister.

He put the paper down and wondered if Blake knew this. Josh and Blake had the same dislike for the curse. Who didn't? But both of them wanted to help those that were bitten to adjust to the lifestyle, to eat other meat besides human flesh. Both of them wanted to stop Lynette at any cost. Josh had a reason to stop Lynette; to kill her would mean his release. Blake's reasons were purely his own.

Lynette's brutality was escalating. There had to be some reason why she was in such a rage, why Josh had turned on her. Case had thought that, at one time, Josh and Lynette were quite the item. There had to be a reason for Josh's hatred.

Case gave the papers back to the clerk and decided he would head out to the cemetery where Josh was buried. He didn't think he would find anything there at this late date, but he reasoned it wouldn't hurt to go there.

When he arrived at the cemetery, Ashling was sitting on the ground in front of the gravestone. Case decided he would stay back far enough so he wouldn't intrude, since it looked like she was talking. He could understand her loss; he missed his own sister.

He watched Ashling as she left and waited until she was far enough away before he headed over to the gravestone. Case stood there and looked at it, saw the flowers Ashling left, could smell the perfume she wore. Now he knew why Blake was so attracted to her. That perfume coupled with the scent of her womanhood was intoxicating.

Other than the flowers and the scent of Ashling, there was no information he could glean about Josh or Lynette.

There was a foul scent in the air, however, that sickened him—Lynette Barber. Case turned as she walked toward him. Her big sunglasses made her look like a locust. It was too late for him to walk

away and avoid her.

"Well, Casey Delany." Lynette purred as she removed her over-sized sunglasses.

Casey looked her up and down, the look of disgust apparent on his face and in his voice. "Lynette. What are you doing here?"

"I might ask the same of you. I didn't realize you were one of Josh's friends."

"Not that it's any of your business, but I wasn't. I just met Ashling last night."

With a bored look, Lynette examined her manicured fingernails. "Oh, yes, Ashling." She looked up at Case, the bored arrogant look of a spoiled cat displayed on her face. "That's right. Her and Blake have started to see each other, haven't they? It's a wonder she tolerates Blake being a werewolf if you consider her hatred of them."

"That's between them. Why are you here? Still mourning the loss of one of your little brood?"

Anger flashed in Lynette's eyes. "Josh was more than that to me. If it wasn't for Ashling, Josh would still be alive today."

Case gave her a quizzical look. "What does Ashling have to do with Josh's death?"

"She's always interfering where she shouldn't be. Someday, she's going to be taught a lesson. That goes for your friend, Blake, as well."

"What is that supposed to mean, Lynette? Blake can take care of himself, but if you mess with Ashling, you'll have more than Blake to deal with."

Lynette smirked. "Oooo, did I hit a nerve? What do you care? You just met her."

"She seems nice, and she makes Blake happy. Besides, I like anyone who pisses you off."

Lynette looked at her watch. "It's been interesting, but I've got better things to do." She turned and walked away.

Case couldn't help but get in one last taunt. "Always a pleasure, Lynette."

Lynette didn't bother to turn around and acknowledge his

comment. Case decided to leave as well and headed in the opposite direction.

\* \* \* \* \*

Blake stood in front of the refrigerator drinking a bottle of water. He looked up at the time. *Seven o'clock*. He had to be at work in an hour.

The sound of the front door opening got his attention, and in moments, Case walked into the kitchen with a roast. Blake hadn't realized how hungry he had been until just then. "Where have you been all day?"

Case set the roast down on the granite countertop and gave Blake an irritated look. "What are you, my mother?"

"Sorry man, just asking."

Case shook his head and slid the roast closer to Blake. "I'm sorry. I had some stuff to do, and I had a run in with Lynette earlier today. She makes me sick.

"I brought this for you," he said, indicating the roast. "I thought you could use something to eat before you head to work tonight. Are you going to see Ashling later?"

Blake took a big bite out of the roast before he answered, his voice muffled from the food in his mouth. "No, not until tomorrow night. Why?"

Case hesitated. There were apparently things he wanted to say, but he seemed unsure where to start. He took a deep breath and said, "Maybe later you should check on her."

Blake contemplated the roast. "Why? What's going on?"

"Does Ashling know that you're a werewolf?"

"No. I don't think so."

Case blurted, "I went to the cemetery today."

Blake stopped eating and looked the meat over a little more thoroughly as he wondered if it were something other than a roast that Case picked up at the cemetery. "Why did you go there?"

"I went to Josh Scarlett's grave."

Blake set the meat down. "Why did you go to his grave? Did you

know him when he was alive?"

"No, I only met him a few times. Josh was a werewolf. He was one of Lynette's. They were pretty tight at one time. That's where I ran into Lynette."

Blake took it all in. That would explain how Lynette knew Ashling. "Did Ashling know about her brother?"

"She must have from what Lynette said. I do know something happened between Josh and Lynette that made him turn on her. I don't know what it was, but Lynette blames Ashling. She all but threatened Ashling this morning, not to her face but to me."

"What?" Blake straightened up in alarm. "What did she say? Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"Look, Lynette isn't stupid. She's not about to make a move after she gives us a heads up. I told the hairy bitch that she would have more than you to deal with if she went after Ashling. It didn't seem to faze her."

Blake stood with his jaw and fists clenched in anger at Lynette. "Thanks for the information. I'll check on Ashling later after I'm done with work."

"There's one more thing. I heard a rumor that Christophe is coming to town; didn't hear when."

Blake took a deep breath and walked past Case to head for the bedroom. "You're just full of good news tonight, aren't you?"

"I try."

"Thanks for letting me know. If you hear more..."

"Don't worry. I'll get back to you as soon as I can."

## Chapter Seven

The man lay twitching as Lynette once again sank her long fangs into the flesh of his arm and tore it away from his bone. It had been three days since she last feasted on human flesh and this one tasted particularly good.

She had run into him at the grocery store, one of her favorite places to find her type of food. He wasn't as tall as she liked them, but he was nicely built with blonde hair and eyes so dark they were almost black.

Lynette carried the small basket with some fruit inside and strolled down the frozen food aisle. She bumped into him and let the basket fall to the floor, oranges rolling everywhere. She joked with him, laughed with him, and found out he wasn't married. Married men were no good; they had someone to look for them, especially if there were kids.

She left the store and went into the back alley by the large trash bin to strip off her clothes, she always carried a bag to put them in, and then she shifted. Her gray fur blended well with the edges of the shadows when she followed him. Once he was on a quiet street, where there was no one around to disturb her, she attacked.

She ripped out his throat to silence any screams. It also made him less likely to fight back too much as she sank her teeth into his shoulder and dragged him to the back of a closed dentist's office.

Lynette stopped, ears pricked forward as she listened. People were walking down the alleyway in her direction. She pulled the man closer to the bushes, hiding him beneath the foliage, and trotted off to a safe

distance where she could watch.

A group of teenagers loudly made their way forward, each trying to be tougher than the other for the two females in their company. They stopped just a few feet from the body as two of the males started to argue. Lynette was patient because she knew they would be gone soon.

As the teenagers moved away from where the man was hidden, a little black cat rounded the corner of the building. Lynette growled softly. The teenagers were still too close. If she came out now, they would see her and might then discover the body of the man.

She sat and watched the creature sit on the steps to the office's backdoor as it washed its face, the glow from the streetlamp nearby bouncing off the charm on the cat's collar. Lynette narrowed her eyes to better focus on the creature's charm. Where had she seen that before?

When the teenagers were a bit farther away, the cat walked over to the body. Lynette watched with renewed interest as the little black cat walked all the way around the body then stopped and stared into the man's face. What the hell was it doing? She put her nose in the air and could smell feminine perfume. Where had she smelled that before?

Though the teenagers were far enough away, Lynette stayed where she was and watched as the little black cat ran back around the corner of the building. Shortly thereafter, Ashling appeared.

As much as Lynette wanted to get back at Ashling, she decided to wait and watch, and hoped there would be something that she could use later.

She watched as Ashling placed the wolfsbane flowers around the body, listened to her chant, and saw her sprinkle some sort of liquid onto him. That's when something caught Lynette's attention—the charm. She had seen Ashling wear it. She found it interesting that Ashling and the cat had the same thing. A little investigation and this might prove to be very valuable ammunition.

When Ashling was done, she disappeared around the building. Lynette made her way toward the body. She decided to take a quick look and then follow Ashling. That was when she picked up another scent in the air. Blake's dark fur made him almost invisible in the night. He

stopped when he saw her, lowered his head, and bared his teeth.

Lynette raised the fur on her haunches and growled deeply. She made a wide berth around him and went off in the opposite direction, thinking it would be best if she followed Ashling another time.

\* \* \* \* \*

Blake stuck to the shadows as he made his way to Ashling's apartment, his dark fur made it easy for him to blend in with the night.

He was surprised to run into Lynette before he reached her home. He was so focused on following the scent of the familiar perfume he ignored his other senses. He could smell the wolfsbane even before he caught a glimpse of a black cat racing away.

It was the same scene that must have greeted Jimmy at the morgue—mangled body surrounded by the flowers and sprinkled with the same mistletoe concentration. Again, the black cat was involved. He would have followed it, but he didn't want Lynette to know what he was up to. He knew the body was one of her kills; he just wasn't sure how she and the cat were connected. He would find out the connection between them on his own, but first he had to check on Ashling.

Moments later, Blake walked around to the back of the Victorian house and silently padded up the fire escape to the second floor. The landing spanned the width of the house. He looked into a couple of windows but didn't see Ashling. The last window was her bedroom. It was open about three inches, and it was enough for Blake to smell her. He kept himself back so he wouldn't be noticed, but close enough so he could enjoy the view.

She had a small lamp on the nightstand lit as she sat on the edge of the bed to remove her running shoes. She tossed them in the closet and sank back against the mattress as she pulled her hair free from the band it was in. He licked his chops as her soft dark waves cascaded over the edge of the bed, and she stretched her arms over her head. When she got up and headed out of sight to the bathroom, he sat down on the cold metal and prepared himself for more.

Ashling emerged without her jeans, with nothing on but her panties and a T-shirt, and she was brushing her hair. Blake held his breath as he watched her pull her T-shirt up over her head, her breasts bouncing free. His eyes were transfixed on her rosy nipples as they came to erection while she tossed the T-shirt into a nearby chair. Then, she slid her panties down to the floor, releasing the heavenly scent of her pussy. Blake's nostrils flared so he wouldn't miss one aspect of her smell.

He knew he was drooling when she turned and he got a full view of her breasts and her neatly trimmed pussy. He had to fight the urge to burst forth and lick that sweet slit. It had to taste as good as it smelled.

She walked around the bedroom for a short time as she put things away. Blake admired her beauty before she crawled under the blankets, turned out the light, and settled in for the evening. Blake made himself comfortable, lying with his front paws stretched out before him. He rested his chin on his paws, his snout positioned so he could breathe in her scent through the small opening of the window. He needed to gain control of himself. Even as a wolf he had a raging hard on.

He would stay for a bit to be sure Lynette didn't show up and to enjoy the sweet smells of this beautiful woman, but then he'd have to go.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Their lips meet, and the kiss makes her tingle all over. His tongue slips past her lips into her mouth. Probing and teasing, it draws her tongue out to meet his. She could nibble and suck on his bottom lip for an eternity. Her hands go over his stomach, his chest, and through his hair. She loves to run her fingers through his soft hair. Blake's hand glides up her thigh, under her skirt, she spreads her legs, and his fingers find the slit they seek, playing her like an instrument before his fingers penetrate and sink deep into her wetness....*

Ashling jolted out of her dream. She sat straight up with her heart pounding. "Wow, that was intense."

She glanced at the clock and noticed it was just after two in the morning. She looked around the dark room to make sure she was alone and to confirm it was only a dream. The cool breeze sifted through the

small opening of the window and produced goose bumps across Ashling's naked skin. Her nipples tightened and became hard.

She lay back against her pillows, and then slid her hand down between her thighs to dip a finger into her pussy. Her clit was swollen and sensitive from the excitement of her dream. She spread her legs a little wider as her finger swirled around and rubbed her clit, while her other hand toyed with a nipple. Ashling closed her eyes to better enjoy the warm pleasure that spread through her body. Her finger slipped up deep inside her, and she imagined it was Blake. She whispered his name as she pumped in and out.

A noise outside her open window shattered her concentration. Her blood running cold, she sat up and clutched the sheet over her breasts. Staring out the window for any sign of a possible intrusion, she grabbed her robe and slid it onto her body before she cautiously walked over toward the window.

As she peered through the darkness, she caught a glimpse of movement at the far end of the yard. Her eyes strained to make out what it could be. Without effort it leaped from the ground to the roof of the garden house where its silhouette was given away by the light of the moon. Ashling gasped at the huge animal and watched it walk across the roof with the ease and agility of a cat. It threw its head back and let out a long howl. Ashling slammed the window shut and locked it securely.

"Damn werewolves!" she angrily spat out before she turned and headed back to bed.

## Chapter Eight

Case walked down the long hall. His footsteps echoed off the old granite floor and bounced around the tall plaster walls. He reached the door and knocked before entering the office. Jimmy sat at his desk surrounded by the usual paper work and stacks of files on every vacant flat surface available.

Jimmy did a double take when he saw his visitor was Case, and he motioned for him to take a seat. Each man sat back in his chair and studied the other. They had a dislike for each other, and neither one of them knew why or cared.

Case decided it was best to get this finished as fast as possible, so he was the first to break the uncomfortable silence. "Can you give me some information about Josh Scarlett?"

"Josh Scarlett? Is it professional information you want?"

Case studied Jimmy closely, and wondered if this was such a good idea after all. "No, I know how he died. What I want is some personal information like his relationship with Lynette."

Jimmy tensed. "What kind of personal information?"

Case took a deep breath and decided the best way to put the guy at ease and get the information he wanted was to be upfront. "I'm trying to find out why Josh turned on Lynette and why she hates Ashling. I thought Josh and Lynette were pretty tight, but maybe I'm wrong. I ran into her at the cemetery yesterday, and she all but threatened Ashling. I figured since you were one of hers, too, there might be some information you could

give me."

"Well, you know what they say. 'Never bite the hand that feeds you.' However, since I'm not much of a fan of Lynette's, I don't see any reason not to help." Jimmy got up and closed the office door before he continued with, "Josh and Lynette were quite the item. She had it real bad for him. I didn't know him very well, we weren't best friends or anything, but I knew he was a nice guy, before and after he became a werewolf. He loved his sister and was protective of her. I think Lynette was jealous."

"What caused him to turn on her?"

Jimmy shook his head and sat back in his chair. "I don't know. I'm almost certain it had something to do with Ashling. He turned vicious toward Lynette and targeted her personally. It's not unusual for betas to go after the other betas in the pack to get back at the alpha, but not Josh. He went after Lynette."

"If she had it bad for him, like you said, did she help him along with his transformation?"

"Oh, hell, yes. They were seeing each other for months before she turned him. She fell for him before he became a werewolf. There is no question in my mind they were mated for life."

Case stood up to leave. "Thanks for your help. I'll be sure to send over some fresh chops and a few steaks."

"Thanks, I appreciate that. There is one other thing."

Case stood by the closed door and waited.

Jimmy seemed reluctant to continue, but he did. "I think Lynette may have had something to do with Josh's hit and run accident."

"What do you mean?"

"Lynette doesn't take disobedience lightly, not even from someone she loves, if she's capable of it. She's a big one for punishments. I have no proof, but I think she may have set up the accident."

"If that's true and Lynette was mated to Josh, it could explain why her attacks are more brutal. Her mate is gone, she's mourning, and if she set up the accident, she's feeling the pain he felt at the time of his death. Alphas can inflict pain on their betas without much consequence, but to kill their own mate is a different story."

Case stood for a moment and contemplated the new information before he opened the door and headed out with a final, "Thanks again." He was almost to the end of the hallway when he heard Jimmy call out his name. He turned and waited for a moment while Jimmy caught up to him.

"I heard a rumor that Christophe was coming to town. I didn't hear when, just that he was coming. I thought you might like to know."

"Thanks. I heard the same rumor the other day."

They parted ways, each with a newfound respect for each other.

\* \* \* \* \*

Blake had told her to dress casually, nothing fancy. He wanted her to be comfortable. She wore a pair of black flats, tight faded jeans, and a blue and white gingham blouse.

Ashling looked at her reflection in the mirror before Blake arrived and gave herself a smile. She looked like a country bumpkin, a sexy bumpkin, but a bumpkin nonetheless. Her blouse had a low scoop neck that showed off the top swell of her breasts, short puffy sleeves and pearl buttons. She decided against any jewelry, she didn't want to distract him away from her soft skin.

The bell rang, and she opened the door for Blake, her jaw hit the floor. She had never seen him in anything but work clothes, the usual long-sleeved, loose fitting dress shirts and black dress pants. She knew he was built. Anyone could discern that, but now he looked like every woman's erotic wet dream. He wore dark jeans, black shoes, and a T-shirt so tight she could see every contour and ripple of muscle, and he had a lot of them.

"Can I come in, or are you ready to leave?" His deep voice reverberated off the walls.

Ashling blushed at her lack of manners. "I'm sorry." She motioned for him to come in. "You shaved off your goatee. It caught me off guard." That was a sad excuse.

He chuckled as he entered, carrying a picnic basket. "Did you get the bottle of wine?"

Busy staring at the tattoos on his biceps, she once again felt like a dolt, or like some star-struck schoolgirl. "Yes, as a matter of fact. I'll go get it, and then we can head out."

She went into the kitchen and grabbed the wine, trying to figure out some excuse to make him stay there and have sex with her all night, but no good excuse came to mind. Just the initial sight of him had made her pussy throb with need, and she wanted to quench that need, but she couldn't bring herself to make such a forward proposal.

They left the apartment and walked a few blocks to the park. They arrived just as the sun was sinking below the horizon. Blake set the basket down, spread out a tablecloth, and lit some candles. He poured her a glass of the wine as she made herself comfortable.

Ashling sat and watched him get the food out. She had a hard time believing a man could think of something so romantic. Then her gaze roamed down his body. He must work out, she thought to herself. There was no way he could have a body like that without spending some time at the gym.

They talked while they ate, and she found Blake to be an engaging conversationalist. He was knowledgeable about music—no surprise—and art. He had a good sense of humor and spoke highly of his parents, more so of his father. He was sensitive when he asked about Josh and listened intently when she told him about her job. He even asked questions about pearls and her designs for pearl jewelry.

Blake looked at his watch. "Wow, I can't believe it's after ten all ready."

"Really? It doesn't seem like we've been here for three hours."

He gave her a smile. "No, it doesn't. I guess we better pack up all this stuff and get you home."

When they got back to her apartment, he followed her inside after he accepted her invitation to continue their conversation.

Ashling stood in the hallway and told Blake to make himself at home as she kicked off her shoes and tossed them toward her bedroom. She stepped into the living room, admired Blake's broad shoulders and back while he looked at the photographs placed around the room.

"Why did you shave off your goatee?"

Her voice drew his attention, and he turned to face her. "I just thought I'd try a different look. You don't like it?" he asked as he ran his hand over his chin.

"Oh, yes, I do. You have a handsome face. I've always been of the opinion that handsome men should be clean shaven and not hidden behind all the fur."

Blake smiled. "Thank you. I think beautiful women should be shaven as well."

Ashling blushed and stammered out an apology. "I'm, I'm sorry. I guess I shouldn't be so opinionated. After all, it is your face and your decision to be fuzzy."

He gave a deep chuckle and walked over to her. He stopped and stood just inches away, looking down into her dark eyes. She looked up at him and felt dwarfed by his height as he pressed his fingers on the pulse in her neck, his hands cool against her warm skin.

He leaned in and placed a soft kiss upon her lips before his eyes dipped down. She took his hand and put it over her breast, his thumb working magic through the fabric.

Ashling closed her eyes and enjoyed the warm heat that made its way from her breast down to her pussy. She whispered, "Stay with me, Blake."

Blake swept her up in his arms and stepped out into the hall. "Where's your bedroom?"

Ashling pointed down the hall. "Straight ahead, down at the end." Without effort he strode down the hall and entered her bedroom.

Blake tripped over the shoes she had tossed in earlier which caused him to fall forward. He dumped her on the bed as he twisted to the side to avoid landing on top of her. Ashling bounced off the mattress and landed with a loud thud on the floor next to the bed.

She immediately started to giggle and reached up to flick on the lamp that was on the nightstand.

Blake's voice was filled with concern. "Are you all right? Are you hurt?" He sat up, flung his legs over the other side of the bed, and reached

out to help her off the floor, but Ashling was all ready pulling herself to her feet.

With a smile on her face, she said, "I guess that will teach me to put my shoes away from now on." She caressed his cheek. "I'm fine." She turned a bit and rubbed her ass. "My butt is a little sore from my landing. Are you okay?"

Blake placed his hands on her hips, and pulled her closer to him. He smiled and said, "Yeah, I'm fine. Not the most romantic way to end the night, tossing your date across the room."

"You're not going to leave are you? My butt needs a good rub."

Ashling didn't give him time to answer. She started to leave warm kisses down his neck as her hands pulled up his T-shirt. After she lifted it over his head and tossed it into the chair, their lips met for a long passionate kiss.

His fingers unbuttoned her blouse with great dexterity and moved up under her bra to caress her breasts.

She coaxed him down onto the mattress as their mouths separated. She tossed off her blouse, her bra, and slid her jeans and panties to the floor. He watched her and savored every new part of her body she exposed just for him.

Ashling straddled his hips and placed her hands on his chest for support as she started to grind her wet pussy against the hard bulge inside his jeans. His hands moved over her skin from her hips to her waist and then to her breasts, just caressing the silky softness of it.

His voice a deep growl, he said, "Woman, you know how to drive a man wild." The smell of her perfume combined with the scent of her pussy drove his desire higher and made his heart pound faster.

Blake flipped her onto her back and without haste removed the rest of his clothes before lying next to her in bed. He kissed her lips, her neck, her shoulders. His hand moved over her breasts, her stomach and thighs, causing her to moan at the intensity that built up inside her.

Ashling moved her hands over as much of his body as she could reach. She felt his muscles bulge and flex with his movements. His lips left a trail down her stomach, and her legs spread wide of their own accord.

She no longer controlled what her body did.

When he parted the lips of her pussy and inhaled her scent, her heart swelled. Never had anyone made her feel so appreciative of her womanhood, or of being a woman. She held her breath as his soft wet tongue glided from the bottom up and flicked her clit. She closed her eyes and enjoyed the warmth he stirred in her as he kissed her pussy, giving honor to every delicate part.

A sigh escaped from her as she opened her eyes and looked down the length of her body. Their eyes met as he sucked her sensitive clit into his mouth and sent a wave of molten heat through her veins. She felt him slip his long fingers up inside her, pump them in and out as he showed no mercy to her clit and held it captive to the torture of his mouth and tongue.

Ashling felt her orgasm build in intensity. Her muscles clenched around his fingers. He pumped them harder, faster. He sucked harder on her clit. Her legs spread wider, her breath came faster, and like a train that barrels down a track, her orgasm sped closer, got stronger, until it exploded. She grabbed his hair and pressed herself against him not wanting the pleasure to stop. Blake's tongue and fingers encouraged every bit of satisfaction to come forth.

She whispered for him to stop when she became too sensitive for touch. Blake kissed his way up her body and lay next to her. He pulled her into his arms, gently kissed and caressed her while her body recovered.

She ran her hands over his arms, chest, and back, feeling the contours of his muscles. She wanted to feel him inside of her. Ashling's hand moved over the ripples of his stomach as she reached for his hard cock. She took a firm grip of his cock and stroked her hand up to his head, the skin warm, the veins engorged.

Blake reached over her and grabbed his pants to search out a condom. After he put one on, he laid on his back at Ashling's request. She straddled him and as he held his erection steady, she slowly lowered herself down onto him. She let a small gasp at the feel of him inside of her. He ran his hands over her while she rode up and down the length of him.

He placed his hands on her hips and guided her. She sat up and threw her head back. Her dark hair cascaded down her back while her hands moved to her breasts. He brought his hips up and buried himself deeper inside of her while his thumb slipped between the lips of her pussy and found her clit.

The sounds of his arousal, coupled with the warmth that had spread through her while his thumb rubbed her clit, drove her desire. She felt another orgasm light itself inside and for a second time it pushed its way forward. Ashling called out his name as her climax burst its way throughout her body. Blake buried himself deep inside her, and with the last few thrusts, his body shuddered and sent his own pleasure coursing through his veins to curl his toes.

Ashling collapsed on his chest, breathless with muscles weak, her voice barely audible. "So good. So very good. Weak, tired, sleep."

Blake chuckled but was glad she fell asleep right away. He needed to shift. The exertion of sex set something off inside him. He rolled her onto her back and disconnected from her. He wanted nothing more than to stay and hold her in his arms, but physically he knew he could not.

He removed the condom and slipped out the window onto the fire escape. After silently making his way down the metal steps, his body shook and his bones crunched as he made the painful shift from human to wolf. He took off at a full run down the street. He didn't bother to stick to the shadows. He didn't care who saw him.

He ran for about a mile before he made a turn and ran for another mile when he decided to head back. Breathless and spent from both the exertion of sex and the run, he walked the last couple of blocks, this time he stuck in the shadows.

He'd found his mate, a mate for life. He was bound to her forever. It didn't matter that she didn't know he was a werewolf; Ashling was kind and understanding. He knew the sooner he told her the better. He realized he was in love with Ashling. Werewolves didn't have to love each other in order to be life mates, but it certainly helped. He *loved* Ashling.

He made his way around to the back of the house and started up the fire escape when he stopped midway. He shifted back to human again

before he continued up the stairs and entered the room.

Ashling lay on her side with a small smile of dreamy satisfaction on her lips.

He slipped his pants and shoes on and was about to pull his T-shirt over his head when Ashling roused. She started to say something when the look of fear sprang into her eyes, and she gasped in fright. Blake turned and looked out the window just in time to see the gray wolf dart down the steps. It was Lynette; there was no mistaking her or her scent. She must have followed him back.

Blake closed and locked the window before he turned back to Ashling.

The sound of fear was in her voice. "What was that? It looked like a wolf."

He sat on the edge of the bed and held her. "It's okay. Whatever it was, wolf or dog, it's locked outside now. I'll stay here with you."

She rested her head against his shoulder and said, "I'd like it if you would, not just because of the crazy dog either."

He stripped off his clothes, crawled under the covers, and he pulled her warm naked body next to his. He wrapped his arms around her, and they nestled together. There was no way he would have left her alone after he saw Lynette out there.

After a while, Ashling's breaths came slow and deep. She was asleep again, and Blake decided that some sleep would do him some good as well.

## Chapter Nine

She stood in the shower and let the warm water wash the blood from her body. She'd settled on rabbit for dinner after she followed Blake back to Ashling's place.

Shutting off the water, Lynette stepped out onto the heated tile floor and grabbed a towel. She looked at her reflection in the full-length mirror, and smiled to herself. "Well, gorgeous," she said, "we need to figure out how to get both Ashling and Blake out of the way."

She relished the thought of telling Ashling that Blake was a werewolf. It was obvious she hadn't any idea, or she wouldn't have had sex with him. Now that Blake had sex with her, he was bound to her for life. If that information slipped out it would by all means hurt them, but not to the extent that Lynette wanted. She wanted them to suffer, especially Ashling.

She combed her wet hair as an idea began to form in her head. She had already started the rumor that Christophe was coming to town, which would put Blake on pins and needles and possibly make him a little less watchful of Ashling.

The idea continued to take shape, and Lynette liked it more and more. What better way to get back at Ashling for all she had done than to first turn her against the man she loved and then make her into the very thing she despised. A few details needed to be worked out, but overall it was a wonderful idea. Lynette decided she would get to work on it tomorrow.

She walked across the room and curled up on the bed with a satisfied, almost gleeful smile on her face.

\* \* \* \* \*

Blake walked into Case's place and heard the crack of the balls on the pool table. He entered the room just in time to see a cute brunette give Case a long kiss before she headed out of the apartment. Case seemed to have just gotten out of bed, his hair was messed, and his clothes appeared to have been thrown on.

Blake glanced back and forth between the door and Case. "Isn't that the clerk from the Crystal Hotel the other night?"

Case eyed the floor sheepishly. "Yeah, that's her." Then he looked up with a big smile and said, "She likes to ride, thinks my bike is sexy."

Blake greeted Leland and Russ, both of whom stood around the pool table, and then asked, "You have any more meat?"

Case picked up his cue and studied the balls on the table. "I always have meat for you beggars." He took his shot and straightened before he surveyed Blake with suspicion. "Where the hell have you been all night?"

Blake gave them all a big toothy grin as he moved past them and headed for the kitchen. "Out," was all the answer he gave.

Case followed him. "You spent the night at Ashling's."

Blake took a pork chop out of the refrigerator and turned to face Case. "If you already knew, then why did you ask?"

"Please tell me you didn't have sex with her." Blake's lack of an answer was all he needed. "I thought you would be more careful. You don't know her."

"And you do? I think I know her better than you do. What the hell's going on?" Blake devoured the chop.

From the other room, Leland shouted, "Hey man, it's your shot."

Case and Blake returned to the room. All four men stood around the pool table—Blake looked, but didn't pay attention, Case tried to concentrate on what shot to make, and the other two were just there to play the game.

Case made his shot and gave Blake a hard look from across the table. "I went to talk to your friend Jimmy yesterday."

Blake watched from the doorway between kitchen and dining room, leaning one shoulder against the frame, arms folded across his chest. "So?"

"Josh and Lynette were mated. Lynette told me Ashling hates werewolves. For some unknown reason Lynette hates Ashling, and it has something to do with Josh." Blake didn't have one flicker of emotion on his face so Case continued by asking, "Did you tell Ashling you're a werewolf?"

"How do you know Lynette told you the truth? The other day you were concerned enough about Ashling to warn Lynette off her and to tell me to check on her after work. Now you're trying to warn me about Ashling. What's going on, Case?"

Case watched Russ take his shot. The ball just missed the pocket. Russ swore under his breath and asked, "You guys talking about Josh Scarlett?"

Blake straightened. "Yeah, did you know him?"

"Not real well, but better than the two of you. I know Lynette asked him to turn his sister to prove he loved Lynette more. Sounds pretty whacked. He wouldn't do it. That could be why Lynette hates his sister. He was a pretty nice guy. You guys would have liked him."

After Case took his shot, he turned back to Blake. "That could be the reason why Ashling hates werewolves along with the fact that her brother was one. Look, I like Ashling. She makes you happy and pisses off Lynette all at the same time. I'm happy you found a mate, but I want you to be aware of some facts. Lynette will go after Ashling, and she doesn't like you much either. Ashling must know Lynette is a werewolf, and sooner or later she'll find out you're one as well."

Leland interrupted with, "Hey, it's a real bitch to be mated to someone who hates you. When I told Kris I was a werewolf, she freaked out. It was after we mated. She wouldn't have anything to do with me for months. She's come around now, but it was hell at first. Tell Ashling right away. The sooner you do it the better."

"Thanks guys. I have to go.... Got a gig at *El Fuego*." Blake turned and walked down the hall toward the door. Case followed close behind.

"Blake, you know I don't mean to bring you down. I'm just watching out for you."

"I know. I have a lot to think about. I will tell Ashling tonight after my set. Thanks for the meat."

"Are we cool?"

"We're cool."

From the dining room, Leland yelled, "Hey Case, hurry up and kiss him all ready. We have a game to play."

Case looked at Blake, rolled his eyes, and chuckled. "What an asshole."

\* \* \* \* \*

Ashling held Blake's hand as they walked back to his place after his show at *El Fuego*. Though he still played beautifully, she got the impression his heart wasn't in it.

They crossed the street, and Ashling gently pulled on his arm to get him to stop.

"Is everything okay?"

She started to think that maybe he might regret having had sex with her. If that was the case, he had better just come out and say so, not lead her on; she hated that.

"If you regret what happened last night, just tell me. I'm a big girl. I can handle it." Then she held her breath and waited for his answer.

Blake gave her a puzzled look. "What? Regret? No, no, no." He set his guitar case down, kissed her cheek, and wrapped his arms around her before he said, "I have no regrets where you're concerned. I just have a few things on my mind. That's all. I'm sorry if I'm distracted." He picked up his case, and they continued arm in arm up to Blake's apartment.

Once inside, he set his guitar case down and followed Ashling into the living room to stop in front of the wall of windows. He stood behind her and wrapped his arms around her. She leaned back against his chest,

and both of them looked out at the skyline. Ashling decided she had to do something to get him out of this funky mood, and there was only one thing she could think of.

She twisted around to face him, wrapped her arms around his neck, and brought his lips to hers. The kiss was long and deep. Their tongues played with each other's as Ashling moved her hand down Blake's body, caressing the muscles of his chest and stomach through his T-shirt before she cupped the semi-hard bulge of his cock through his jeans.

He kissed her deeper, his hands in her hair. She undid the button and zipper of his jeans and slipped her hand inside, his flesh warm against her cool hand. She took a firm hold of his growing erection and stroked it up and down, then rubbed the head of his cock with her thumb. Blake pulled his lips from hers and kissed her neck, moaning while she continued to tease him with firm strokes.

After she pushed his jeans down, Ashling knelt on the floor before him, his cock stood straight out as if begging her to suck it. She looked up at him. Their eyes met as she again held his cock and tilted it up. Blake watched her as she swirled her tongue around his balls then licked up his cock to its head. With her tongue, she lapped at his cleft before she glided it across the tip, sending delicious shivers over his body.

Ashling loved the feel of his cock against her tongue, the skin warm and velvety. She watched his eyes roll back as she slid him into her warm wet mouth, her soft lips wrapping around him.

He held her hair as she moved her mouth over him and teased him in every way possible. She wanted to bring him to the brink before she pulled back. Her tongue licked and swirled as her mouth sucked and kissed. And her hands stroked and massaged in ways that made his eyes roll back again with pleasure.

Ashling hesitated when she heard a strange growl come from Blake. Her eyes widened with fear as she saw the bones in his body start to shift about. She stopped altogether and slid back away from him. Tears welled up in her eyes. She was so terrified she couldn't speak.

Blake opened his mouth to speak, but his voice was a raspy growl.

"Ashling...I'm sorry," was all he could say as he tried to control his shift. This wasn't the way he wanted to tell her.

She scrambled across the room as far away from Blake as she could. "What's going on? What's happening?"

He managed to stall the painful bone-crunching shift. He was too far along to stop it. "I'm a werewolf."

Ashling stared at him. A new kind of fear made its way over her features before the rage and hatred took over and marred her expression. "You *son of a bitch!* You were leading me on all this time! You and Lynette!"

Blake still struggled with his shift. "No. That's not true."

The look of disgust Ashling gave him stabbed at his heart. He tried to explain, wanted to explain, but he was just too far along.

*I should have told her!* He screamed to himself.

"I ...wouldn't...hurt you...ever." It was a struggle to get those words out, but Ashling had to know, had to understand, he would never hurt her. He would never work with Lynette.

He growled in anguish. He wanted her to understand. "Ashling...*please!*"

With tears streaming down her face, she picked up her purse and ran from the apartment.

Blake, now mostly wolf, gave in to the shift and let out a long howl of pain. It wasn't pain caused by his shift. It was because Ashling left. *His fault.* He caused the tears to run down her cheeks. *All his fault.* He'd put the look of fright and hatred on her face.

With her gone, though, his blood stopped its crazy rush through his body, and he was able to calm down and catch his breath. Although the beast in him wanted to rage, the pain he felt over Ashling's fear of him was enough to make it possible for him to revert back to human form.

He had to go after her. He had to explain, convince her she had nothing to fear from him. But his body was weak and the muscles shaky from his struggle.

Blake managed to get to his feet just as Case bolted through the door.

"I heard your howl. What's going on?" Case gave Blake a once over. "You look like shit. What happened?"

Blake started for the door as he said, "Ashling. You have to help me find Ashling."

Case stepped in front of him and prevented his going any farther. "If you try to go anywhere *like that* you'll end up getting arrested."

Blake looked down to see he was naked, his clothes ruined from his shift. He hadn't thought of that. His main concern was Ashling.

He went to the bedroom as fast as his weakened state would allow, and when he emerged in a pair of jeans, tugging a T-shirt over his head, Case still blocked the door. "You're not going to do her any good if you're sick. Now tell me what's going on."

He knew Case was right. He had to give his body some time to recover since he did two complete shifts within minutes. And he used most of his strength to try and fight the first one.

Blake sat on the edge of a chair and jerked on his shoes. "I'm an asshole, Case."

Case smirked. "Tell me something I don't already know."

"Ashling came back here with me tonight. We were standing over by the windows." Blake looked at his friend, his voice barely a whisper as he explained, "I was going to tell her, Case. I was. But she started to kiss me, started to go down on me. My blood rushed, the excitement, the arousal. It was all too much. I couldn't control it."

Case gave him a sympathetic look. "I think I can guess the rest. You scared the hell out of her, didn't you?"

Blake started for the door again, his strength and energy almost back to normal. "I need to find her, Case. I need to talk to her, to explain."

Case stopped him. "Leave her alone."

"*What?* I can't just leave her. She's upset. She thinks Lynette and I are in this together! Besides Lynette may be out there somewhere, and I need to get my mate back."

Case stood his ground and shook his head. "You are the *last* person she is going to want to see right now. What's done is done. We told ya, man. You should have told her!"

Blake ran his hand through his hair. "I don't need an *I told you so* lecture, Case. She needs protection. She needs comfort."

"*She hates werewolves, Blake!* Ashling is going to need some time. I understand your concern about Lynette, so we'll go find Ashling, but you stay out of sight. You'll be lucky if she ever forgives you, and if she does, you better kiss that woman's ass every day."

He told Case as they head for the door, "I plan on it."

\* \* \* \* \*

Ashling knew she didn't have much time to get away. Once he had finished shifting, he could rip her apart. She had to get as far away from Blake as she could, as fast as she could, and she didn't want to go home—not yet anyway. He and Lynette would go there first and wait for her. So, she ran.

Ashling couldn't see where she was going. Anger and tears made her blind to her surroundings. But when she stopped, she ended up in front of Josh's grave. She knelt on the ground, wrapped her arms around the cold headstone and rested her cheek against it. She felt lost and alone. She'd fallen for a man that toyed with her affections and used her. He had to have used her to help Lynette. There was no other explanation, was there?

She allowed herself a moment of insanity, to do whatever she had to in order to feel close to the one person in the world she trusted. *Josh*.

"What the hell was I thinking, Josh? Why did I fall so quickly? I know, you would say, 'You have to take a chance in love.' That's such crap. I think I fell for Blake so quickly because of this damn curse! I've kept myself at a distance because of it, and the first time someone pays the slightest amount of attention to me, I lie flat on my back with legs spread. You were right, though. Lynette is sneaky and will do whatever it takes."

Ashling cried on the shoulder of his gravestone until she had no more tears left. Then she stood up, wiped the dirt from her pants and turned around to leave with a new resolve to strike back at Lynette as much as she could.

That's when she saw someone approach and decided to put Josh's marker between her and the stranger. The stranger turned out to be anything but.

Blake's friend, Case stopped a few feet away and seemed to sense her anxiety. "Are you all right?"

"You're a werewolf, too, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am. Blake and I were bitten around the same time by the same alpha."

"Lynette."

"God, no! Neither one of us can stand that bitch." He smiled. "Pun intended."

She didn't return the smile. "What do you want?"

"To make sure you're okay."

Ashling could understand why a woman would fall for Case. He was a handsome man, and that Texas drawl was soothing. But he was also a werewolf. "Why do you care?" she asked with suspicion.

"Blake told me what happened. I'm sorry it happened that way. I know you hate werewolves, but we're not all the same, especially Blake."

"You eat human flesh!" she said, the disgust obvious in her tone.

"No, not all of us hunt people. There are many of us who eat raw meat from animals to curb that desire for human flesh. Blake and I are among them. Blake would never hurt you in any way."

"How do you know that?"

Case smiled. "I know Blake. He couldn't get you out of his mind the first time he saw you, and he didn't even know your name. He never invites women to see him play. Hell, he never invites me. I don't know if he's any good or not."

"He's very good."

"Then, there is the fact that you and he had sex. Wolves and werewolves are monogamous. We mate for life. He's bonded with you, bound to you. He loves you, or he never would've slept with you."

Ashling took a deep breath. If Case wanted to attack, he would have done so by now. "How do I know you're not lying for him?"

"You don't." Case paused and studied her. "I would suggest you

head home. You never know where Lynette is, but you should be safe now. I'll be nearby just in case."

"And Blake? Where is he?"

"Not far."

\* \* \* \* \*

Ashling awoke from a troubled sleep. She got up out of bed and looked out the window. The sun was just starting to turn the sky a dark rosy hue.

Today she could sleep in, she thought, because it was Sunday.

She didn't go back to bed, though. Instead, she opened the window and stepped out onto the fire escape. Leaning against the rail, she looked at the yard stretched out before her.

Movement below caught her attention. It was a large black wolf. It must have been lying on the ground and got up when it heard her above. It looked up at her, and she could see the familiar pale blue eyes.

*Blake.*

Had he been out here all night?

A noise from the far end of the yard caught their attention, and they both glanced in that direction. A grey wolf appeared out of the bushes. It arched its back and curled its lip to display long white fangs. Blake flattened his ears against his head and bristled his fur. Then he crouched, ready to attack if necessary.

Both animals walked toward each other, their snarls and growls getting louder. Ashling wasn't sure what she should do, but tried to think of something when another grey wolf charged forward from the street and stood with Blake. The new arrival caused the first grey wolf to think twice and back down. It turned and disappeared back into the bushes.

Blake jumped up onto the roof of the garden house, threw his head up, and let out a howl. The sound more sorrowful than the one Ashling heard the other night.

When Blake jumped down, he and the second grey wolf ran off, and disappeared into the morning mist.

## Chapter Ten

Blake stationed himself outside Ashling's place every night for the past three nights. Case took the watch for a short time while Blake worked a late shift at the restaurant. She had come outside the last two nights and sat on the fire escape just above his head. There were no words spoken to break their mutual bond of silence.

He longed to hear her voice, hear her tell him to come up, and he longed to kiss her lips and feel the softness of her skin. Hell, he would even stay in wolf form and be happy to sleep at the foot of her bed if she'd let him.

Blake made himself comfortable on the grass. His black fur blended in with the shadows. It was late and past the time Ashling usually came out. He knew she was home. He had seen her lights on and could smell her. He rested his chin on his outstretched paws, his eyes raised toward the sky, watching the clouds gather. The sound of the window opening made him lift his head, and he could see Ashling through the holes of the metal. She walked over to the rail and looked down at him. Their eyes met.

"It's going to rain tonight." Her voice was soft and sent a warm sensation through his body. "I'll leave my window open if you decide you want to stay dry. You're welcome to come inside, but I don't want the smell of wet dog in my house." The last part was said with a hint of humor. Then she turned and went back inside.

He laid there a moment in disbelief over what he just heard. Then

he sprang to his feet and climbed the stairs as fast as his four legs could carry him. When he entered the room, she was lying in bed. "It's up to you if you want to stay a wolf or if you want to shift into human form," she told him, "but, if you stay a wolf, you have to sleep on the floor."

Blake made the bone-crunching shift from wolf to human. There was no way he wanted to sleep on the floor if he had the opportunity to sleep in the same bed with her. He then stood before her in complete naked human form, his blood on fire as he watched her gaze roam over his body.

With a concerned look, she asked, "Does it hurt when you shift?"

"Tremendously," he said, his deep voice echoing in the room.

"Would you like to come to bed?"

"Very much."

She flipped the covers down in invitation for him to join her. He didn't need to be asked twice. He crawled in next to her and took her into his arms.

Blake brushed the hair from her face and traced her lips with his thumb. His eyes took in every aspect of her face and skin. She was beautiful.

His kiss was soft, deep, and she returned it with as much passion and warmth as he gave. He broke from her lips and looked into her eyes as he grazed his hands over her skin and brought forth goose bumps. She returned his caress with gentle strokes of her hands over his arms and shoulders.

Blake ran his tongue over a rosy pink nipple, then pulled away to watch it tighten to full erection. He then took it into his mouth where he used his tongue to play with the hardened nub. He smiled when she laced her fingers through his hair and let a sigh slip past her lips. He loved those soft sounds.

He kissed his way from one breast to the other. He took that nipple into his warm mouth and showed it no mercy, while he slid his hand up her inner thigh. She spread her legs for his searching fingers, and he slipped one between her pussy lips. He glided it up and down and explored her delicate, wet pussy. Blake inched a finger deep inside of her

and watched as she closed her eyes in enjoyment.

When she opened them again, she caressed his cheek and whispered, "I love you."

Blake never realized his heart could swell so much after hearing those words. He took her hand from his cheek and kissed her palm. "I love you, too." Then he kissed the inside of her wrist before he added, "Very much."

His gaze locked with hers as he positioned himself between her open thighs and slid his hard cock inside her. God, she felt good. He watched her as he pumped himself in and out, watched the different emotions and stages of ecstasy play across her face, watched as her cheeks flushed when she came close to her orgasm, as her lips parted with a sigh. He felt her fingers dig into his flesh and saw the flood of emotion and pleasure wash over her the moment she reached her climax and toppled over its edge. Only then did he permit his own muscles to tighten, his own pleasure to surge forth, and his own orgasm to burst free.

A few minutes later, Blake lay next to Ashling, her head on his chest. She sat up, lightly kissed his lips and said, "Good night, Blake," before she snuggled up against him.

He pulled her closer and wondered what it was that caused her to forgive him, to look past the fact that he was a werewolf.

*Does it really matter? No. As long as I have her back in my arms, that's all that matters. And the fact that she loves me!*

"Good night, Ashling."

\* \* \* \* \*

Lynette sat on the roof of the garden house and spied Blake and Ashling. She had taken the opportunity the last few days to gather information and to put her plan in motion. Ashling's discovery of Blake's secret was unexpected, but Blake and Ashling having sex again after that discovery moved the plan forward.

She jumped down off the building and quietly padded down the street, ducking behind bushes or houses when she didn't want to be seen.

She wanted to keep a low profile until her plan unfolded.

Lynette made it to the cemetery and hid behind a tall grave monument. She peered around it, and watched for the rabbit she smelled was around. As she waited she thought about the other victim she lost to Ashling's interference.

He had been perfect. He was tall, blond, blue-eyed—a regular California surfer type. Nevertheless, she'd been unable to control herself and mangled him up more than she should have. That was when she'd heard the old lady open her door. Fortunately, the lady couldn't see well and didn't know the body was right there in her yard.

Lynette had taken cover, but the lady was distracted by that little black cat. The damn thing wouldn't leave and, of course, the lady had to get it some milk then some food. Lynette lost her patience and left. When she came back later, Ashling's handy work was displayed. Lynette had almost gagged on the smell of the wolfsbane.

Lynette had her information and her plan, and now she had the rabbit.

\* \* \* \* \*

She sat on a comfortable tall chair, a glass of wine in one hand and a potato chip in the other. Ashling gazed at Blake as he contemplated his shot, bent over, took aim and thrust his stick forward. He straightened and watched his decision play out across the table.

Case entered the room with a plate of barbecued ribs and a bowl of coleslaw. He set them down on a small table, among other plates and silverware. He motioned to Ashling. "Help yourself. I made the coleslaw myself." He turned to Blake. "My shot, yet?"

Blake gave him a noncommittal grunt and headed for the food. He stood behind Ashling as she fixed herself a plate, his hands caressing her ass while his lips kissed the back of her neck where stray wisps of hair from her ponytail curled.

Ashling smiled. "You're going to embarrass your friend."

"He should watch. He might learn something."

Case straightened in mock indignation. "Man, that's just low. I taught you all you know about women. You used to let a girl know you liked her by marking her as your territory."

Ashling gave him a puzzled look, so Case explained with a smile. "He'd lift his leg and piss on her."

She looked at Blake's stony face and giggled, the sparkle in his eyes gave away his own amusement.

Ashling sat back down and asked, "Who is the alpha that turned you two into werewolves? Is she around here?"

Blake smiled and picked up one of the barbecued ribs. "*She* is a *he*, and his name is Christophe. He's in Europe somewhere, and very seldom comes here."

"Aren't werewolves like wolves when it comes to being part of a pack with the alpha?"

Case walked over and grabbed a plate of ribs. "Christophe isn't the pack type. He's more of a rogue, a lone wolf. In some ways he's a lot more dangerous than Lynette, but he's less volatile, and he will eat animal meat more than hunt humans."

"He owns this building," Blake said as he licked sauce off his fingers. "He set each of us up with our own apartment, which is why we can afford to live here. We don't pay rent. The other units are rented out to whoever can afford them."

Ashling contemplated her coleslaw. "So he takes care of you? How many of you are there here?"

"Besides Blake and me, there's Leland and Russ. Russ lives on the first floor, and Leland lives two floors up with his wife. I wouldn't say Christophe takes care of us. He does what he thinks is his duty as the alpha. I heard he was supposed to be here in the next couple of days."

Blake gave Case a hard look. Ashling saw the exchange and asked, "You don't like him?"

Blake took a deep breath before he answered, "Most betas don't like the alpha unless they are mated, and even then it isn't necessary. No, I don't like him. He destroyed my life and the lives of others. I hated my first hunt, hated the taste of human blood. It was my first and last. I

vowed never again. I would rather starve to death. That didn't last long. I got hungry, but I loathed the idea of hunting people. Other animals are not as plentiful as you might think. I got desperate and bought a huge steak from the butcher. The desire to kill for blood or meat disappeared after I ate it. Same thing with Case."

"That's how Blake and I met. I'm part owner of a small business that butchers and packs meat."

Blake picked up his pool cue and walked around the table. "Enough stalling, Casey. It's time for me to kick your ass at pool."

Case looked at Ashling and rolled his eyes. "I'm not letting you win just because your lady is here."

## Chapter Eleven

Lynette found the perfect bait for the first phase of her trap. She had called Blake and told him to meet her in the alley behind *El Fuego* after work. It would be a perfect time, and she had the perfect spot—no one around, the view blocked by a large trash bin, and the only light was from an overhead lamp attached to the building at the end of the alleyway.

She waited outside behind the trash bin when her victim walked out the backdoor of the building—an accountant or financial advisor, she couldn't remember. That's when she attacked. She made sure he was dead and dragged his body behind the large trash bin so he wouldn't be discovered, at least not by anyone but the little black cat.

Lynette shifted, grabbed the bag of clothes she had hidden earlier, got dressed, and waited just out of view of any curious passersby. She could sense the beast within her victim start to awaken. This victim would be a success in many ways.

She didn't have long to wait. The little black cat appeared at the end of the alleyway. Lynette watched in gleeful anticipation as it sat down and washed its face with apparent indifference to its surroundings. After a few moments of grooming, it stood and continued its journey down the alleyway toward the bait Lynette set out.

\* \* \* \* \*

With the restaurant closed for the evening, Blake walked out the backdoor and stepped into the alley. He hated the thought of meeting Lynette. She was such an arrogant bitch. After he and Case chased her away from Ashling's the other night, he knew he couldn't afford to underestimate her, but he agreed to meet her because she said it concerned Ashling.

He saw her down at the end of the alleyway by the trash bin used for the offices. He could hear her laughter, and she looked as if she was playing with something. As he approached he heard a deep growl and hiss. That's when he saw Lynette mercilessly taunting a cat. She had it cornered up against the brinks of the building. Its ears were flattened against its head, and its eyes narrowed, fur bristled.

Lynette jabbed at it with a stick, sadistically laughing at its reaction. With claws unsheathed, it swiped at the stick. It moved so fast its paw was a blur, and then it opened its mouth and let out a vicious hiss. All the while its eyes never left Lynette, and they burned with pure hatred.

"Recognize this little pussy?" Lynette asked him.

"No," he lied, but he didn't want her to know that he did recognize it or its scent.

"Well, you should." Again she jabbed with the stick, and the cat swatted before it crouched lower to the ground. Its growl started off in a high pitch before it ended in a low rumble, and then another hiss came forth.

Blake couldn't stand to see the creature teased. He had no love of cats, but this was just wrong. "Stop teasing the damn cat," he shouted, his voice gruff with anger. "What the hell do you want? You said you wanted to see me about Ashling."

Lynette looked at him and gave an arrogant smirk. "I have a few tidbits about your lady love that I'm sure you'll be interested in." She stepped to the side to keep the cat from running off and then continued with, "Ashling is the one who has been performing some ritual that releases my victims from the werewolf curse. As you know, I hate interference."

Blake kept his face as stony as possible. He didn't want to give

anything away to Lynette, but why hadn't Ashling told him this herself? "Good for her. Is that it?"

Lynette jabbed at the cat again. This time the reaction was a loud vicious howl, and the cat's body became stiff in preparation for a fight. "Do you recognize this beast?" When Blake didn't answer, Lynette taunted, "You should. Look at its collar."

Blake saw a little charm that dangled on its red collar. It was a silver filigree heart, the same as the one Ashling wore. "So, what about it?"

The arrogant, know-it-all smirk still on her face, Lynette said, "It's just like Ashling's. Don't you find that odd?"

He did, but he sure as hell wasn't going to let her know about it. "Maybe the cat's owner and Ashling shop at the same jewelry store. So what? What does the cat have to do with Ashling?"

"Ashling has her own curse. I'm afraid you're not the sole shape-shifter in the relationship."

"The only curse she has is you. Ashling isn't a werewolf." Blake looked at the charm, studied the cat, and then began to recognize the scent of the perfume.

Lynette jabbed once again at the cat. It stood on tiptoe, arched its back, and let out another loud hiss followed by a deep growl.

"No, Blake, you're right. She's not a werewolf." Lynette looked at the cat. "Are you, Ashling?"

Blake crouched down to get a better look at the cat. It had deep golden eyes and shiny black fur. It looked between him and Lynette. The charm on its collar was the same as Ashling's.

He had suspected Ashling was the one who performed the rituals, but he had never seen her do it or actually found her around any of Lynette's victims.

He whispered, "Ashling?" and the cat looked at him and blinked. He found anguish and sorrow in its eyes. He held out his hand for it to come forward. It hesitated then craned its neck forward to sniff his fingers. It looked back up at him, but when its eyes shifted to look over his shoulder, they became wide with fear, and it crouched down to the

ground.

Blake turned his head to see what had caught the cat's attention and out of the corner of his eye, he saw Lynette start to swing a board he'd seen propped against the building when he entered the alley. In that instant, he realized her target wasn't him but the cat. He popped out of his crouch and shoved his shoulder into her, causing her to lose her balance and her grip on the board. Surprised by Blake's reaction, Lynette stumbled and fell backwards to the ground. The board clattered harmlessly to the asphalt.

In the commotion, the cat took its opportunity for escape and ran off around the corner. Blake got to his feet, started after the cat until Lynette grabbed his leg, pulled it out from under him, and sent him sprawling to the ground. He sprang to his feet and fled around the corner, but no cat. He took off down the street and headed for Ashling's place.

Lynette came to her feet, furious that Blake thwarted her opportunity to smash the cat to pieces, thereby getting rid of Ashling as well. The first part of her plan failed, but she had a backup idea, and that would take care of both Ashling and Blake.

She started to go after them, but her attention was distracted by the growl from the new member of her pack. A pleased smile spread across her face. At least she had one triumph for the evening.

## Chapter Twelve

Blake ran up the stairs to the second floor and rang the bell. He waited, but there was no answer. He pounded on the door and still there was nothing. He tried to turn the knob, in hopes it wouldn't be locked, but no such luck. He stood back, put his nose in the air and breathed in deeply. The intoxicating smell of her pussy combined with her perfume made him groan with lust.

He stepped forward and again pounded on the door. "Ashling, please open the door." He listened for any sound of movement.

"I know you're in there." He tilted his head to one side and listened. That's when he heard the muffled sound of her crying.

Enough was enough. He turned the doorknob, broke the lock, and opened the door. He strode down the hall to her bedroom. She was curled up on the bed, her arms around one of the big pillows, tears streaming down her face.

Blake sat on the edge of the bed and tenderly ran his hand over her thigh as he saw the beginnings of a couple small, off round bruises. He hadn't noticed them the other night when he spent the better part of an hour exploring every bit of her body.

"Ashling, where did you get these bruises?" Though he believed he knew the source, he wanted her to tell him so there was no doubt.

"From Lynette."

"Lynette, when?"

"Just a while ago when she jabbed me with that damn stick. You

saw her."

He hadn't realized Lynette was being so cruel, but it didn't surprise him. "Why didn't you tell me about the cat?"

"I don't know. I guess I was afraid. You have such loathing for your curse. I didn't want to see you have the same disdain for me. I didn't expect to fall in love with you. I've kept myself at a distance from everyone. I hoped the curse would run its course so I could go back to living a normal life."

"Ashling, I love you. There is nothing that will change that." He gave her a lopsided grin and hoped what he said next would cheer her up a bit. "Besides, you know I like to eat pussy." When she gave him a smile he added, "Tell me about this curse, about why you shift and become a cat."

She wiped the tears from her cheek with the back of her hand and sat up. "Josh was our mother's favorite. Everything he did was always wonderful. He could do no wrong. She hates me. Josh never understood her hatred of me, and I still don't, but he was always my protector—from her or anyone. When Josh was killed, my mother blamed me. He must have told her he was a werewolf, because my mother said he was killed because he wouldn't sacrifice me. She became so distraught in her grief she turned to some witch or sorceress, whatever, and had this curse put on me as punishment for Josh's death. Since she truly believed it was my fault, the curse stuck.

"I found out later that Lynette was the one who wanted him to turn me into a werewolf. That's when I decided to use my curse to help others and get back at Lynette for turning my brother into one of her toys. I found a ritual that could be performed to reverse the werewolf curse as long as the victim hasn't eaten or tasted human flesh. I use the form of the cat to go unnoticed by others and find out where the victims are taken or where they are. No one pays attention to a cat. There are strays all over."

Blake took it all in. "You said you were hoping the curse would run its course. Does that mean you just have it for a certain length of time?"

Ashling looked down at her hands folded in her lap. Fresh tears started to fall as she tells him, "I thought so, but I found out today when I

was doing some research on it that I will have this until my mother dies or if a stronger curse is put on me, in which case that one takes over. It was like finding out I had an incurable fatal disease."

Blake's heart broke with her tears. He took her into his arms and held her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Blake quietly got up out of bed, not wanting to disturb Ashling. He left the room and shut the door when he heard the doorbell. It was Case with some meat.

Case studied the doorknob before he walked in. "What happened with this?"

"I did that. I'll have to fix it later."

Case followed Blake into the kitchen and sat at the table to watch him make coffee. "Man, you look like shit. You been up all night?"

Blake took a steak out of the bag of meat Case brought and ate it while the coffee brewed. There was a lot of new information to digest.

He poured each of them a cup of coffee and sat down at the table. "I was up most of the night with Ashling."

A knowing smile spread across Case's face. "Yeah? Well, I don't want to hear about it."

Blake got up and grabbed himself another steak. He sat back down and said, "You're such an asshole. That's not why I was up all night. Ashling is a shape-shifter."

Case looked across the table dumbfounded. "What?"

"Remember a few weeks ago when I was out looking for any fresh victims of Lynette's, and I mentioned a little black cat that showed up and smelled of a woman's perfume?"

"Yeah, that was the night you saw Ashling walk into the morgue."

"Ashling is the cat. She's also the one who performs the rituals on Lynette's victims and reverses the curse."

"She told you this last night?"

"Well, to tell the truth, Lynette started the conversation. I met her

last night after work at the restaurant."

"Lynette? Are you crazy? What happened?"

"When I showed up she had the cat cornered and was tormenting it. Lynette told me Ashling was the cat, that she was a shape-shifter. It, or she, had on a red velvet collar with a silver filigree heart pendant. You've seen Ashling's."

"That doesn't mean the cat was Ashling. Lynette could have put that on the thing."

"Just wait. I'm not finished. Ashling and the cat have the same scent. I've never put the two together until last night in the alley. It's the perfume she wears. Anyway, while I was distracted, Lynette grabbed a board and was about to smash the cat when I stopped her. That's when the cat took off. I followed the scent here and found Ashling, bruised and crying. She confirmed what Lynette said."

"Wow. How long has she been doing this?"

"Not long at all. She told me her mother put the curse on her sometime after Josh's death. He's only been dead for what, a little over a year?"

"Yeah, so what are you going to do now?"

"Find a way to get that curse reversed."

"You may want to wait until after Christophe leaves. Rumors of his arrival are flying about like crazy."

Blake got up, went to the refrigerator, and stared at its contents. He grabbed the carton of eggs and the loaf of bread. After he set them on the counter, he turned and faced Case. "I'm going after him and do what I can to end our curse."

Case gave Blake a concerned look. "That means you'll have to kill him."

"I know." Blake turned away and started to put bread in the toaster. He didn't want to burden Case or Ashling with his thoughts or ideas of Christophe. "I'm making Ashling some breakfast. You can stick around if want to."

## Chapter Thirteen

"Good afternoon, Miss Scarlett, Mr. de Marco." The door attendant greeted them as they walked into the lobby of the condominium.

Ashling smiled in return. "Hello, Kevin."

The girl at the desk stopped them before they got on the elevator and handed Blake an envelope. It had his name scrawled across the front.

He could tell Ashling was curious about what was inside. Case was the sole person he told about his idea of going after Christophe, and that was a week ago at Ashling's apartment. He had hoped he wouldn't have to tell her, but it looked as if he didn't have much choice.

Once upstairs, Blake unlocked the door and held it for Ashling. He followed her in and looked around. There was evidence of her feminine touch everywhere. She had spent the week with him so she would be safe, but it looked more like she had lived there all along. A photo of her and Josh sat on the mantle, her sweater was thrown over a chair, flowers bloomed in a vase on the dining room table, and the kitchen was well stocked—so unlike his bachelor ways. Her panties and lingerie dripped a pathway through the bedroom, her shampoo sat in the shower, and that weed whacker she called a razor was near the sink. There were other things as well.

He felt better with her there. He didn't worry about her when he was at work, since Case was close by.

He had formed a tentative plan about Christophe, and one of the aspects was to marry Ashling before his encounter. That way, if anything

happened to him, she would be taken care of.

Blake sighed heavily and stood at the wall of windows that gave him a view of the city, the letter burning in his hand. He ripped the flap open, took out the letter, and read it.

"What does it say, or am I not supposed to know?" Ashling's voice startled him. He hadn't heard her walk into the room. "It's from Christophe, isn't it?"

He gave her a surprised look. "Why would you say that?"

"The afternoon you and Case were playing pool, he mentioned Christophe may be coming. It was the day we had barbecued ribs and coleslaw. You told me about Christophe, your first taste of blood, and your decision to eat raw meat. I also know you are in all likelihood planning to go after him."

"What makes you say that?"

"I know you. I know you hate him for what he has done. Please, Blake, don't keep me in the dark. Maybe I can help in some way."

Blake closed his eyes for a moment, reluctant to tell her. He had no time to do some of the things he had wanted to, to make sure she would always be safe. "He wants to meet today, in about an hour at the park near the river."

Ashling's voice sounded small when she asked, "So soon?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so. He never likes to meet here, too much of a reminder of the lives he's destroyed."

Ashling thought for a moment. "I have something to help you." She walked into the bedroom, Blake not far behind her. She pulled one of her large suitcases out of the closet and opened up a secret compartment. In it was a black velvety bag. Ashling lifted it out and went over to the bed. After she pulled the cords apart, she carefully removed a slender bladed dagger with a carved wooden handle.

She held it up for him to look at. "It's silver-plated from tip to tip. The blade runs through the handle, which is held on by these silver-plated screws."

Blake took the weapon in his hand and examined it closer. "How is this going to help? It's pretty small."

"Like I said, it's silver-plated. A person can kill a werewolf with silver. You'll have to make sure you stab him in the heart though. The blade has to penetrate the heart to kill him and reverse the curse on you."

He looked deep into her eyes. "What if I don't make it back?"

Tears welled up in her eyes, her voice soft and barely audible. "You will."

\* \* \* \* \*

She pulled open the bedroom door before he had the chance. She stood before him in a black leather corset and thigh high boots, a smile spread across her face and the desire growing in her eyes.

Case was about to throw her over his shoulder, carry her to the bed, and have his way with her when his thoughts were rudely interrupted by a loud persistent knock on his front door. He decided to ignore it, but the knock turned into a pounding that reverberated down his spine and was beginning to mess with his hard on. He groaned in frustration, as the pounding on the door seemed to shake the walls. "Stay right there. Don't you move," he said to the leather clad beauty.

He yanked open the front door and saw Jimmy in the hall, a worried look on his face. "What the hell do you want?"

"Casey, the rumors about Christophe are untrue. They were lies spread by Lynette. She's trying to set up a trap or something for Blake. I went up to his place but no one answered."

"Wait here." Case went back inside and grabbed his keys. He told the leather clad lovely there was some trouble, and he would be back as soon as he could.

He closed the door behind him and motioned for Jimmy to follow him up the stairs. "Blake said he had something to take care of this afternoon."

They reached Blake's door, and Case pounded on it. "Ashling should be here."

"No one answered when I rang the bell or knocked."

"She doesn't know you. She wouldn't open the door for you." He

pounded on the door again. "Ashling?"

Case used his key and unlocked the door, and called out to Ashling as they entered the apartment. "Ashling, are you home? It's me, Case. Maybe she went with him."

Jimmy stood in the hall while Case searched the apartment for Ashling. When he reappeared, he motioned for Jimmy to come into the living room. A note sat on the coffee table.

Case read it then handed it to Jimmy. "I'd know his handwriting anywhere and so would Blake. It says to meet him at the park by the river. That was over an hour ago."

Jimmy tosses the note back down. "It won't take us long to get there. If I'm right he'll need our help."

"Who'll need your help?" Blake's voice made the other two men jump in surprise. They turned and were relieved to see him in one piece and unharmed.

"Damn, Blake." Case tried to sound angry. "You scared the shit out of me. Jimmy came to my place and said the rumors about Christophe were lies."

Blake shrugged his shoulders. "They must have been. I went to the park as the note asked to meet him, and he never showed up." He looked at Jimmy. "How do you know they're lies?"

Jimmy sat down, a look of relief on his face. "Lynette. She likes to brag when she's done something big. She didn't come right out and say it in so many words, but I understood what she meant. I guess I was wrong about the trap."

Blake gave him a puzzled look. "What trap?"

"She said she was going to use the rumors about Christophe to lure you into a trap. Obviously, it didn't work."

Case looked at Blake. "Where's Ashling?"

"She's here."

"No, she's not. I used my key to get in."

Blake took off for the bedroom. When he came back, he looked frantic. "She was here when I left." He walked over to the table by the door and came back carrying a small tan bag. "This is her purse, and this

note was next to it. Lynette has Ashling. Go get Leland and Russ, then meet me at the cemetery by Josh's grave."

## Chapter Fourteen

The sun had just started to go down when Blake arrived at Josh's grave, but there was no sign of either woman. He put his nose in the air and could smell Ashling's perfume. He could sense something else as well.

Blake followed the scent and found Ashling lying behind a bush a few feet away from Josh's grave. She was unconscious and had been bitten on the left shoulder. The torn flesh and teeth marks were unmistakable. The other thing he sensed was the beast within her coming to life. It struggled to take over as it grew in strength.

He crouched down beside her and held her in his lap. He felt helpless, not knowing what he could do to help her.

"Don't worry, Blake. She's not dead, just injured." Lynette's voice sounded amused.

Blake gently placed Ashling back down on the ground and stood to face the alpha bitch.

She chuckled. "It's funny how life works, isn't it?"

Blake kept his voice flat and unemotional, his body and mind ready for anything. "How's that, Lynette?"

She put out a hand to indicate Ashling. "First, I turn her brother out of love, and then I turn her out of hate. She hates werewolves, but falls in love with one and now she is one. She has become the very thing she despises."

"I don't see the humor."

"Well, then maybe you'll find this funny. Her little *pussy* curse is broken, now that she's a werewolf. She'll be just like you, except for one tiny detail." Lynette started to circle around him, testing his defenses. He knew she looked for a weak spot. "She will, of course, be under my control."

Blake watched her move, ready for whatever she might do, and thought of the dagger hidden under the back of his shirt. "Why do you hate her so much, Lynette?"

A wicked grin spread across her face. "Because of Josh. He was so protective of her. He adored her."

"She was his sister. There's nothing wrong with an older brother loving and protecting his little sister."

"It didn't matter. I wanted him to prove he loved *me*! He wouldn't turn her, and when he found out I sent someone else to do it, he became enraged and turned on me! He killed Brett, the one I sent after Ashling, and then he came after me. She has cost me a number of victims with her damn ritual. Now, she's mine."

Lynette and Blake lunged at each other, wrestling to the ground. She got him on his back, but he managed to throw her off and get to his feet. Lynette hit Josh's headstone, crumbling it to pieces before she landed on the ground. She stood up, dusted off her pants, and then lunged at Blake again.

They fought for several minutes. Blake gave as good as he got, but he was starting to wear down. As much strength as he had, Lynette was an alpha. Her strength was superior.

He pulled the dagger out and continued to fight, mindful for any opportunity to jab the blade into her heart.

Ashling's transformation was almost complete. Blake could see her body quiver. He knew he had to act fast, but when Ashling made a small howl of agony, the sound and his concern for her distracted Blake's attention away from Lynette.

Lynette lunged at Blake from behind and shoved his body with enough force against a tree that he lost his grip on the dagger. The collision knocked the wind out of him for a moment. The dagger landed

on the ground well out of his reach. Lynette wasted no time and continued to batter him with blows.

He managed to get himself turned around, picked her up, and threw her as far away from him as his strength would allow. She landed on the ground with a loud thud and slid across the grass a foot or two.

Blake turned and started to head for Ashling, searching for the dagger. By the time he heard Lynette come up behind him, it was too late. She had picked up a piece of Josh's broken marker and used it to hit Blake on the back of his head. He fell to the ground unconscious.

Out of breath from the fight, Lynette walked over and stood near Blake's head. Her anger and hatred reached a new high. She saw before her another opportunity to make Ashling suffer, by killing her mate, the man she loved, and doing it with a piece of her own brother's gravestone. She felt triumphant as she started to lift the piece of rock over her head with the intent to crush his skull.

"Lynette."

The soft voice caught her off guard, and she turned in the direction from which it came.

The last bit of sunlight glinted off the blade of the dagger right before Ashling plunged it into Lynette's heart.

Lynette's eyes went wide with horror and disbelief. She crumbled to her knees and dropped the stone harmlessly to the ground as she fell. She managed to pull the dagger free before she landed face first on the grass.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ashling lounged on the bed next to Blake, propped up against the headboard with pillows, reading a book.

Blake rolled over, and his eyes fluttered open. He stared at her for some moments as if he couldn't figure out who she was. His voice was raspy and drowsy, "How long have I been out?"

Ashling set the book on the nightstand and fingered his hair. "About a day and a half or so. She hit you pretty hard. How do you feel?"

He rolled onto his back and looked up at the ceiling. "I feel like I have a hangover. I have a headache, too."

Ashling smiled at him. "That's no surprise. Would you like something to eat? Some steak maybe?" Blake gave her a noncommittal grunt as he tried to sit up.

She came in later with his steak and found him sitting up. She set the tray down in front of him as she commented, "You're starting to look like yourself again, a little scruffier maybe." She ran the back of her fingers against the stubble on his cheek.

Blake swallowed a bite of his steak, closing his eyes as if he hadn't eaten anything so good before. "Are you going to tell me what happened?"

"When you're done eating," Ashling sat down on the bed again and picked up her book. She pretended to read, but she watched him out of the corner of her eye.

He finished his steak and drank half of the bottle of water that was next to the bed. When he got up to go to the bathroom, he swayed a bit and was a little uneasy on his feet, but he walked slow and took his time. She heard the water run and the shower door open and shut. She took it as a good sign that he felt well enough to want to shower. Eventually he made it back to the bed, his hair damp, his face shaven, and his body completely naked.

She set the book back down and looked at him. It was amazing what some rest and a little nourishment could do. He looked better already. His eyes had some sparkle, and his color was almost normal. She could tell he was ready to hear what happened.

She sat up in a half lotus position. "Okay, where do you want me to start?"

"What day is today?"

"Monday."

"Where's Lynette?"

"Dead."

"Who killed her?"

"I did."

Blake studied her face before his gaze dropped to her shoulder. "Are you okay?"

Ashling caressed his cheek. "I'm fine," she told him then moved her blouse to show him how well she was healing. "Both curses are broken. I'm no longer a shape-shifter of any kind."

He closed his eyes and let out a heavy sigh. He brought her hand to his lips and opened his eyes. "Okay, fill in the blanks."

"Lynette knocked you unconscious and was about to kill you. I came to in time to see her hit you on the head and watch you go down. I don't know if you dropped the dagger or what, but it was lying on the ground between me and Lynette. I grabbed it and walked up behind her. I said her name, and when she turned around, I plunged it into her heart."

"What happened after that? How did I get here?"

"Case showed up with three other guys. One of them, Jimmy, looked you over to make sure you were okay. They carried Lynette over to a car and dumped her in the trunk, and then Case and the others carried you over to the car and got you up here through a service elevator. Once you were here, Jimmy gave you a thorough exam. He said since you were still a werewolf, you should heal well, but he gave me a prescription for some stuff to help you sleep. Case came by yesterday and told me that after you were examined, all of them went down to the cemetery and cleaned up any mess. I gave him a key to my apartment so they could get the wolfsbane and mistletoe concentrate. They buried Lynette in a pet cemetery on the other side of town, along with the wolfsbane and mistletoe."

Blake sat with a thoughtful look on his face. "It's too bad you're not a shape-shifter anymore."

Ashling looked puzzled. "Why?"

He smiled. "Because I like eating pussy."

She laughed and cuddled up next to him. "You can eat my pussy anytime. I'm sorry you didn't get to end your curse."

He kissed her forehead. "I'm just glad you're okay. I love you very much, and I don't mind being a werewolf as long as you don't mind."

"Werewolf or not, I want to be with you. There will come a time

when you'll be able to take care of Christophe and end your curse. Until then, you're stuck with me."

Blake rolled her onto her back and gave her a lecherous grin. "I'm afraid I'll have to give you a thorough examination, just to be sure you really are okay."

Ashling giggled as Blake nuzzled her neck, his hand moving up under her T-shirt to caress a breast and tease a nipple to erection.

The End

### **Author's Bio**

C. L. Casey began writing stories and poems as a child. Writing sensual erotic romance got its start later in life with a dare, and with the encouragement of a few friends, she embraced her passion for that subject.

Casey loves to read and write, and could spend all day in a book store, art museum, or chocolate shop (especially the chocolate shop). She collects teddy bears and unusual perfume bottles, and enjoys music and cooking.

Casey lives in the Midwest with her two cats.

You can visit her on the Web at [www.authorclcasey.com](http://www.authorclcasey.com).