



A Bad Moon Rising

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Chapter One

Megan McShaw gripped the Honda's steering wheel tight. Her heart pounded wildly in her chest as she listened to her passenger's ragged breathing from the seat beside her. She could also sense his fear, mingled with confusion, and the metallic scent of blood that lingered in the confines of the small car. The fact her wounded passenger was nude didn't help matters. Sometimes she wished she wasn't so *aware*, but it was a part of her *sithech* nature.

She glanced in the rearview mirror. No headlights. Megan exhaled a soft sigh of relief. "Don't worry. We're not being followed," she reassured her friend, not taking her eyes off the road.

"Meg, sweetheart, I-I don't know what came over me. I didn't mean to 'turn wolf' at the bar. Honest, I didn't." The sincerity in his voice caressed over her body like raw silk. "MacDonald was shooting off his mouth and, yeah sure, I got pissed, but—"

"It's not entirely your fault, Derek." Megan sighed, glancing at the sky through the windshield. "It's the moon. Look—almost full." She pointed to the large, rust-colored disk in the night sky.

"You're shitting me, right?" Even in shadows, she could tell he was staring at her, perplexed. "That's the kind of stuff in Hollywood B-flicks and fairy tales...not real life!"

"We'll discuss it later, Derek. After we get to the cabin, we'll have a long talk." Megan glanced out of the corner of her eye and nervously licked her lips. "You just keep that blanket wrapped around you and lie back. Take it easy." She flashed him a tight smile. "And try not to bleed on my upholstery, okay?"

Despite the tenseness of the situation, Derek Lee chuckled. The warmth of his laughter trickled through her, from her heart straight to her sex. She'd seen every inch of him, running naked down Main Street right after he'd transformed back from wolf to man. And he was all man. For a split moment, she'd been spellbound, watching his muscles ripple under his flesh as he'd made a wild dash to her car, clutching his arm.

Now, even in the semi-darkness of the car's interior, she could see the rest of his unquestionable good looks—the firmness of his jaw that accented the even symmetry of his face and those warm, amber-tinted eyes. Derek's stunning features were topped off by a golden tan and his wild, blond mane.

As he shifted in the bucket seat, a groan of pain escaped from his lips. Derek straightened, still cradling his wounded arm. "You know, you didn't have to stop to help me, Megan."

"And if I didn't stop, you'd run the risk getting caught or worse. Lucky for you Officer Murray is a lousy shot, but you're still in trouble," she firmly reminded him. Slowing the

car, she turned onto a narrow strip of gravel road. In light of the moon, the road was half-hidden by an overgrowth of weeds, making it barely visible to the naked eye.

“Where are we going anyway?”

“You’ll see,” she quipped. To her relief, he only let out a heavy sigh. He settled back in the seat and fell silent.

Oh boy! He’s definitely an alpha. Megan returned her attention to the bumpy road ahead. *No doubt about it!*

She had only met him a month ago and the attraction was instant, but she knew there was something different about Heather Grove’s newest resident. Her keen intuition detected he was *sithech*. Whether he knew it or not, he was searching for something...or someone. Derek Lee was not an aimless drifter who’d just happened to wander into town. But then, Heather Grove was no ordinary town.

Half of the population descended from her family clan, banished from the Highlands of Scotland in the eighteenth century. Settling in the Americas, the McShaws and their kin harbored a secret. A secret in their blood, passed on throughout the generations. They were a clan with *sithech* blood coursing through their veins—blood of the wolf.

The McShaw family and their wolf pack had created a tight-knit bond with the townfolk of Heather Grove. For many years, their secret stayed within the town limits. The wolf clan lived by the rede, “Bother no one and no one will bother you.” It was an age-old bit of advice ingrained into every *sithech*. Megan’s family was no exception. She and her older twin brothers, Raymond and Richard, lived by the rede.

Fear coiled in Megan’s gut. She was sure her brothers would be alerted to Derek’s moon-induced transformation this evening at the bar. Ray and Ritchie were two of the lead protectors of the pack. They’d be looking for the rogue wolf, she was certain. However, Megan was struggling for self-control. Her feelings for Derek were growing, spreading through her like wildfire. Hot, desirous...and deadly.

* * * *

Gravel crunched under the tires as the Honda came to a stop. “We’re here,” Megan announced with a weary sigh and shut off the engine.

“Where is ‘here’?” Derek inquired as he unsnapped the seat belt. His wound was laced with pain, but he’d managed to control the bleeding by tying the remains of his sleeve around his injured forearm.

“It’s my father’s...was my father’s cabin. It was his special place where he could escape from the world.”

“So, is that why you have those groceries in the back?” He gestured, thumbing toward the plastic bags strapped into the back seat of the car.

“Fortunately, I was heading back from the grocery store when Rhonda called. There was a report on her scanner about a wolf running loose down Main Street.” Megan’s voice was tight, strained with emotion. “So, I got my tranquilizer pistol and headed into town.”

“So you do this often? Do you always check out every report of rabid, runaway wolves?” Derek raised an eyebrow, fixing his gaze on the lovely redhead beside him.

“Well, of course I checked it out. And you’re damn lucky I did, too!” she snapped.

Derek could see impatience flair in her emerald green eyes.

“I know,” he replied in a calmer, lowered tone. “Meg, I’m grateful. And, you’re right, if Officer Murray was a better shot, I’d been one dead wolf. Thanks.” Derek leaned close, tenderly laying his uninjured hand on top of hers. “I owe you one.”

Something stirred in the space between them. Derek knew the moon had very natural powers, but he could have sworn he felt a current of energy surging in the close quarters of the car.

“You don’t owe me anything.” Megan shook her head as if she, too, were trying to break the spell. She slid her hand free from his touch and reached for the door, casually changing the subject. “The cabin’s very spartan. However, I came out here this spring for a quiet weekend. So, it’s a little cleaner than you might expect.”

There was a hint of a smile on her luscious lips. Derek fought the urge to lean over and kiss her. Deep down, however, he had a gut feeling he knew why she’d backed away. She could sense the beast...the damned wolf inside him. And he didn’t blame her one bit.

“I’ll turn on the power. Can you get the bags?” Her voice seemed entirely under control, despite the circumstances.

Derek nodded and stepped out of the car. The chilly evening breeze brushed his face, cooling the heated trail of sweat that dotted his brow.

Tying the blanket around his waist, he watched as Megan disappeared to the back of the small cabin. Within a few moments, there were a couple of loud *snaps*, then a low hum.

“Power’s on!” she called out, rounding the corner and stepping up onto the wooden porch.

Toting the plastic bags, Derek was cautious as he made his way up the steps. The boards creaked with age and neglect. “Look, Megan, you shouldn’t be helping me. If someone finds out about this, I don’t want you involved.”

“But I am involved. I picked you up, remember?” She slid a key into the keyhole and pushed open the door. Megan stepped inside the doorway and flicked a switch on the wall, flooding the cabin with light.

Basically a single room, the cabin was indeed small. Big enough for one or two adults at best, Derek noted. A table and two chairs along with smaller than average appliances made up the kitchenette, with a double bed and miniature fireplace in the opposite corner in what appeared to be the bedroom area.

A narrow door near the back of the cabin must open to the bathroom, Derek observed. The cabin was indeed compact, but at least had the basics for someone to survive for a weekend in such cramped quarters.

“Here, let me take those.” Megan reached out and took the bags from his hands. “And take a seat over there.” She nodded to a kitchenette chair as she began putting the groceries away in the rustic-looking storage cabinets. “I have a first-aid kit here to patch up your arm, then I’ll rummage up some clothes for you.”

“Look! It’s already stopped bleeding,” he replied with a weary smile. “And I didn’t get a drop of blood on your car seat.”

“Bully for you.” Megan winked as a sly smile curled her lips. “Guess that’s one less thing we have to worry about, huh?”

Derek shifted uncomfortably in the chair, gazing up into her eyes. “About tonight, Megan, I’m really sorry for everything. Unlike you, I don’t understand what’s happening. I’ve always been in control of the beast. It’s never been the other way around...well, until tonight.”

“The Samhain moon is growing full. The full moon affects those of us with wolf-blood differently. Whatever happened to you at the bar only tipped the scale. We’re unique creatures, you and I. Within us, there is a delicate balance between our human side and our *sithech*. During the full moon phase, some of our kind may experience violent outbursts, while others experience extreme...uh, arousal.” Her cheeks flushed pink in the kitchen light.

Derek suppressed a grin, sensing her aura of cool confidence waver slightly. The awkwardness was short lived.

“Now, let me see your arm,” she bid, scooting the other chair close to him. She popped open a small first-aid kit.

Derek leaned into the light, revealing a jagged two inch mark along his flesh. “I don’t think it’s deep, but it bled like a son of a bitch.”

“It may not be deep, but you’ll be lucky if this one doesn’t leave a scar,” Megan frowned. “The bullet just grazed your skin. Murray’s usually an ace-shot, but missed for once.”

Derek shivered as her warm hand encircled his arm to inspect the wound. There was something happening inside him—a spark, a connection through her tender, simple touch that sent his senses reeling. He inhaled a slow, steady breath, trying to keep his focus.

“Thank goodness it’s not too serious. I don’t think I have enough supplies for anything more than a scratch or a splinter.” She glanced up at him and smiled, then returned her attention to the first-aid kit, digging through its contents.

Seated directly in front of him, her scent enveloped him. It was warm, earthy and laced with musk, exciting his senses. Derek tried futilely to stop the erotic images of Megan from flickering through his mind.

“So, why don’t you tell me what happened tonight at the bar?” she asked, not looking up as she cleaned his wound.

A flicker of anger shot through him, cutting through his lusty thoughts as he recalled what MacDonald had said earlier that evening. *“Megan’s family is pure-blooded sithech, boy. There’s no freakin’ way the pack’s gonna accept you...especially her! Why, you’re no more than a Heinz-57 mutt!”*

“It’s nothing, Meg,” he mumbled, suppressing the heated irritation that simmered inside him. “Just a misunderstanding between us guys.”

But why did his needling bother me? He’d weathered insults worse than MacDonald’s before. Besides, the drunken Scot was only a beta in the town pack. Perhaps Megan was right. Maybe the full moon was having a strange effect on his wolf senses.

Chapter Two

After administering first aid to Derek's arm, Megan dug into the storage cabinet and found a black jogging suit along with a battered pair of sandals. The thought of him wandering around the cabin in nothing more than a blanket teased her senses. *Not a good idea—at all.* She sighed.

"It's not the warmest clothing, but it'll do for tonight." She grinned, handing him the bundle. "You're lucky I keep a spare here. They're 'one size fits most'."

"Most, huh? I'm afraid I'll bust a seam," Derek retorted, holding the shirt up to his muscular chest.

Megan swallowed hard as her sex fluttered in response. The cabin suddenly felt very claustrophobic and warm, definitely warm, despite the nighttime chill. "Well, at least try to squeeze into it after your shower. I won't want you to catch a cold," she replied, playfully wagging a finger at him. "The temperature's already dipped a few degrees, so I'll step outside and get some timber. You hit the shower."

"Yes ma'am," Derek replied with a cheeky salute, heading into the tiny bathroom with its metallic shower stall, small sink and commode.

Megan figured after a hot shower, Derek would collapse onto the mattress and be sound asleep within moments. From the weary expression on his face, she could tell his transformation had zapped his energy. The adrenaline of the night's events had subsided and, before long, exhaustion would set in.

Derek was certainly a lone-wolf. No living parents or a pack, either. Her heart ached for him. *No wonder he doesn't know how to preserve his strength.* Megan sighed. It also explained why he didn't know about 'bad moons' and their effect on the *sithech*. She couldn't imagine being a lone *sithech*. *But Derek's a lot stronger than our pack gives him credit for.* Megan smiled, pulling on her denim jacket. That was, of course, if he survived the Samhain moon.

She concluded a good night's rest would do Derek good and stepped out onto the wooden porch. Leaving him alone to fall asleep was best. Her own blood was stirring in her veins. She was feeling the effects of the full moon, too. Recognizing her body's signals, she inhaled a deep, calming breath to soothe her jangled nerves.

Folding her arms over her chest, Megan focused on the sounds of the cool, autumn night. Town was miles away. All she could hear was the familiar rustlings of the woods and the rippling water of the lake nearby. Somewhere a distant owl hooted. Stepping off the porch, she slowly walked the tree-lined perimeter surrounding the cabin. Thankfully, there were no usual sounds or unfamiliar scents to alert her to any intruders in the vicinity.

Buzz! Buzz!

Her cell phone was vibrating in her jacket pocket. She pulled it out, glancing at the caller ID, then flipped open the phone.

“Hello?”

“Geez, Meg, where are you? I’ve been worried sick!” Rhonda Morrison’s voice crackled through the receiver.

Sensing her best friend’s anxiety, Megan took a breath before she responded. “I’m okay, Ronnie. Everything’s fine.”

“Tell me, what the hell happened on Main Street tonight? Your brother’s fit to be tied! He wanted me to call you. What’s going on?”

Megan proceeded to fill her in on the events of the past hour or two. She could tell Rhonda was trying to digest her account, not saying a word, waiting until she was finished.

“So, I brought Derek here to Dad’s cabin. He’s patched up and sleeping right now. Everything’s cool.”

“Cool, huh? He gave us quite a scare with that stunt he pulled! Ray wanted me to tell you there’s an emergency meeting tomorrow—nine a.m. at the diner. Come alone, if you can. Derek is okay to be left alone, isn’t he?”

“Yes, I trust him. He’ll be fine while I’m in town. Just reassure Ray I’m safe and I’ll be there in the morning, okay?”

The tenseness in her friend’s tone dropped a notch. “Okay, I’ll tell Ray. But you be careful, Megan. Girl, I worry about you.”

“Yeah, I know,” Megan smiled into the uber-thin receiver. “Like I said, everything’s fine. I’ll see y’all tomorrow, bright and early.”

Saying their ‘good-byes’, she flipped the phone shut with a heavy sigh. Rhonda was as close as a sister to her. It was times like this Megan was grateful Ronnie was an excellent intermediary between her and her older brothers. Really lucky.

With a sudden feeling of momentary relief, Megan turned her face up to the moon’s glowing light. It was almost full in the night sky, riding high above the tree tops. Deep inside her, she felt the flicker of a deep-seated, passionate fire as her thoughts returned to Derek. *Damn it! I have to remain in control...for myself and for Derek!*

She didn't want him to witness her in the throes of moon fever—when she could get dangerously aroused. Any *sithech* within her sight was not safe. Especially a male. *But that was long ago. I've overcome a bad moon before...and I won't let it happen again!* she vowed.

* * * *

Derek tossed and turned on the mattress. A fine sheen of perspiration covered him, making the undersized t-shirt cling to his skin. *Damn, it's blazing hot!* Frustrated, he kicked the blanket onto the floor and sat up on the edge of the bed.

"So much for trying to sleep," he grumbled, spearing a hand through his hair. "Megan?" He glanced around the semi-dark cabin. There was no fire in the hearth. The cabin was empty...and unusually quiet. A sickly feeling coiled in his gut as his senses sharpened, on alert. *She should've been back by now. That's not a good sign.* He sprang to his feet, and slipped into a pair of worn, leather sandals.

A cool autumn breeze caressed him as he stepped out onto the wooden porch. "Megan?" he called out into the darkness surrounding the cabin. "Megan, sweetheart, are you okay?" No reply. Nothing except the sounds of nocturnal creatures in the woods and the watery-sounds of a nearby lake.

Derek glanced over to the gravel driveway. Her Honda was still parked right where she'd left it. His heart pounded wildly as he leapt off the porch. His skin was itching beneath his clothing. The *sithech* inside wanted out. Derek glanced up at the moon over the tree tops. "Damn you!" he hissed. "This is all your fault, isn't it?"

The moon glowed back, cold, silent and aloof.

A rustle in the bushes near the car caught Derek's attention. He stilled, holding his breath. His heart lurched into his throat as he made out a pair of eyes staring at him from the darkened hedge.

The creature leapt out from its hiding place. A large, reddish-hued wolf with green eyes. It was Megan in her *sithech* form. Derek had never seen another of his kind until now. His heart softened, deep-seated emotions bubbling inside him. Joy and happiness mingled with awe and a dash of fear. "Megan, is that you?" he asked softly, holding his still, uncertain stance. "I was worried about you."

The wolf let out a low whimper, slowly padding toward him on four paws. Within a few feet of him, she stopped and sniffed the air. Derek knew she sensed his fear. "I'm sorry, honey. I've never seen you like uh, this before." He managed a thin smile. "But you're beautiful. Really, really beautiful."

He didn't know how much of what he said she'd comprehend. In his own experience, he recalled that sometimes he felt human inside, other times not.

“Remember what I said earlier, Derek. Within us, there is a delicate balance between our human side and our sithech.” Derek heard her voice in his head as if she were speaking directly to him. The wolf blinked her big, green eyes, then slowly nodded. *“Of course I can understand you.”*

“Oh, good!” Derek exhaled a sigh of relief. “For a moment there, I thought I was the lunatic.”

Megan trotted over to the porch and laid a paw on a pile of clothing...her clothing, folded neatly on a wooden plank. She glanced back at him, a glimmer of moonlight in her eyes. *“Wait here a moment,”* she conveyed, then disappeared around the side of the house. Within a few minutes, a bare arm appeared around the edge of the cabin.

“My clothes, please?” she asked with a wave of her hand. “Sorry I took off like that, but I was feeling a bit edgy. I desperately needed a run in the woods.”

Derek grinned, scooping up the pile and handed them to her. “It’s okay. I understand. I just can’t get over seeing you like that, Meg. You’re a beautiful creature.”

“Gee, thanks!” Megan, now in her human form, rounded the corner, returning his grin. “Maybe I should pose for the cover of *National Geographic*, huh?” She winked.

He reached out, encircling his arm around her waist and drew her to him. “You’re a beautiful *sithech* and woman, too.”

In the glow of the moonlight, he saw her cheeks darken with color. She looked so lovely, so tempting—even if she had twigs stuck in her hair.

“Derek, you shouldn’t say such things.” There was a quiver in her voice as she attempted to pull from his grasp.

“Now, hold on, Meg,” he coaxed. “What’s wrong with me finding you attractive?”

“It’s just the moon having its effect on you. You’re not thinking clearly,” she protested.

“Well, I must confess, Ms. McShaw, I found you attractive even before the moon was near full. Does that make you feel any better?” Derek chuckled and leaned closer, catching a whiff of her dark musky scent.

Megan gazed up at him, speechless. He brought a hand up and tenderly brushed away a smug of dirt on her warm cheek with the pad of his thumb. A shiver went through his body like a ghost passing through a wall.

She drew a ragged breath. “Derek, now is not—”

Before she could finish her protest, he kissed her. Her lips were like warm honey, sweet and yielding against his hungry mouth. A low moan escaped from deep in her throat, but she didn't pull away. Instead, she leaned in closer, her arms wrapping around his shoulders, drawing their bodies together.

Every muscle in his body tightened, burning with an inner fire. His cock, buried in the crotch of the borrowed sweatpants, also responded, humming to life.

Involuntarily, his hips pushed forward, rubbing against her, seeking out her heat between the layers of clothing. His tongue darted over the warm seam of her lips, parting them gently and capturing her in a fuller, deeper kiss.

The sounds of the forest around them melted away. All of his senses were focused on Megan—sweet, delicious Megan. Sliding a hand beneath the hem of her shirt, he glided a hand over her hot, sweaty skin. Gliding upward, his hands grazed the cups of her bra, feeling the firm imprints of her nipples against the satiny material.

Oh, sweet Jesus! He loved the way she was responding to his touch, confirming that she wanted him as much as he wanted her. His heart thundered in his chest, his hips pressing against her body.

He peeled his lips from hers, planting soft kisses down her neck. The warm, musky scent was spurring him on, making him desperate, hungry and—

“No!” Megan’s voice broke the spell. “No, Derek, we can’t!” She pulled away from his grasp.

Dazed with desire, he blinked, confused. But he held his stance under the heavy gravity of her stare.

“Megan, don’t do this,” he softly pled. “I want you. Honestly, I do.”

“Now’s not the right time,” she protested. “Let’s wait until after the Samhain moon passes, then we’ll see if whatever we’re feeling is the real deal.”

“B-but, Meg, I’m real horny!” he stammered in frustration.

“I can tell.” She flashed him a smirk, her gaze dropping to the tented crotch of his sweatpants.

Derek felt his face warm with embarrassment as she turned, heading back to the cabin.

“I suggest you take another shower...a cold one,” she called over her shoulder. “I need to head to bed. I’m going into town tomorrow to meet with the pack. While I’m there, I’ll gather a few more supplies...including some more suitable clothes for you.”

Still stunned, and with his body aching with longing, Derek followed behind her, close on her heels. But deep down, he could understand a bit of her reluctance.

He paused a moment, gazing up at the full moon. He exhaled a heavy sigh of disappointment and followed her into the cabin. She'd already flopped down on her side of the mattress, still fully clothed and sweaty from her run. Derek could tell by the expression on her face she was exhausted.

Megan let out a weary sigh and closed her eyes. "Right now, I just need some rest. You try to do the same, all right?"

Derek gazed down at her for a moment, hands on his hips. "Oh, alright," he grumbled, heading for an icy shower. "I'll wake you in the morning, Meg, okay? Okay?"

But he was only answered by a soft, deep snore.

Chapter Three

Jewel's Family Diner was a great place for the pack to meet. Megan took their designated table in the back of the diner, ordering the breakfast special while she waited. Derek had brewed a strong pot of coffee earlier that morning. She'd grabbed a granola bar and drank a quick cup before she'd left the cabin, but she was still hungry.

Stopping off at her house for a hot shower and a fresh change of clothes, she felt more alert. However, she was also a bit anxious about the meeting. Despite traditional pack structure, their pack was lead by several *sithech* alphas with a couple of betas to keep the balance evened out.

Eating her breakfast, she kept to herself, as the other pack members slowly trickled in, taking their seats and talking among themselves. She overheard the others either grumbling over the price of gas or discussing the latest episode of *American Idol*.

"Hey, sis!" A familiar voice broke her train of thought. She half-turned in her chair, her mood brightening a bit at the sight of her brother, Ray.

"Hey, you." She grinned as he leaned in and placed a kiss on her cheek.

Ray McShaw pulled out a chair and sat down beside her, his hand resting lightly on her shoulder. "So, how's our wolf-boy doing this morning? Does he remember anything about what happened last night?"

"He's all right, Ray." She patted her brother's hand for reassurance. "But he doesn't recall too much about the whole bar incident. I've come to the conclusion he's under a 'bad moon'. He's never experienced anything like it, he says."

"Oh?" Ray raised an eyebrow, but his expression was solemn and serious.

A shiver passed over Megan as she gazed into her brother's face. He resembled their father more with each passing day. It made her heart squeeze with momentary grief. "Yes." She nodded. "And I honestly believe he's telling the truth too, Ray. He's genuinely naïve to the whole phenomenon."

"Naïve my ass!" boomed Jerry MacDonald as he took a seat across from the McShaw siblings and glanced around the table at the other pack leaders.

Ah shit! Megan's gut recoiled with anger as she drew a breath to calm herself. MacDonald was the biggest, burliest member of the pack, but he was also very outspoken for a second-rank, beta *sithech*.

Ray held up a hand to quiet the heated murmurs rumbling around the table. "That's why I've called this emergency meeting today. There are two sides to every story.

MacDonald, you'll have a chance to speak in just a moment. I want to hear Megan's side first, 'cause she's been with Derek Lee since he fled down Main Street."

"Where's Ritchie?" Megan glanced around the table, not seeing Ray's twin among the familiar faces of the pack members.

"He's out of town on business, but he sent me a text message this morning that however the pack decides to handle this matter, he'll approve," Ray replied with a tight smile. "Now, sis, why don't you tell us what you've learned about our rogue wolf-boy?"

"I wish you wouldn't call him that," Megan muttered under her breath, angling her head to stare her brother in the eyes. She really wanted Ray to like Derek. Without the approval of the entire pack, Derek wouldn't stand a snowball's chance in Hell of becoming a member of it. Unless, he mated into the pack. The thought sent a heated streak of arousal down her spine.

Taking a sip of coffee to clear her throat and steer her mind away from sex, Megan proceeded to fill in the group with what she'd learned about Derek. Minus the fact he was attracted to her, of course. She knew that alone would send her protective older brother over the edge...and that was something she'd rather not have happen.

* * * *

Derek was getting edgy waiting around the cabin. Stepping out onto the porch, he took a deep breath, inhaling the aroma of the wooded area around him. The rich colors of the leaves glistened in the sunlight, creating a cornucopia of hues that only Mother Nature could create.

Despite his uneasiness, he wished he could have returned to town with Megan. He recalled Megan shaking her head, her voice level and rational as he walked her to the car.

"You'll have to stay here a few nights until the moon loses its hold on you, Derek. You don't want to run the risk of 'going wolf' again in public. The pack frowns on it. Fortunately, we have a connection at the town council. He'll deal with Officer Murray and straighten things out with the council members and the local newspaper."

"I didn't realize how tightly connected your pack is with the town, Meg. I've traveled around, but I've never witnessed anything like this before." He chuckled.

"Our *sithech* heritage is welcome here in Heather Grove. When our ancestors fled from Scotland in the eighteenth century, the town greeted us with open arms. We're an important, yet secret, part of its history. And we do our best to make sure the general public is not alarmed or threatened by our presence in any way."

Megan smiled, gazing up at him with those enchanting emerald eyes. Derek felt his heart flutter in his chest. Gently, he placed his hands on her shoulders. She didn't pull away,

but, instead, ran the tip of her tongue over her lips. Before he realized it, he'd leaned in, placing a feather-light kiss on her mouth.

"You'd better get going," he whispered. He'd felt his blood warm with desire, but reluctantly, he pulled away.

"I'll be back tonight." Her face brightened, her cheeks glowing with color. "And I'll bring more supplies, too. Now, promise me you'll stay out of trouble while I'm gone."

"Trouble? In the middle of nowhere?" He grinned, spreading his arms in an expansive gesture.

"Derek?" Megan's tone was serious, although he could tell she was trying to stifle a smile.

"Oh, all right. Cross my heart, no trouble." He sighed, tracing a little x over his chest with his fingertip.

As he'd watched her leave, the warmth of her promise lingered in his heart. For once in his life, he felt wanted...and loved. Now, standing on the porch, the wolf once again stirred under his skin.

"It's a lovely day," he mused out loud. "It'd be a shame to waste it." He slid out of the tight t-shirt, borrowed jogging pants and sandals. Leaving his clothes bunched in a pile on the porch, he strolled naked through the autumn leaves, the sunlight warming his skin.

Derek felt an inkling of tranquility, an at-oneness with the natural beauty that surrounded him. Casting a cautious glance back at the small cabin, he knew he was alone. With a smirk of satisfaction, he headed for the grove with a quick sprint. Reaching the first line of trees, Derek effortlessly transformed and the wolf bounded off into the woods.

* * * *

Megan's blood was still churning in her veins. She could feel the effects of the moon even though the afternoon sun was shining through the windshield. It was a strong moon, and a dangerous one, but she had to remain in control...for her sake and Derek's. She gripped the steering wheel tighter as she recalled what had happened earlier at the diner.

MacDonald was telling his side of the incident. Megan eyed him across the table, listening, but not quite believing him. Not that MacDonald was lying. She just felt he wasn't telling the whole truth.

"Yeah, I had a few beers and may have said some things out of line." MacDonald shrugged his big shoulders. "But that Derek fella didn't have to get out of hand. He's the one who lost control, not me. I tell ya, he's a loner—always has been, always will be."

“What if he wants to join our pack? Have you ever thought of that?” Megan hotly asked before she’d even realized she’d spoken. “Doesn’t he deserve a chance? A sense of belonging?”

Megan glanced around the table, her senses on alert as she studied the other pack members. Gazing over at her brother, she was disappointed to find he was blocking his thoughts from everyone...including her. But what did she expect? She knew he was only trying to stay neutral and impartial to the whole situation.

“He’s too unpredictable, moon or no moon. Besides, he’s not even sure of his parentage, Megan. If ya ask me, he’s nothing more than a mutt!”

Megan slapped a hand down on the table in aggravation. “MacDonald, you will not talk about Derek Lee like that! It’s wrong! It’s unfair to judge him before you even get a chance to know him!”

Ray leaned close, laying a cool hand on her shoulder. “Meg, calm down and lower your voice.” The tone of his voice was gentle, but held a note of warning. Her entire body quivered with anger. Her outburst had sent a ripple of shock and uneasiness around the table.

“So, tell us, Megan,” MacDonald leered, pushing his chair back from the table and holding her gaze, “how well have you gotten to *know* him?”

That did it. Megan leapt to her feet as she gripped the edge of the table for control, but her heart was pounding angrily, the wolf inside her rippling under her skin. “You son of a bitch—how dare you!” she growled. “I ought to—”

“Meg, no!” Ray swiftly rose and gripped her arm tight, whirling her around to face him. Her anger lost its punch as she gazed up into her brother’s eyes. “Not here. Not now.”

She inhaled deep, struggling on the inside to cool her demeanor. *Control. Breathe. Don’t let him get to you. Stay calm, sis.* Megan blinked, realizing it was not her own thoughts in her head, but Ray’s.

“I-I’m going outside.” She nodded, her voice quivering. “Excuse me.”

Megan barely remembered walking through the crowded diner and stepping outside into the parking lot. “Damn him! How dare he think that I—that we—oh!” She fumed, letting out another hiss of anger. *But it wasn’t like we didn’t want to.* A tiny smile tugged at the corners of her mouth, recalling their kiss. She tried to shake the memory from her head.

This moon’s definitely got a hold on more of us than just Derek. She let out a heavy sigh. Propping up against the side of her car, she took a deep breath. She felt the autumn sun on her face and let the coolness of the morning air quiet her thoughts, clearing away the barrage of feelings that swirled inside her.

Only ten minutes had passed, but it felt like forever. She'd decided to just wait outside, not go back into the diner. Her outburst had drawn attention from a few of the other customers. She thought it best to stay put. More than likely, the pack was finishing the meeting...without her.

Finally, the diner door swung open. Members of the pack filed out, talking among themselves. A low growl escaped from under her breath as she saw MacDonald exit the diner, but he wasn't even looking in her direction. His shoulders were hunched, his face pale and lips tightly drawn as he headed to his truck on the far side of the gravel lot.

I wonder what all that's about?

Ray and fellow pack-mate, Bruce Taylor, came out the door, heading toward her. Ray was chatting with Bruce as they drew closer. She couldn't help overhearing what her brother was saying. "I'm glad you spoke up when you did, Bruce. I felt MacDonald was holding back on us, too. Thanks for letting us know." Her brother grinned, patting the other man on the back.

The two men came to a halt in front of her. Ray turned his gaze to Megan. "Hey, sis, are you doing okay now?"

Her heart nervously skipped a beat. "Uh, yeah, I'm feeling better." She blushed, and then her curiosity got the best of her. "So what happened in there after I left? What was MacDonald holding back on?" Her eyes darted from Ray to Bruce, then back again to her brother.

Bruce rubbed the back of his neck with a hand, a slow grin spreading over his face. "Well, I should have spoken up before MacDonald made his dig, Megan. Sorry. But I was waiting to see if he did or not. Hard to tell with a guy like *him*." He gestured with his head in the direction of MacDonald's truck as it pulled out of the parking lot.

"What do you mean?" Megan raised an eyebrow in Bruce's direction, folding her arms over her chest.

"I was off-duty that night and in the bar too. I overheard what was said. MacDonald was drunk again. Derek was there asking a few members about his chances of getting acceptance into the pack. That was all. Then, MacDonald shot off his mouth, and basically said that your family was full-blooded *sithech*. He also said there was no way our pack would accept him...especially you. After that, he insulted Derek, calling him a Heinz-57 mutt."

Megan stared at him, speechless. Her mind was numb. She was trying to comprehend what Bruce was saying. Ray wrapped his arm around her shoulders.

“It seems like wolf-boy’s fond of you, sis. I think he went off not because dumb-ass MacDonald called him a mutt, but because he’d struck a nerve when it came to you.” Ray grinned down at her, giving her a gentle, affectionate squeeze. “And it doesn’t take any wolf-sense to know you’re having feelings for him, too. Right?”

Megan blushed again, her cheeks burning with color as butterflies invaded her stomach.

“Whoa! That’s between you guys.” Bruce grinned over at them, raising a hand. “I’d better get a move on. I go on duty at the police station in a few hours and I don’t want to be late. Y’all have a good Halloween and be safe tonight, okay?”

Ray and Megan said their good-byes, watching in silence as Bruce headed to his car. When he pulled out of the parking lot, Megan drew a deep breath and glanced up into her big brother’s eyes.

“I’m really glad Bruce spoke up, telling the pack exactly what MacDonald said. I also had a funny feeling, but I thought it was my own emotions getting in the way.”

Ray chuckled, his arm sliding from around her shoulders. “Yeah, remember Dad used to warn us about the October moon. He used to say it was a ‘bad moon risin’. Up until a few years ago, when I took over as a pack leader, I never understood what he meant. It seems to me that even MacDonald’s petty envy over Derek’s interest in joining our pack was magnified by the moon the other night.”

“Yeah.” Megan nodded in agreement. “I can’t believe he lashed out at me, too. That was a nasty remark in front of the pack leaders. A real low blow.”

“Hmm, I think he also struck a nerve with you, sis.”

“What do you mean?” she asked, but kept her thoughts carefully guarded as she stared over at him.

“If I were you, I’d wait until after we get past this moon phase before you and wolf-boy do anything rash. Please, promise me, Meg, you’ll play it cool. Okay?”

“Yeah, I’ll be cool.” She nodded, flashing him a reassuring smile. “I promise.”

After she left Ray in the diner parking lot, she drove over to her house to pick up supplies for her and Derek. She’d also stopped off at the local Target, purchasing him some warmer clothes before she headed back to the cabin.

As she turned down the gravel road leading to the little hideaway in the woods, her heart began to patter rapidly in her chest. She was happy to be heading back to the quaint little cabin, returning to the serenity of the forest...and to Derek.

Chapter Four

His entire body ached. He was grimy and sweaty, too. However, lucky for him, nothing was broken thanks to the thick bedding of fallen leaves coating the bottom of the hole. Derek had been the prisoner of the large earthen crater all morning. He'd kept watch on the sun's rays as they shifted angles, revealing to him the passage of time. The morning seemed to have lasted an eternity.

The sides of the pitted crater were crumbly, difficult to climb in either his human or his wolf form. Reluctantly, he finally gave in, realizing he was stuck until Megan returned back to the cabin.

She should be back soon, she promised. Gazing up to the top of the wide opening, his frustration mounted. Frustration and hunger. He was anxious until he heard the sound of a car off in the distance. *Megan's back!* His heart soared with happiness, his nerves flooded with relief. *She'll get me out of here!*

Knowing his senses would be keener in wolf form, Derek effortlessly transformed. Remembering how Megan mind-talked, he wondered if it could be done, conveying messages over a distance. *Ah, what the hell...it's worth a try.* Raising his nose to the sky, he mentally strained, sending out a psychic message. *Meg! Megan! Can you hear me? Meg! I need your help! Meg?*

* * * *

Megan shook her head in disbelief, placing an armload of bags onto the kitchen table. The cabin was quiet and empty. Derek was no where in sight. *Now, where has he gone? Maybe he's running off a bit of sexual frustration.* She grinned at the thought. *Lord knows, I could use a good run too!*

Returning back outside to her car, she busied herself with the remainder of the bags when something nudged at her mind. It was like a mental poke. Listening to her instincts she stilled, holding her breath, and concentrated on the sensation. But whatever it was went silent. "Oh, that moon's now screwing with my mind too, damn it!" she cursed, hefting the bags into her arms and heading toward the cabin. "I swear, I can't wait until this moon waxes and—"

Oooooo! A distant howl rolled through the woods. Megan stopped dead in her tracks, the hairs on the back of her neck rising in response. *Oooooooooo!* It was a call for help.

"Derek?" she yelled, depositing the bags swiftly onto the porch before she jogged in the direction of the distressing call. "Derek, where are you? I hear you! Keep howling!" she called out, stripping out of her clothing as she transformed, then picked up her pace. In her *sithech* form, she dashed off into the thick, amber-shaded grove in search of him.

Ooooooo! His howl sounded strange, muffled, but unmistakable. She hurried on all fours through the bed of fallen leaves with her keen nose sniffing, seeking a clue to which direction to take. *Ah ha!* She gloated, finding the trail tainted with his unmistakable scent. Megan followed it deeper and deeper into the woods until she came to a shaded glade.

Oooooo! A howl arose from a midsized hole in the ground. *Derek?* She slowed her pace and cautiously padded to the opening, gazing over the edge into the leaf-lined pit. To her relief, a pair of amber eyes glowed back at her from the bottom. The tawny-colored wolf let out a soft whimper.

Derek! Are you okay? she mentally conveyed, her heart racing against her ribcage.

Yes, I'm okay. Be careful. Those leaves around the edges are slick.

How long have you been down there? Can't you get out in human form? she inquired, padding easily around the rim of the earthen-cavity, pondering the situation. Derek transformed and stood upright, naked and dirty at the bottom of the pit with a frown on his face.

"I've been waiting for you to return all day. I tried to climb out, but the dirt is too flakey and loose. I won't be able to climb out unless I have something sturdy to grab onto."

She could sense his frustration. He shrugged his shoulders, looking as helpless as a baby wolf pup. Her heart ached with desperation and longing.

Don't worry...I have an idea. I'll be right back! She turned and scampered back in the direction of the cabin as fast as her limbs could carry her.

* * * *

He stared up at the opening and blinked in disbelief. *Well, this'll be the second time she's saved my ass.* He shook his head. Megan was once again putting herself out on a limb for him. That was twice in just a couple of days.

"Well, I'll just have to think of a special way to thank her." He grinned, as a heady scent of she-wolf drifted down into the hole and filled his senses. The sun was still lingering in the sky, but Derek could feel the stirring of the moon in his blood. The feeling made him ache for Megan's caresses, her honey-sweet kisses and her body.

Derek shook his head. "No, it's more than that," he grumbled out loud, engaging the moon's strange sensations within him. "I want her to be...to be something more. I want her to be...to be my mate!"

Mate. The realization hit him hard, like a punch in the gut. Never in his single, solitary life had he ever met a woman who he wanted for both her body and her spirit. Megan McShaw was definitely special...and he wanted her forever.

“But it’s impossible right now. She’s keeping a distance between us until this Halloween moon fades. Damn it!” He swung his foot in frustration, kicking up a cloud of leaves.

“What’s wrong? Are you okay, Derek?” a familiar voice called from above.

Hoping she didn’t hear his outburst, he glanced up and cleared the tightness in his throat. “I-I was just letting off some steam, that’s all. It’s not easy to be stuck down here most of the day, you know.”

“I found some rope back at the cabin.” She grinned, holding up a coil of thick rope in her hand. “Now I need to find a sturdy tree trunk to tie it around.” Megan’s face disappeared from the opening once again, but he could still hear her voice. “I’ll help get you out of there in no time.”

“Sorry to be such a pain, Meg. I wasn’t paying attention where I was running. The next thing I knew, I was staring up at the sky from this damn hole in the ground.” Derek gave a heavy sigh. “I guess it could be worse, huh?”

“Yeah, it could have been worse, but I’m glad it’s not.” Her voice drifted down to him. “Ah, here we go!”

“What?”

“I found a sturdy tree trunk. Now let’s hope my knots hold. I must confess, when I was a kid, I was a really lousy Girl Scout.” She peered down at him again, grinning.

“You? A lousy Scout? I seriously doubt that.” He chuckled, gazing up at her as he felt the tension of the situation lessen a notch.

“Heads up!” she called out, tossing the loose end of the rope into the vast pit of leaves and dirt.

“Got it!” Derek shouted back, the rope drew tight. “I’m coming up!”

Glancing over the edge, she saw him straining, the muscles moving under skin as he carefully attempted to gain footing against the crusty side of the hole. Slowly, cautiously he moved up several steps.

“Take it easy,” she gently coaxed. “You don’t want to—”

Before she could finish her sentence, the dirt crumbled beneath his foot, dropping him back to the bottom of the hole. He let out a harsh curse.

“Derek! Are you okay?” Her heart was racing in her chest as she peered over the edge in distress.

“I’m fine. It’s just so damn difficult to climb up because I keep losing my footing.”

“Just hold onto the rope, then,” she suggested, taking the rope and gripping it tightly in her hands. “I’ll help keep the rope pulled tight while you climb. Now, try again.”

“Okay, here I come!” he shouted back.

The rough texture bit into her palms as the rope pulled taunt. It was like a twisted game of tug of war—them against the pit. She heard Derek grunting accompanied by the shifting of dirt. Straining to keep a tight grip on the rope, her heart fluttered as a dirtied hand rose from the hole, grasping for something to hold onto.

“Here!” she cried out, dropping the rope to grab onto his hand. She held on tight, afraid to let go. “Almost,” she panted, her voice quivering with a sudden rush of adrenaline mixed with fear. Megan pulled on his hand as he scrambled against the dirt, struggling to get free. Letting out an animalistic snarl, he came up over the edge and lunged ahead with all his strength.

Toppling forward, Derek knocked her back. She gave a startled grunt of shock as she landed on her back with his hot, sweaty body pinning her to the ground. Too stunned to move, Megan lay still beneath him, gasping for breath and tried to regain her focus.

The weight of his body pressed against her caused the heat to rise within her body. A low moan escaped her lips as Derek shifted on top of her. His skin against hers...the delicious friction made her gasp.

“Oh! Are you all right? I’m sorry if I’m crushing you.” He propped up on his elbows and gazed down at her. His eyes twinkled in the afternoon sun, golden-hued with tiny flakes of green.

She hadn’t noticed the warmth of his gaze until that moment. Reaching up, she brushed her fingers down his cheek.

“You’re messy,” she teased, smiling up at the handsome man hovering over her. “But at least you’re not injured.”

“And I’d still be stuck in that hole, if it wasn’t for you.” He cocked his head, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. “That’s another one I owe you.”

Megan drew a ragged breath. The heat was now in her veins. She blushed, feeling the moisture gathering between her legs. “Y-you don’t owe me.” She attempted to smile despite the sensations coursing through her body.

“Well, may I at least give you a kiss?” he inquired, playfully.

Yes! An unconscious shrug of energy rippled from her, calling him closer. A response that came from deep inside her. Derek's mouth covered hers, the touch of his lips burning with white-hot desire. Megan yielded. She let his mouth consume hers with its searing heat as her senses reeled in sheer, undiluted lunacy.

The *moon fever* rushed through her like a wildfire and her body responded. The *sithech* inside her was begging for more than a mere kiss. A groan escaped her lips as Derek's mouth pulled from hers and began kissing a hot trail down her neck.

Megan tossed back her head, exposing her neck to his lips, and closed her eyes. She reeled in the all-consuming passion that held her tighter in its embrace. His hard body moved against her, stimulating every fiber of her being with the strong, natural aroma of *sithech*-male. A dark scent of forest, man and wolf blended together and aroused within her a primal desire...the desire to mate.

As his lips swept over her collarbone, she gave a soft groan. Encircling her arms around his shoulders, she drew him close. Lust was overriding her senses. She didn't want to pull away. Even though it was afternoon, the Samhain moon still held sway, washing over her with full force.

She heard Derek groan as he urgently brushed his cock against her. He was hard, rigid and eager. *I want you, Megan. Please, sweetheart?* His velvety-steel member grazed over her thighs, seeking out her inner heat. There was also tenseness in his body. Restraint. He was holding off, waiting...for her.

The fever had them both wrapped in its embrace. Megan trembled beneath him. Her body was aching as the resolve within her melted away. Scissoring her legs around his waist, Megan let out a wordless sound and flipped him over onto his back in the bed of leaves.

Startled by her sudden display of strength, Derek blinked, gazing up into her smiling face. Megan straddled his thighs. The heat of her sex radiated from between her legs. The *sithech*-blood rushed through his veins, burning him with wild desire.

"Yes, I want you, too." She flashed him a feral grin, encircling the base of his penis with her slender fingers. Just her touch was almost enough to make him snap. Derek panted. Sweat covered his body as he struggled for an ounce of control, but the beast within him was screaming for release.

Megan's eyes widened with surprise. She sensed it too, the unmistakable surge of pure, raw sexuality and power drawing them together like magnets. Clasp ing her hips in his hands, he held her steady over his cock. "Please, Meg. Now." His voice was ragged with intense emotion.

Seated on top of him, Megan raised her hips and sank down onto his shaft in a swift, fluid motion. Heat engulfed his entire body, searing him to the core. His vision blurred as she

moved over him, her sex clutching his cock. Derek moaned and thrust upward into her moist, hot body, matching her primal rhythm.

His lower body tightened, sensing every impulse of her sex as her hips rocked and swayed. The pleasure mounted between them. Her hands splayed over his chest and burned as hot as a brand, marking his heart. He was hers. She was his. They were meant to be together...there was no doubt.

With a cry of rapture, Megan's climax reverberated through his cock. Her joy sent him over the edge, his hips wildly thrusting inside her until he erupted. A tremor of happiness rippled through him. Derek wrapped her in his arms, letting the bliss of the moment envelop their souls.

Every fiber of her being radiated from the intense pleasure of their lovemaking. Megan lay motionless in the bed of leaves. Lazily, she watched Derek rewind the rope, looping it over his shoulder.

"It's getting chilly. We'd better get inside and take a hot shower before we catch a cold." He grinned down at her.

"Do we have to go?" She smiled up at him. Her heart fluttered in her chest as he bent down, effortlessly scooping her up into his arms. The firmness of his embrace and the delightful scents that lingered on his skin were stirring her sex again.

"Yes." He sighed, glancing up at the sky through the canopy of autumn foliage. "It's late afternoon and I'm hungry. Besides, wouldn't you rather be indoors than out here rolling around on the ground?"

"That depends." She smirked.

"Depends on what?" he inquired, raising his eyebrow.

"That depends on who I'm rolling around with." Derek chuckled as Megan contently leaned her head against the expanse of his chest.

They both fell silent, listening to the sounds of the surrounding woods. Megan smiled, recalling their passionate encounter on the bed of leaves. It had felt so good and natural. Then something deep inside her clicked. It was if a piece of the puzzle had locked into place, revealing a complete picture.

"Oh my god," she gasped, pulling her head from his chest and gazing up at him in astonishment.

"What's wrong?" he asked, furrowing his brows. "You look like you've just seen a ghost."

“Oh no, it’s nothing like that.” She shook her head. “I’ve just had an epiphany!”

“An epiphany?” Derek stopped and gazed down at her, bewildered.

“Yes, I’ve suddenly realized why some *sithech* believe the Samhain moon’s a ‘bad moon’!” She grinned.

“Well? Don’t keep me in suspense, Meg.” The afternoon sun sparkled in his amber eyes as he gently put her feet back on the ground. “You’ve got me curious.”

Megan focused, recollecting her thoughts. “I realized what my brother said about how the moon affects the *sithech* is true. Since we’re part wolf, and closely connected with the moon phases, it can magnify our emotions—whether it’s fear, anger, jealousy or lust. When our emotions are amplified during the Samhain moon, it can bring on ‘moon fever’.”

Derek stood with his hands on his hips, deep in thought. Then he glanced over at her and nodded. “Yes, that makes sense. The other night at the bar, I was pissed off and the beast emerged before I could control myself. I wanted to tear MacDonald apart.”

“See? Your anger was magnified by the moon! It sparked your transformation and you lost control. That’s what we call a ‘bad moon’.” Megan grinned, reaching out and taking Derek’s hand in hers. “But I was thinking, if the moon can affect our *sithech*-blood in a negative way, I believe it can affect us in a positive way, too.”

He angled his head, smiling over at her. “I think I know what you’re talking about. I felt the ‘moon fever’ today in the leaves with you. However, this time, it was different. Yeah, I was horny, but I also think it amplified the feelings in here.” Gingerly, he took her hand, placing it over his chest.

Beneath her palm, she could feel the steady pounding of his heart. Each beat sent a shiver through her naked body. The gravity of their ‘moon fever’ was more than lust...it was something deeper and more profound.

Love? Megan conveyed, unable to tear her gaze from Derek’s handsome face.

He slowly nodded. *Yes, I feel the same, too.*

Megan returned his smile. Then, he stepped close, narrowing the space between them, and drew her back into his arms for a breathtaking kiss.

Chapter Five

Megan was happy as they returned to the cabin for a quick meal and hot showers, both of them now clean and momentarily satisfied. She was a bit disappointed the shower stall was too small to share.

However, Derek insisted on making love to her at a more leisurely pace after their showers. “Now that we understand the ‘moon fever’, we can enjoy ourselves and not be so rushed.” He grinned. “And I fully intend to savor every inch of your body.”

Freshly showered, she stood in the bathroom door wearing nothing except a towel and a smile.

Despite the zesty scent of the soap, Megan could smell Derek’s rich, musky scent beneath...the scent of a *sithech*-male in heat...as he drew close. Her body quickly filled with desire, which rose up her spine. Her sex moistened in anticipation as she flashed him a cheeky grin. “Oh? You still sound like a hungry ol’ wolf to me.”

“And, let me guess, you’re Red Riding Hood, huh?” He winked, suddenly sweeping her off her feet.

Megan squealed with delight. “Put me down, you big, bad wolf.” She giggled.

With a triumphant laugh, Derek deposited her onto the mattress, sliding his naked body over hers. “I’m so bad, I’m good,” he whispered hotly in her ear. His husky voice was laced with pure, raw sexuality.

“I know.” She saw desire burning bright in his eyes. His was controlling himself, but only just. His lips possessed hers, burning through to her very soul. There was such passion in Derek’s kiss it melted away any doubts or fears she might have had.

The ‘moon fever’ rushed through her veins, but this time it was different. Delicious heat warmed her body as Derek brought up his hands, entangling his fingers in her hair. He consumed her mouth with a rabid passion that spiraled through from one set of lips to the other.

She moved beneath him, a low moan escaping, rumbling from the back of her throat. If one could combust from just a kiss, Megan thought for sure she would. No one had ever kissed her like this before.

* * * *

Derek moved his kisses from her lips to the softness of her throat. She tasted like soap and sex beneath his hungry mouth. Megan exposed her neck, surrendering to him. The gesture stirred his heart. With eager hands he roamed over her body, peeling away her towel. She moved beneath him, the brush of her silken skin fueling his desire.

His cock stiffened, responding to the call of her *sithech* and the powerful tug of the moon deep within him. But this time, he felt more assured as he cupped her breasts. Their creamy swells with strawberry-colored peaks begged to be tasted. Derek gently suckled her nipples until she was panting wildly.

“Oh, Derek!” she gasped, her hands gripping his shoulders. The moon filled his being as he lowered his mouth, kissing over the smoothness of her belly. The scent of her sex drifted to his senses, teasing him with desperation and need.

Derek darted his tongue down to the apex between her legs. Megan spread her legs, her body quivering as she let out a low moan. Her pussy was pink and slick with moisture. The musky scent enveloped his heightened senses as his tongue swiped over her nether lips, savoring the exotic tang of her arousal.

“Oh god, Derek,” she gasped once more as he felt her entire body tense with impending orgasm. An unmistakable raw cry filled the room. Her body tensed above him. Waiting a moment until the rapture subsided, he raised his head and gazed up at Megan.

She was lying back on the pillow, her rich, red hair fanned out around her face with a smile upon her luscious lips. Megan glanced down at him, her green eyes shining like emeralds. “I-I want you now,” she uttered, her voice low and slurred with heated desire.

Derek grinned, sliding his body up over hers, his cock rigid and flaring as the heated blood boiled in his veins. Desperation overcame him. Sliding between her silken thighs, he plunged into the moist, yielding heat of her sex with one swift stroke. Derek’s mind melded with hers in wordless bliss. The intense merging filled his senses with a thrill of white-hot passion.

* * * *

Megan let out a loud groan, opening to Derek’s passionate fucking. Her *sithech*-senses were overwhelmed by the heated connection between them. She felt every inch of his cock as it plunged inside her, filling her and fulfilling her completely. The tension crackled in her veins as he totally possessed her.

Locking her legs around his hips, she matched his thrusts. This time, it was Derek’s turn to moan in response as she fully embraced him. Face to face their bodies entwined, slapping together with heated, vigorous strokes until her body tensed, sending her over the edge. Megan closed her eyes, the orgasm rush through her, taking Derek along with her into erotic exaltation.

* * * *

Megan sensed it was almost midnight, the *witching hour*, as the moonlight beamed through the window of the small cabin. With a grin, she rolled over on her side and

looked out, marveling at the beautiful sight. She was completely sedate and mellow. The evening had been a happy blur since they'd returned to the cabin. Her thoughts were drifting in bliss when something slammed into her mind. Fear coiled inside her belly as her senses leapt to instant alert.

"Derek?" she whispered, rolling to face his sleeping form on the bed beside her. "Derek, wake up!"

"Huh? What?" He was groggy. She hated waking him, recalling how tired he'd been after an exhausting day, but her *sithech*-senses were being assaulted by something nearby...something angry.

Megan desperately tried to explain what she was sensing. "I don't know what it is, but it's a strong feeling, Derek, and a disturbing one." She watched Derek swing his legs over the edge of the bed and sit up, spearing a hand through his hair.

"Did you see anything at the window?" he asked in a low voice as he rose, quietly padding over to the sheer curtains. Silhouetted by the moonlight, he peered out through the glass and then turned to face her.

"No, but I feel it." She shook her head, crossing her arms over her chest. "What about you?"

"I don't see anything outside, but, you're right, I sense something, too." He sighed. "I'm getting dressed and checking it out. You stay here."

"Oh no!" Megan quickly got up from the bed. "I'm going, too!"

"Megan." Derek's voice held a note of warning.

"I think we should both check it out," she replied, tossing him a pair of jeans and a black t-shirt.

He didn't protest out loud, but she could hear him clearly in her mind. *You're one stubborn sithech, Megan McShaw!*

Me? Stubborn? I get it honestly. She grinned. *It runs in my family.*

Derek chuckled, shaking his head as she quickly tugged on her jeans, a pullover sweater and sneakers. After tying back her hair from her face, she reached into the duffle bag she'd brought in earlier from the car. Clipping the cell phone to her belt loop, she dug deeper into the bag.

"Aha!" she whispered.

"What?"

“Lucky for us, I put my tranquilizer pistol in the bag.” She held up the gun in triumph. “I’m bringing it with us.”

* * * *

Derek was already dressed, his hand on the doorknob. In the dim lighting of the cabin, he turned to her with an anxious expression on his face. *That’s a good idea.* He nodded. *Let’s hope we won’t need to use it.*

Unlatching the door, he gave a gentle push and, with a soft creak, it swung open. Nocturnal sounds drifted in on the autumn night breeze. Derek’s eyes darted over the lawn. Without being in *sithech*-form he couldn’t see anything, but he could definitely sense something was not right. An invisible menace was somewhere in the darkness, toying with their senses.

Cautiously, he stepped out onto the porch with Megan close behind. He wished she would stay inside, but arguing with her was futile. The full moon filtered through tree branches, illuminating the wooded glade with a silvery glow.

Derek thought about transforming to check things out. However, before he could, the sharp snap of twigs and the crunch of leaves drew his attention. A shadow was moving close from just beyond the trees.

Not taking his eyes off the dark form, Derek gestured for Megan to stay put. “Who’s out there? What do you want?” he shouted.

“I’ve been looking for you,” came a throaty growl from the shadows. The speaker moved into the clearing. It was MacDonald. Moonlight illuminated his burly shape against the darkness. “You and me, we’ve got a score to settle, Lee.”

Derek’s gut tightened. His *sithech*-senses were telling him something was seriously wrong with MacDonald. Derek strained to see more clearly in the silvery light, then he saw the angry man’s face was covered with fur, not facial hair. His eyes glowed green and his teeth were dangerously sharp and jagged in his mouth. It was like something out of an old Hollywood B-movie...MacDonald was a *werewolf*!

“Oh my god!” Megan gasped over his shoulder. She saw it, too, MacDonald’s mutated transformation. “H-he’s part wolf and part man!”

“Get back into the cabin, Meg,” Derek ordered, without taking his eyes off of MacDonald. “Call for help!”

“Not before I tear you apart!” MacDonald snarled, running up to the porch with heavy, lumbering steps. He reached out with fur-covered hands, his claws glistening in the moonlight. The wolfman’s features were contorted with ugly rage.

Derek heard Megan let out a yelp. She shuffled back into the cabin and slammed the door shut. A ripple of relief coursed through him just before MacDonald lunged forward and attacked.

Clenching his clawed fists, the half-wolf swung wildly. His blow knocked Derek off his feet and sent him sprawling onto the porch. An explosion of agony shot through Derek's jaw, followed by a wave of nausea. He shook his head, trying to clear the sensation, but MacDonald's claws dug into his shirt, jerking him up.

Before he knew it, he was airborne and hit the leaf-covered ground away from the cabin door with a hard thud. Derek groaned, pain racking his body. MacDonald was swearing, his clawed fists pounding on the cabin door.

"When I'm done with this little mutt, I'm coming back for you, bitch!" he snarled.

MacDonald's threat burned into Derek, anger coiling up from deep inside him. Threatening him was one thing, but to threaten Megan was something entirely different.

Despite his dizziness, Derek attempted to call forth the transformation. For the first time in his life, he *wanted* the beast to emerge. Sweat beaded his brow, but nothing happened. His body shook with anger and bittersweet adrenaline. "Leave Megan out of this, MacDonald," he hissed.

MacDonald leaped off the porch, jerking Derek to his feet. MacDonald's claws gripped tight into his forearms. The metallic scent of blood filled the air. His blood. Derek thrashed. "You son of a bitch!" he spat out as his foot landed a swift blow to MacDonald's nads.

The wolfman howled with pain and fury, tossing Derek hard onto the ground. Curled up, Derek reached into the depths of his being, seeking out the beast within him. *Oh please!*

A dark shadow loomed over him, blocking out the moonlight. "It figures she'd fall for a mutt like you, Lee!" Derek shot a sharp gaze to MacDonald as a smirk formed on his contorted face.

A flash of foolish bravado flickered through Derek. "What's a matter, MacDonald? Are you jealous?" he taunted back with a wicked grin.

"Why you—" MacDonald's clawed hands reached out.

Derek gave a sharp inhale. A loud *pop* resounded over the wolfman's shoulder, followed by a *zing* that sliced the air. He gave a startled yelp and spun around.

Derek saw the dart lodged between the big man's shoulder blades as MacDonald rushed angrily toward the cabin. Derek's gaze flickered to the porch. Megan stood there, brave

in her stance, the tranquilizer pistol in her hands. She was lining up another shot when MacDonald barreled onto the porch.

“Watch out, Megan!” Derek shouted, but it was too late. Before she could squeeze off another shot, MacDonald lashed out, knocking the pistol from her hands. Derek helplessly watched as he took another swing. The wolfman hit Megan hard. She staggered back against the door with a loud crash, her limp body sliding down onto the porch.

Frustration swelled inside him. Rage blurred Derek’s vision as he felt the full moon’s burning heat pumping through his veins. He tossed back his head, a raw howl escaping from his throat. The ‘moon fever’ swiftly overtook him, ripping the clothes from his body as the beast emerged.

In *sithech*-form, Derek charged MacDonald. With a snarl, he leapt up, forcing the wolfman to the ground with a harsh thud. Hot waves of anger radiated in the air as the two bodies clashed, then tumbled over the leafy ground.

MacDonald growled, clothes shredding, as he transformed fully into wolf form. He was a larger, black wolf, but the smaller, tawny animal was more aggressive. Finally, he pushed Derek off, sending him to the ground. The tawny wolf rolled onto all fours and shook leaves from his fur. He glanced over at Megan, still slumped on the pouch.

She gave a low moan, opening her eyes and sat up, holding her head. *I’m okay, Derek*, she reassured him.

Derek turned, adrenaline pumping through him, and narrowed his gaze at MacDonald. *Attacking me’s one thing, MacDonald. Attacking Megan, that’s another.* He conveyed with a harsh growl. *I’m gonna sink my teeth into your—*

You gotta catch me first, mutt! The big, black wolf spun around, dashing off into the woods.

No, Derek, don’t! Megan desperately conveyed, but the ‘moon fever’ had overridden him. The tawny wolf snarled and raced off after MacDonald.

He sped after the black wolf, his paws kicking up leaves in his wake. Anger coursed like liquid fire through his veins. Derek followed MacDonald’s foul scent on the night breeze, barreling into the moonlit forest after him, hot on his trail.

* * * *

Megan scrambled to her feet and reached for her pistol. Ray and Bruce were on their way. *But how soon would they arrive?* She ran down the steps. In the distance, she heard the rustling sounds of MacDonald and Derek running through the woods, going deeper and deeper into the foliage.

Clutching her pistol, she dashed off into the woods, following the distant echoes of the fighting wolves. *If I 'turn wolf' now, I won't be able to use my pistol.* Her heart raced in her chest. Hoping no one would get killed, she bravely ran deeper into the wooded glade after the two moonstruck wolves.

As wolves, Derek and MacDonald were snapping and growling at each other. The whiteness of their jagged fangs glistened in the moonlight. Their furry bodies clashed together, rolling on the leaf-covered ground.

Megan stopped, taking a stance and aimed her pistol. Frustration rippled through her as she attempted to distinguish which wolf was which in the tumbling mass of fur and teeth.

“Derek!” she cried out. But it was futile. She sensed white-hot anger in the air as the two wolves continued to fight. Her gut clenched as she realized they might battle to the death.

Even in the dim light of the moon, she recognized the pit, the gapping crater among the leaves. *Derek, be careful!* He didn't respond. Snarling, jaws snapping wildly, the wolves were teetering closer to its edge.

The black wolf's pace was slowing. A sense of triumph flickered through her. She sighed with relief as the wolf pulled away from the fighting and retreated a few paces. He shook his head. The tranquilizer was working, but MacDonald's eyes glowed with evil intent.

Megan aimed again, squeezing the trigger. Nothing. The gun was jammed. “Damn it!” she cursed, tossing the useless weapon aside.

MacDonald was eyeing Derek. The tawny wolf held his ground. A deathly odor hung heavy in the air. The black wolf made his move. With a fierce growl, he leapt for the tawny wolf with his jaws opening wide.

“Look out!” Megan shrieked in alarm. Derek jumped aside. The other wolf landed on the bed of leaves. Attempting to stop, he skidded, unable to get solid footing. MacDonald let out a yelp of surprise and toppled over the edge of the pit.

Megan raced forward as the tawny wolf transformed back to Derek. He was heavily panting, his naked body drenched with sweat and blood. Together, they looked over the edge of the earthen crater.

MacDonald's unconscious, naked body was sprawled out at the bottom on a cushion of leaves. Megan exhaled a sigh of relief. “I think he's okay. I don't sense anything broken.” She turned away from the pit in disgust. “It serves him right. He was trying to kill you!”

“I was worried he'd kill both of us. Between the dart and the fall, I'd say he's out cold for now.” Derek shook his head. Moonlight twinkled in his amber eyes as he reached out, drawing her close. “So, are you okay, Meg? How's your head?”

"I'm okay." She shrugged. "I grew up with two big brothers. I'm fairly tough."

"You sure are." Derek grinned, his mood lightened a bit. "So what are we going to do with Sleeping Beauty there?" he inquired, glancing over at the pit.

"I called Rhonda. Bruce and Ray should be here soon to take care of MacDonald," Megan sighed. "But I suggest we get back to the cabin and clean up before they arrive."

"Sure. Besides, I don't think running around the woods in my birthday suit will impress your brother much." Derek winked.

"No, it won't," she agreed. "But I think he'll be more interested in dragging MacDonald out of that hole."

"So, what's he going to do about MacDonald? I mean, doesn't attacking another pack member go against your pack rules?" Derek's brows knitted together with genuine concern.

"That's pack *law* and, yes, even though the 'moon fever' did have something to do with his 'turning wolf', that doesn't excuse his actions." A chill passed over her skin as Megan remembered. "But what happened tonight was so...so bizarre. I've never seen any *sithech* turn into a werewolf before. That was downright scary!"

Megan returned her gaze back to Derek. "But why did you go after him? He was literally a lunatic! MacDonald could have...could have..." Her voice trailed off as tears threatened in the corners of her eyes.

"Sweetheart, I can take care of myself," Derek assured her as they walked slowly back toward the cabin. "Besides, nobody, especially an asshole like MacDonald, is going to attack my mate and get away with it. Nobody."

"Mate? Did you say *mate*?" Megan's eyes widened with surprise. She could hardly believe her ears.

"Well, yeah, I did." A slow grin spread over his face. "I was going to wait and ask you in the morning, after sunrise."

"Ask me? Ask me what, Derek?" Megan voice quivered with emotion. Just a few yards from the cabin they stopped, gazing into each other's eyes in the moonlight.

Although he was still naked and dirty, Derek went down on one knee in front of her and smiled up at her. Tenderly, he took her hand. "Megan, I'm tired of living alone, without a pack. But most of all, I've been searching for someone to love me...and my beast."

“But you’re not a beast, Derek, you’re *sithech*. The blood of the wolf runs strong in you. I’ve sensed it from the moment we first met,” Megan assured him.

“Have you also sensed that I’m in love with you?” he asked, his eyes glistening in the moonlight. “You’re the one I’ve been searching for, Megan.”

Her heart skipped a beat. “Derek, do you really mean it?”

He nodded, giving her fingers a gentle squeeze. “Sweetheart, would you please be my *sithech*-mate?”

A feeling swelled up inside her, washing over her senses, enveloping her heart. Her instincts were right. Derek Lee was her mate, only she’d been too worried the ‘bad moon’ had distorted her true feelings for him. Instead, the Samhain moon was revealing their true love for each other.

Megan tugged at his hand, drawing him from his knees. She encircled her arms around his shoulders and drew him close.

“Yes.” She smiled up at him. True happiness reflected in his eyes. Derek leaned in, his lips brushing hers. However, she made the move first, capturing his mouth in a hot, spellbinding kiss.

The End