

# CASSIE'S AWAKENING

*He's a werewolf...  
who doesn't want a mate.*

BRIGIT AINE



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"Don't ever touch Kraig again or let him touch you," Jared growled from deep in his chest. He was having trouble keeping his wolf in check. When Kraig had kissed Cassie it was all he could do to not rip the pup's head off. She didn't know anything about being his mate, or even what it entailed, but Jared did and he was having trouble controlling the wolf because of it. He had barely managed to control changing, and he certainly wasn't going to stop the rush of jealousy and anger at his mate being touched by another man. Not just a man, but another werewolf. And with that acceptance, he quit thinking and did what his wolf wanted. He kissed her.

*Brigit Aine*

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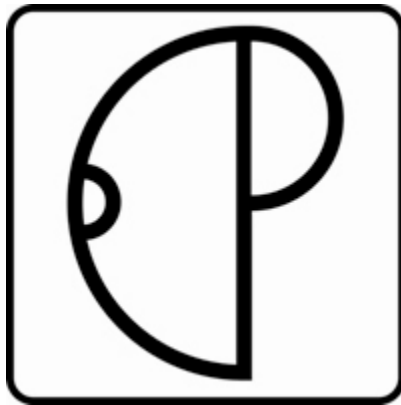
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## *Acknowledgements*

Thank you to my husband and children for putting up with the odd hours and crazy times. Thank you to Barb for taking the time to pre-read all of the stuff I put out there.

## *Dedication*

To Denyse and her band of merry makers... wouldn't have even tried without you.

## *Chapter One*

Smiling and looking out over the full bakery, Cassie shook her head. Since Red had come home and married the sexy sheriff, things had really picked up in here. Cassie had enjoyed her job at the bakery before Red, but now; now she loved it. There was never a dull moment, someone always coming in, wanting to chat and share. Then there was Red and Ethan. They were wonderful together and seeing them so in love made everyone happy, enhanced by the wonderful effect on Red's baking.

Sighing to herself, Cassie took a moment to daydream about finding her own sexy man, just like Red had done. A tall drink of water that loved the very ground she walked on. Shaking her head, Cassie came back into the moment. Daydreaming wasn't going to get her anywhere, and there were customers to be waited on. She had worked in the bakery now for eight years, since she turned sixteen, and discovered that her talent was soothing others. She seemed to exude calmness, people found her pleasant to be around, and they were always pleasant back. Cassie found this pretty frustrating at times, and yearned to be able to have a spat with someone, to feel their passion, but this did not seem to be a possibility. Although she portrayed calmness, the entire range of emotions was very much a part of her inner-self. Unfortunately, this talent of hers, while useful in some situations, had also made it difficult for Cassie to develop passionate relationships. Calmness and eroticism did not make for successful bed-mates.

As she headed out from behind the counter to wipe off a few tables and collect dishes, the bell above the door rang. She looked up to see who was coming in. Having lived in Torrent her entire life, Cassie thought she knew everyone, but the gorgeous god walking in with Red's Ethan was new to her. Easily six feet two inches, blonde with fabulous

blue eyes, he was by far the sexiest thing Cassie had ever seen. Even next to Ethan, who was not so shabby himself, the blue eyes of this Adonis seemed to glow. The two men were talking as they walked in, both dressed in the uniform of the town's sheriff's department. Ethan's companion obviously worked with him. Men in uniform always made Cassie feel safe, and Ethan's friend made her feel all sorts of other things as well.

Ethan's eyes scanned the bakery for trouble, and also for Red. As the sheriff, he was always looking for anything out of place. As Red's husband, there was no way he didn't look for her the second he walked in the door. Cassie sighed again. Looking at the blonde in the doorway, she thought how nice it would be if he would look for her that way. She figured it was time to get back to work and stop mooning over someone she had not even met. Just as she was getting ready to go clean up the tables, Red came bounding from the kitchen. Even covered in flour and wearing an apron she was sweet and sexy, and Cassie couldn't help but smile at the energy Red exuded.

"Isn't it a glorious day?" Red said, stopping and embracing Cassie in a hug.

"You think every day is a glorious day," Cassie responded with a smile, as she hugged her friend back. She was glad Red was back in Torrent; the two had been friends before Red went to live in the city. Cassie had missed her when she was gone.

"Well, that is true. Having Ethan around does help. So, what do you think of Jared?" Red questioned slyly, as she grabbed Cassie's hand and began tugging her toward where the men were standing. Cassie knew it was useless to try and pull away from her.

"Jared? Is that his name?" Cassie sighed as she responded to her friend.

Red laughed, let go of Cassie's hand, and bounded into Ethan's open arms and passionate, mind-blowing kiss.

Sighing yet again, Cassie figured it would be polite to introduce herself to Ethan's friend, so she stepped around the embracing couple to greet Jared. Just as she was getting ready to put out her hand and say, "Hi", he looked up at her, his nostrils flaring slightly, as if he had smelled something he could not quite identify. He narrowed his beautiful blue eyes, growled deep in his throat, then turned and stomped off to the nearest empty table. Cassie was so surprised she just clamped her jaw shut. Turning around, she ran right into Red who had seen the

whole exchange and was now glaring at Jared and whispering to Ethan.

"You tell him to straighten up or I won't have him in here."

"You know what his problem is, Red. I can't ask him to just accept it, not when he isn't ready," Ethan responded, looking between Jared and Cassie.

Then Red asked the one question Cassie hadn't been able to wrap her own mind around. "I wonder how it was with Cassie here that he could exude so much negative emotion? How come he seems to be immune to her *talent*?"

Cassie wondered the same thing, as Jared continued to glare at her from his table. She could not figure out what she had done wrong, to piss off the amazing-looking god, but she was hoping between Red and Ethan they could help her figure it out. She really would have liked to at least shake his hand and be able to say she had touched him. As Red grabbed her elbow and propelled her back toward the kitchen, Cassie looked over her shoulder toward the table. Ethan was talking low to Jared, who was still just glaring at her.

"I'll take over in the front, you head on home. Stupid men. Sometimes they don't know what they are doing or even what is in their own best interest," Red said, as she pushed Cassie out the back door.

"Red." Cassie felt like she was in shock. "How do you deal with these feelings all the time?" Cassie asked the one thing she was having the most trouble dealing with. She felt as if she couldn't breathe. She had never felt or seen someone else's emotions so intensely.

"Oh, honey, I didn't even think of that." Red stopped trying to push her out the door and held her close instead. "This is the first time you've experienced something so intense back at you, isn't it? I am so sorry; I didn't think. You just learn to breathe deep and then focus on making things right. In this case Ethan and I will help you. In the meantime, take a walk or read a book. Just try and relax a little bit and don't worry. Everything will work itself out."

\*\*\*\*

"I don't want a mate, Ethan," Jared stated emphatically, as his friend, who was also his Alpha, sat down at the table with him. "I'm not ready. I don't want the responsibility." Even as he said this Jared knew it wasn't true. His thoughts turned immediately to the dark-haired beauty he had just seen. With her raven-colored hair and deep sea-green eyes, he knew



she was perfect for him. She was so petite, but the strength that radiated from her when he had rebuffed her was amazing. Jared was ashamed of his behavior now that he could look back and reflect on it.

Ethan looked at his friend and second-in-command with compassion and empathy. "Sometimes we don't get to choose when it happens, my friend. You could do worse, way worse, than Cassie. She is comfortable to be around, easy on the eyes, and loyal to a fault."

Jared just glared at Ethan. "Why did you notice how easy on the eyes she is? And how do you know she is loyal? Why would she be loyal to you?"

Ethan laughed at Jared's questions. "Did you hear yourself? Your wolf has already claimed her and is jealous that I know more about her than you do. Red has told me Cassie hasn't ever really had a chance at passion because of her *talent*. Since she exudes calmness, people can never get worked up around her. That includes men. Looks like your wolf is a little more primitive than most, so you are immune to her *talent*. Of course, if she had asked I would have told her you were less than civilized. You will have to go gently with her. All the emotions and reactions that you will give her will be new to her."

Jared looked at Ethan. Sighing, he said, "I guess my wolf has decided I should just go with the flow. Who knows, maybe she'll be as adventurous as your Red." Grinning at some of the stories Ethan had told him about Red, Jared pushed his chair back. "I think I'll go see what my mate is up to."

Ethan watched Jared go. He was a fine second-in-command, and he would do well by Cassie, if she could get used to feeling his emotions. It was good to see his pack settling here in Torrent, finding mates and working their way into the community.

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Cassie made her way home through the woods. She always loved to walk the dappled paths, and even more so now that Red lived out here with Ethan. Cassie lived just on the other side of Red's grandmother, Casey, so she often stopped in, but today as she passed by she just felt like doing what Red said. Going home and relaxing.

After letting herself into her cottage Cassie looked around. She loved her home and it always felt like a piece of her was missing when she was away from it. Walking from room to room, Cassie realized she was

jumpy and jittery, still trying to deal with the overflow of new emotions she had never had to deal with before today. The intense anger and underlying passion were new to her and she needed a way to calm down and work through what she was feeling. Deciding to clean up, Cassie headed into the bathroom, one of her favorite rooms in the cottage with its deep, sunken tub and a wall of windows that looked out into the forest. She poured bubbles into the wonderful warm water and sank deep into them.

As she was sitting there with the warm water lapping at her skin, she began running her hands over her stomach. Sighing, Cassie imagined they were Jared's hands; large, roughened from hard work and moving up over her rib cage to cup her breasts, pinching lightly at the nipples that were begging to be played with. Cupping one hand around a breast and tugging slightly on her nipple, Cassie worked her other hand back down over her stomach. Inching further, she felt her tight curls wet from the water wrap around her fingers and beckon them to move closer. She was caught in her fantasy of Jared, cupping her mound and lightly running a calloused finger over her hardened nub. Arching in the tub, Cassie let herself go with the moment. She hadn't done this in a long time and she was home alone.

As she pushed her fingers in the tight, wet hole, she opened her eyes and looked out into the woods. There, watching her play out her fantasy, was the most beautiful animal she had ever seen. A white wolf. It just sat there, watching her as if it wanted to be a part of what she was doing. Making eye contact, she felt herself moving her fingers faster, willing the wolf to be here with her, a part of what she was doing. Tugging harder on her nipple and running a thumb over her clit one last time, Cassie climaxed, whispering "Jared" as she came. Looking up, she saw the wolf moving closer to the window as if it wanted to comfort her. She unabashedly got out of the tub and walked naked over to the door where her robe hung. After all, she figured, it was just a wolf.

## *Chapter Two*

Getting ready for work the next morning, Cassie took extra care in her appearance. She didn't know why she cared if Jared came back. After all, he hadn't liked her, but she still wanted to look nice just in case he did.

On her way to work she agonized over the emotions of the previous day. What would she do if he came back? How was she supposed to deal with the overwhelming emotions that seemed to break through her *talent*? Shaking her head, Cassie gave herself a stern warning. *We are not going to freak out over a guy. Other people deal with emotions every day. We can learn.* With that thought in her head she walked into the bakery and, inhaling deeply, began to smile. Red had been in and baked already this morning and the smells alone were enough to make anyone happy. Smiling, Cassie began to brew the coffee for the morning crowd, and started to set up the display case.

The bell rang just as she was finishing the last of the display cases. Glancing up with an automatic smile Cassie stopped, frozen when she saw it was Jared.

"Good morning." The deep timbre of his voice went straight to her middle, causing her to clench. She could feel a sudden moisture in her panties.

"Good morning." Cassie tried to appear aloof, but knew she sounded breathless.

Jared casually strolled over to the counter and leaned on it so he could get a better smell from her. After watching Cassie yesterday in the tub, all he wanted to do was lift her up and carry her out of the bakery, but he knew that would scare her. His wolf huffed in disagreement, eager to be mated to this delicious creature that wasn't afraid of him. "So, what do you recommend today?"

"Ummm..." Cassie chewed on her bottom lip as Jared stared at her like he wished she was on the menu. "If you like lemon cream, Red made these delicious bars, or if raspberry is more to your liking, Red also made up a lovely raspberry crisp as well." She was trying hard to keep her breathing in order while he stood so close to her. She really could feel his emotions. They were so intense and would overwhelm her, the passion especially, if she didn't figure out how to deal with them. Of course, her ideas of dealing with them included leaning over the counter and kissing him silly, but she wasn't sure he was ready for that yet.

"Lemon cream, please," Jared breathed, as she walked away from him to get his order. He could smell her arousal and it pleased his wolf, but it made the man hard as a rock. His cock was throbbing in his uniform pants and all he could think about was burying himself deep inside of her. As she walked back toward him, he reached out to take the plate from her, his fingers grazing her wrist. Cassie gasped at the effect; a spark, immediate and absolute. For Jared and his wolf it felt like they had come home, and a deep contentment settled within their soul.

Cassie couldn't contain the feeling when Jared touched her. She had never experienced such passion and intense emotion before. It was overwhelming, and she staggered under the sheer weight of it. Lifting her eyes to his, she could see he had no idea what she was going through. "I have to... I'll just..." she muttered, hearing the bell above the door ring as she tried to get away from him.

Glad for the distraction, Cassie glanced over to greet the newcomer. Her smile turned genuine as she saw it was Kraig, one of her favorite deputies and another of Ethan's friends.

"Hey, darling," Kraig was loud, boisterous and young. "How is my favorite girl?" Leaning over the counter he kissed Cassie's cheek, as was his habit. He was a great flirt, and even with her *talent* leaving her feeling nothing from him, she knew Kraig well enough to appreciate that he was usually a man of exuberance and passion. This was, of course, muted around her but it was still nice to have a cute man's attention. Reaching back, she gave him a quick hug and released him.

"I am doing—" As Cassie was responding to Kraig's question, Jared suddenly pushed forward, picked up the young man, and bodily removed him from her reach.

"What do you think you are doing touching her?" Jared's question came out in a growl, and he knew his eyes were glowing as he looked at Kraig.

Kraig glared at him, but seemed to back down when he saw Jared's stance and eyes. "I was just saying hi to Cassie, but I think I'll take my usual to-go today." Kraig looked back at Cassie and his eyes were smiling. "Cass, darling, I think you have a new protector." Kraig held up his hands as Jared growled low in his throat. "As well you should. I wish you all the luck in the world." Laughing, Kraig took his coffee and chocolate cream roll out the door. She wasn't reassured by the way he continued laughing as he went.

Cassie turned from watching Kraig saunter out the door, and looked at Jared like he had lost his mind. "What did you think you were doing, scaring off my friend like that?" Just as Cassie was getting ready to let loose with another round at Jared, she found herself lifted out from behind the counter and set down on the top, directly in front of him. Out the corner of her eye, she saw Red emerge from the kitchen, stop, survey Jared, and go right back. Cassie realized she was completely on her own with him.

"I repeat. What did you think you were doing?" Cassie asked, with more bravado than she was feeling. She had never felt anything like the pulsating emotions emanating from Jared. It seemed to overwhelm all her senses and she was struggling with just getting breath in and out of her lungs. She looked up at him and found herself face-to-face with eyes that were so intense she could see nothing but them. There was a slight glow that fascinated her; she had never seen eyes like this before, incredibly deep with a special inner light.

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Cassie was getting ready to comment on Jared's voice, which had changed and become gravelly, and in all honesty, super-sexy. His eyes continued to glow, another thing she was going to mention, but before she could say anything he shifted slightly. Jared bent his head down and captured her lips, not with a gentle first kiss, but a conquering one. His

lips slanted over hers, tongue demanding entry, and when she thought to resist a little, he pushed past her lips into her mouth. Stroking his tongue along hers, he seemed to devour and taste every bit of her. Cassie gave in and wrapped her arms around his neck, pushing her tongue against his and demanding everything from him that he was demanding from her. He tasted of coffee and summer, something she was sure was uniquely Jared.

"Ahhhheeee." Cassie looked up to see an amused Ethan standing behind Jared. "I can see that the two of you are doing better at least, but until there is some more conversation, I think you need to let Cassie get back to work." There was a veiled threat as Ethan looked at Jared. "Besides, I don't want to hear it from Red later that my deputies are the cause of disruption and chaos at the bakery. "Shuddering, Ethan closed his eyes. "Think of how the food is going to taste if Red is upset. Then we'll all be affected and have stomachaches to boot."

Just then Red came out from the kitchen. "I'll have you know that I wouldn't bake if I was upset. But I am taking Cassie with me. We are closing the bakery for the day, so you two boys go off and do whatever it is a sheriff and his deputy do during the day. We are going for a girls' day off." With that, Red walked over, spun the closed sign on the door in front of the startled couple about to come in, grabbed Cassie's hand, and the two women went out the back door.

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"Might I remind you," Ethan said, as he and Jared walked around the small downtown area of Torrent, "that she doesn't know you are a shifter and is clueless about how to deal with all the increased emotions?"

Jared sighed as Ethan talked. He knew his boss and friend was right, but he didn't want to hear it and his wolf wanted to hear it even less. "I know all that. It doesn't change the fact that she is my mate. Whenever I get near her the wolf seems to take over some part of me and demand that I touch her, claim her. And when Kraig kissed her this morning, I thought I was going to kill the kid. It was close, Ethan, I gotta tell ya." Jared glanced over to see Ethan laughing. "What's so funny?"

"I hear you. I can't imagine what I would do if I ever saw anyone else touching Red. She knew I was coming, though. Grandma Casey had been warning her for years. Cassie is different. She doesn't know how to

deal with the emotions you are sending out and she has no idea that werewolves exist, although I think part of what Red is doing today is giving her a quick course in how to deal with it."

Jared was glad to hear that Red was going to do the hard part. He knew it was cowardly to let her tell Cassie about the wolf but, at the same time, he didn't know what he would do if she fell apart or got scared of him. "I'll have to thank Red the next time I see her, for helping with Cassie," Jared said slyly, knowing Ethan was going to kick his ass for that remark.

"Stay away from my wife, Jared." Ethan's words were slow and marked as he stopped walking. "You have enough trouble getting Cassie to come around, so you don't want me messing up your pretty face now, do you?"

Jared laughed and slapped Ethan on the back. "Gotcha, and I have to tell you it feels nice to know I am not the only one who feels that way." Ethan laughed at his friend's remark. Feeling better now, Jared walked with Ethan as they greeted the people of Torrent and made sure to check in with businesses. This was a part of the job that both men loved. Taking care of their pack, or as men of their town, was what being a wolf was about. Law enforcement was a natural profession for a were-shifter. They were able to watch out for those they cared about, which soothed their need to protect the community.

As they were walking around, Ethan and Jared spotted someone new to town. Looking at each other, they meandered over to the young woman who was unpacking in front of the empty storefront.

"Afternoon, ma'am," Ethan said as they approached her.

"Hi," she mumbled, looking up at them. She couldn't have been more than five feet two inches. A tiny thing in comparison to them.

"Need any help moving that stuff in?" Jared asked when she continued to just stand there.

"Nnn...oo. I have it. Thank you," she stammered, looking around her, eyes darting in all directions, like she was afraid someone was watching.

Both Jared and Ethan noticed the nervous look.

"My name is Ethan and I'm the sheriff here in Torrent. This is Jared, my second-in-command. My wife owns the bakery across the street and Jared's girlfriend works there."

"I'm Katherine," she whispered, head down, still glancing around her.

"Well, Katherine, it is nice to meet you. Could you please tell me who it is you are hiding from?" Ethan asked in a calm, straightforward voice. His wolf could smell her fear, but even without the wolf he could see the signs of a nervous woman.

Katherine started. "Ummm... no one?"

Ethan looked at Jared, who smiled gently and in amusement. "Come on, Katherine, we are trained law enforcement. We can see you are trying to be inconspicuous and you are watching around us like a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs. So, be honest. We can help. Trust in that."

Katherine looked up at them. "I'm hiding from someone who wants to use me to become more powerful and rich than he already is. I had heard that Torrent didn't judge people who might be different. I read tarot cards and am psychic. I have a real talent for it and someone wants to exploit that."

Jared and Ethan looked her over and then glanced up and down their streets. No one was going to come into Torrent and hurt people. They would make sure of it.

"You heard right about Torrent, Katherine," Jared said. "We will take care of you here. Come by the bakery in the morning. Our mates will both be there and they are very *talented* women who can help you settle in and will want to hear all about your *talent*. We will meet with you as well and work out who is after you, and form a plan to keep you safe."

"Oh, I don't know. I don't want to bring anyone else in. It might get them hurt." Katherine was startled at the offer.

"Don't worry. We can take care of ourselves and with the special *talents* we all have there is nothing that will stop us." Jared gave Katherine a quick wink. "We'll let you get back to unpacking and setting up. Give the sheriff's station a call if you need us."

The two men turned to go. "Thank you," a quiet voice said behind them. Had it not been for the wolves' hearing they would not have heard her. They kept walking so as to not embarrass her.

"Trouble is coming," Jared said.

"Trouble." Ethan grinned. "Nah... it is just going to get interesting, is all."



## *Chapter Three*

Red had grabbed Cassie out of the bakery before Jared could make things any worse. Pushing her into the car, she sped off towards Grandma Casey's house. If anyone could see into the heart of things it would be Grandma Casey. Before they had gone out the back door, Red had grabbed some cinnamon twists so they could sit, have coffee, and relax when they got there.

"Red." Cassie was looking stunned in the front seat. It was difficult to tell exactly what Cassie was feeling because of her *talent*, but Red could see by the look on her face nothing like this had ever happened to her before. "Is that really what it feels like to be taken over? I have never felt anything that intense before. How do I know it is real?" The real fear and anxiety in Cassie's voice pushed Red to hurry.

"You know, Cassie, I think that Grandma Casey can help. Let's just get there, and sit down with some coffee and pastries. Grandma Casey can look at you and let you know, and then if it is the real thing, you and I can talk about some unique traits that Jared has." Red sighed inwardly. That could be fun. Not.

"You mean like why I thought I saw his eyes glowing?" Cassie asked, somewhat wryly.

"Yep, stuff like that."

A few minutes later they were walking into Grandma Casey's house. "Grandma?" Red called out.

"Red? Is something wrong, dear? Why are you here in the middle of the day?" Grandma Casey came out from the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron. "Oh, I should have known. Cassie, girl, how great it is to see you." Casey approached and gave her a hug. "So the storm that has been building has finally blown into your life, huh?"

Cassie just stared at Casey. She loved her but had never understood what her *talent* was. She knew Casey had the knack for matchmaking, but did not know what it was that made her so successful at it.

"The storm?" Cassie questioned Casey.

"Come on. We'll talk about it over whatever it is Red has that smells so good." Casey headed into the kitchen, leaving Red and Cassie no choice but to follow her. Red looked at Cassie, shrugged her shoulders and followed her grandmother. Cassie stood there for a few minutes, uncertain about whether she wanted to hear what Casey and Red had to say. She really thought she might get to like Jared; he sure made her hotter than Hades. She knew she wanted him with a passion, but if Casey knew he was coming for her, that meant there was more to this than a quick roll in the hay. Resigning herself to the fact that fate, as always in Torrent, was about to play a huge role in her life, Cassie followed them into the kitchen. If she had to be swallowed by fate, she might as well do it on some of Red's food.

"All right, tell it to me straight," Cassie said, as she waited for Casey to serve up coffee and some cinnamon twists. "I mean, how bad could it be? A hot man wants me and can't stand to see other men touching me." Grinning, she looked over at Red, who grinned back and waggled her eyebrows.

"Yep," Red said in agreement. "There could be worse things."

"All right you two. Stop with that." Casey just smiled at them as she served up the cinnamon twists. "So, how are you handling this? Are you okay with all the emotions that you are dealing with? I know it must be overwhelming for you, so why don't we start there," Casey said, as she took a bite of her cinnamon twist. "Ah, Red. So thoughtful. You were really worried about her, but the love you feel for her makes these sweet, not worrisome."

Cassie took a bite of her own and felt tears come to her eyes. "Thank you," she whispered to Red, as she tasted the emotion that was infused in the twists. Her friend loved her and cared that she was hurt and confused.

Red blushed and mumbled, "Sometimes I hate my *talent*."

Cassie got up and hugged her. "Don't. It is a great way for me to know what you are feeling, and that isn't easy for me. As for how I am handling the emotions." Cassie glanced up at Casey. "I thought the first time I was going to bust, but every time I see him it gets a bit easier. I am able to sort of distinguish what it is he is feeling. I just have to get use to

the intensity. It is different, but I feel... I don't know, almost normal." Now it was Cassie's turn to blush. She didn't usually tell people that she didn't feel normal because of her *talent*.

"So, you aren't feeling too overwhelmed? " Casey questioned, eyebrow quirked. "That is excellent, for the storm is not one that people generally weather lightly. You have lived in the calm before the storm. Now you will live with the calm after the storm, but only if you survive the storm itself."

"Can you tell me, please, why it is that my *talent* is not working on him?" Cassie questioned Casey. "I don't understand. I have never had this problem before."

"Your *talent* does not work because in order for you to know your true self, and his, you must be able to feel. You know he is the one, whether you "know" it yet or not, because you are able to feel from him what it is he wants from you."

"Grandma, I think this is something I will need to talk with Cassie about," Red interjected. Taking Cassie's hands in hers, Red held on. "Cassie, I want you to keep an open mind when I talk to you about this, okay?" Red waited for Cassie's nod before continuing. "You know how all of us here in Torrent have something unique, something we call a *talent*. Well, even though Ethan and Jared and all of their friends aren't from Torrent, they are unique and special as well."

When Red stopped talking, Cassie started to get a feeling in the pit of her stomach. "Is this something I'm not going to like hearing, Red?"

"Well, you know how when we were kids we used to laugh at Grandma Casey because she always told me the big, bad wolf was going to claim me for his own?" Red waited again. Cassie nodded once slowly and then her eyes widened big. She tried to tug her hands from Red, who wouldn't let go. "Cassie, it is okay. Take a few deep breaths."

"Are you telling me Ethan is a wolf? " Cassie asked in a low voice, thinking hard about what she knew about Ethan, but unable to focus. Then she remembered Jared's glowing eyes and growling voice. "Are you telling me Jared is a wolf as well?" Unable to think, Cassie put her head down on the table.

"Yes," Red stated plainly, still holding on to Cassie's hands. "Cassie, they are wonderful, gorgeous creatures in their human and their wolf forms. When they are wolves, they retain all of their human intelligence and emotions. They are simply in a different form. Jared's wolf is a little more primitive than most and that is why your *talent* doesn't work on

him. Their sense of taste is so highly developed that my *talent* sends them into overdrive because of the emotions they taste in the food, but with you, because their sense of emotion isn't as highly developed, your *talent* doesn't affect them as much. And with Jared, because you are his mate, he isn't affected at all."

Cassie listened to Red and realized she wasn't as surprised as she thought she should be. It made sense, the glowing of the eyes and the voice. Then she remembered her bath from the other day. "Oh my goodness." Turning bright red for the second time, Cassie lowered her head and smiled.

"I know that look. Did he spy on you already?" Red asked, amusement in her tone. "Those men. Ethan did the same thing to me."

"Um, it wasn't just watching me... I was in the tub the other day like you told me to. You know what my bathroom looks like, with that bank of wall-to-wall windows facing the woods. There was this gorgeous white wolf out there. I think now that it must have been Jared."

"Yep, probably. He is the only white wolf that I am aware of in the area."

"You mentioned me being his mate. What does that mean?" Cassie asked Red.

"Ummm... that is really something you should talk to him about. I'm sorry Cass," Red said, as she saw the look on Cassie's face, "but mate stuff isn't something you should talk about with anyone but your mate."

Taking another bite of her cinnamon twist, Cassie absorbed the emotions her friend had poured into it. She realized Red wasn't trying to be mean, but that this was something personal and she needed to discuss it with Jared. Her friend did care about her and only wanted the best, and that meant Cassie was going to have to face Jared herself and demand some answers.

"Okay, I understand. If you could just take me home then. So that I can sort of prepare for this talk. That would be really great."

"All right. Grandma, thanks for the coffee and that talk." Red walked over to Casey and gave her a kiss. "I'll be back soon."

"Take care, Red. Cassie, girl, you know if you need anything you are always welcome here, dear one."

Cassie walked over and gave her a hug. "I know, Casey. I have always known. Thank you."

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Jared finished his shift at the station and walked into Ethan's office to say goodnight. "Hey, boss, I'm outta here. I'll see you tomorrow?"

"You know you have to go see her and talk about this, right?" Ethan offered, instead of the usual goodnight.

"Ah, man, lay off a little. I'm having trouble adjusting as it is and now you want me to go have a heart-to-heart with a woman who makes me feel like a teenager all over again? Come on."

"Red will have told her about the wolf, man. You can't just leave her hanging like that. She has to know what it means and how you feel."

Sighing, Jared shook his head and looked at Ethan. "Okay, I hear you. I'll head over there after I shower." Seeing Ethan's look he changed his mind. "I'll head over there right now. I know it isn't fair to subject her to the mood swings and the irrational mind of a wolf when she doesn't even know what is going on."

## *Chapter Four*

Once home, Cassie changed into some cotton pajama bottoms and a tank top. She settled onto the couch in her living room to watch television and try not to think too much about what Casey and Red had said. After all, if she was going to be subjected to the emotions of a werewolf, she figured she could use the quiet time.

Just as she snuggled down she heard a car pull into her drive. Sighing, she knew it was Jared. It was time for her to face the music. Just like Casey had said, the calm before the storm was over and the storm itself had arrived. She opened the door on the first knock. Sure enough, standing there looking good enough to lick all over was Jared. His blonde hair was disheveled and his blue eyes anxious as he looked down at her.

"I figured you would be here. Come on in." Opening the door wider, Cassie let him into the house. Heading back into the living room she sat down on the couch. Looking around, Jared realized there was a lot about Cassie he didn't know. She had great taste if her house was anything to go by.

"Um, I thought maybe, after you talked with Red, you would have some questions for me." Jared sat down next to Cassie on the couch. His wolf immediately picked up on her scent and proximity, and he knew he was going to have trouble getting through this talk without touching her. He also knew that if he touched her the talk wasn't going to happen. As if she had read his thoughts, Cassie reached over and stroked his hair. Jared's wolf pounced; there was no other reaction he could have.

Cassie couldn't help herself. She had to know what his hair felt like. It looked so soft and thick. As she reached over and ran her fingers through it, Jared grabbed her and dragged her into his lap. His arms

wrapped around her and he lowered his head to hers. Touching his forehead to hers, he ran his hands up and down her back as she fingered her way through his hair. Growling, he lowered his head to her throat. She felt him nip and then lick at the tender skin. Moaning, she leaned her head back, inviting him to do more.

He nibbled his way back up to under her jaw, putting little kisses in place until he reached her lips. Unlike this morning's possessive kiss, this was a kiss of passion and tenderness. His tongue explored her mouth at a leisurely rate and his hands continued to caress her back. At some point he had slipped them under her tank-top and she could feel his roughened fingers on her back. It was wonderful.

She arched into his touch as he moved onto her stomach. Fingers grazing over her soft skin, he continued to plunder her mouth with his tongue. She ran her fingers over his face and down his neck, reaching behind to stroke his back. He growled low and she could feel the vibrations all the way through her. She reacted by rotating her hips into his.

"I can't wait," he said against her mouth, as he broke the kiss. "I have to have you. My wolf has to have you. But before we do this, I want to take just a minute to show you who I really am." He broke away a little and looked down at her. His blue eyes were so earnest she could deny him nothing.

"I want to see him, but I am a little bit scared." Cassie bit her lip. "Did you watch me in the tub the other day?"

Jared smiled. "That was one of the most erotic things I have ever seen. With my keen sense of hearing when I am in that form, I could hear you say my name."

"So, I have already seen you. In that case I would like to see the wolf up close. Will I be able to touch you?"

"God, yes please," Jared groaned at the question. The wolf couldn't believe she wanted to stroke him. Jared moved her away from his lap and got off the couch. Calling to his wolf, he shimmered into place.

One second Jared was in front of her and the next there was the most gorgeous creature Cassie had ever laid eyes on. "Oh, you are beautiful. I can't believe that you have to keep hidden." She slipped off the couch and moved on her knees over to the animal. She looked into its eyes and saw nothing but Jared. Reaching out, she placed her hand on top of his head, stroked down, and watched as he closed his eyes. She felt his fur under her hands, so much like the hair on his head when he was human.

Stroking over him, she noticed his head push into her stomach, and looking down she saw him snuggle into her stomach. She reached over and hugged him. Looking up, he shimmered and then there in her lap was Jared again.

Cassie reached over and stroked the hair on his head. He sat up slowly, reached for her, and when they were level grabbed the hem of her shirt. Lifting it up over her head, he leaned back and took in his first look of her naked skin. Leaning forward, he took a dusky rose tip into his mouth causing her to sigh as he suckled gently on her nipple. Leaning into him and letting his arm support her back, she gave him access to her body. Jared lowered her slowly onto the floor.

"I want to do this right the first time, not here on the floor," Jared said against her breast.

"I don't want to leave this spot, where I was able to see the both of you. Take me here, please." Cassie looked up, her green eyes sincere as she gazed at him.

"Ahh, Cass, how am I supposed to fight against that?" Sinking deep into her, Jared kissed her with a passion that spoke of more than just a moment's lust. She tugged at his shirt, getting him to separate just long enough to take it off and shuck the rest of his clothes, as he helped her take off her panties. Reveling in the softness of who she was as she slithered out of them, he ran his hands down her thighs.

Moving across her as if she were a goddess, Jared sprinkled light kisses and then gentle nips on her stomach and abs. As he moved lower to her mound, she began to wriggle underneath him. She had never gotten this far before, usually unable to arouse this much passion in a guy. "Um, Jared, this is the first time that... I mean... if you don't want to."

Jared looked up into her anxious eyes. "Sweet Cassie, don't worry about me. I am going to make myself a full dessert out of the sweet cream that you are giving me here." With that, he kept moving down. She watched as his head disappeared between her thighs, then sighed and closed her eyes as she felt his tongue start to probe her lips. She bucked her hips against him as he nipped at her clit. When her hands slid into his hair to hold him in place, he began to suckle and lick in earnest. Just when she thought she couldn't take any more, a finger slid gently into her pussy.

"Jared," she cried, as he pushed a second finger into her. He looked up from sucking on her clit. Watching her face, he began to move his



fingers in and out, bringing with them the sweet juices that flowed from her. He leaned back down to lick the juices that were dripping, his wolf whining to the surface, wanting to taste and claim his mate. Jared felt her walls start to clench around his fingers and looked up just in time to see her face as she shattered over the edge. She relaxed against the floor, but he was nowhere near done with her. Crawling back up her, he reached her mouth, claiming a gentle kiss as he slowly slipped his cock into her.

"So tight, baby," Jared whispered. "Just relax. I'll take care of you." He felt like he had died and gone to heaven as he began to move in and out, slowly. Trying to take it slow and make it as good for her as it was for him was difficult. Jared's wolf wanted to claim her, showing the world that she belonged to him. Of course, he knew that they needed to talk before this could happen, but he wasn't sure he was going to be able to control the wolf's instincts.

Reaching up with her legs, Cassie wrapped Jared close to her. "Please, Jared. Now." With her whispered plea she arched up into him, loving the feel of him being so close. She had never experienced anything like this, the rush of feelings overwhelming her to the point that she wanted to cry.

Jared knew he wouldn't be able to hold his wolf back at her whisper. As he gave a final cry and pushed into her he felt her shatter and pulse around his cock. Lowering his head to her shoulder he bit her, marking her as his mate. As his wolf roared in pleasure Jared felt himself go over the edge.

Lying there with Jared, Cassie had never felt so complete in her life. She understood now what everyone talked about when they said it was like nothing before. She had never had such a flood of emotions, or been subjected to such passion. She was pretty sure she could get used to this, but was afraid to trust what she was feeling. Things were so new to her. Cassie knew she and Jared needed to talk and soon, but for now she just wanted to lie there and enjoy the aftermath of her first lovemaking.

Jared kissed her shoulder lightly. He also knew they needed to talk. He had just claimed her as his mate for all other wolves to see, without her permission. He needed to explain to her that in his wolf's eyes she belonged to him. Somehow he didn't think she was going to just take that as calmly as he would like. In his heart she was his, but since he had never told her, or explained about mates and such to her, he knew that he couldn't expect her to just return his feelings and understand what it meant. His wolf growled at the idea that she could walk away after he

had claimed her. Gathering his thoughts so that the wolf couldn't do anything stupid, like pin her again, Jared rolled away.

"Cass, we really need to talk." He stood up and started gathering clothing.

"I know. Why don't you use the guest bathroom shower and get dressed? I'll get some coffee started and clean up in my own room. The bathroom is the first door down the hall." As Cassie headed into the kitchen she heard the shower start. Sighing, she wondered what Jared had to say. Red said Cassie was Jared's mate. Cassie had no idea what that meant or if she was certain she even wanted that. Wandering into her own bathroom, she remembered the day she had dreamed this would happen and how the wolf had watched her. As she showered, Cassie thought about whether or not she was even ready to deal with the talking part of this. Her whole life people had been calm, even, and never too intense or one-sided around her, thanks to her *talent*. With Jared that was not the case and she didn't know how she was going to handle it.

Once she had dressed in comfortable jeans and a T-shirt, Cassie wandered back out into the kitchen. Jared was already there with the coffee poured. He was sitting at her kitchen table and he looked so right, waiting for her, that it made her heart melt.

"Thanks," she said, as she accepted the coffee he had poured for her. Fidgeting with the sugar and the creamer, Cassie puttered about for a few minutes. She knew that she was just procrastinating, but wasn't sure she wanted to hear what Jared had to say.

"Cassie." She jumped when his hand landed on her shoulder. She had been so wrapped up in her own thoughts that she hadn't heard him approach. "It will be okay. Come talk to me and I will explain some things to you." Taking her hand, Jared led her back into the living room. They sat on the couch and he turned to face her, keeping a hold of her hand. "Wolves mate for life. Did you know that?"

Cassie shook her head. She was already feeling the drowning sensation she was afraid of. "No. What does that mean?"

"My wolf sensed you were his mate the first time we walked into the bakery. That is why I behaved so badly. I, me, Jared, the human side, didn't want a mate. I didn't want to be tied to one person and have the wolf be the one that chose that mate. So I treated you badly and tried to stay away. Ethan about kicked my butt when he got a hold of me. He reminded me that whether I wanted it or not the wolf had chosen. He

also told me to search my heart and I would find I had already fallen in love with you, not just the wolf. The two go hand-in-hand. The minute the wolf chose you, whether I wanted to admit it or not, I fell in love. Once I realized that, I was ready to face you again."

Cassie stared at him in awe. He was in love with her. How did she feel about that? Did she love him? She wasn't even sure she knew what it felt like to be loved and to love. How was she going to explain this to Jared?

"Of course, then Kraig came in and the wolf reacted before I could get it under control. I really am sorry about that. Kraig is just a pup and I know that." Jared looked sheepish and took a deep breath, as if what he was going to say next was really important. "Cassie, I know this is all very new to you, and it is really a lot to take in, but you have to know that I love you very much. I have come to love the passionate, warm, loving person that you are. You care about your friends, you take pride in your work and your home and you are filled with emotions that I want to learn and explore with you. I wish I could tell you that I can take this slow and let you adjust with me, but I have something really important to tell you."

Cassie looked at him, swallowed hard and said, "You are overwhelming me already so I might as well get the rest of it."

"When we made love just now, my wolf couldn't wait for me to explain, and he claimed you. I bit your shoulder in the mate mark and now whenever another wolf is around he or she will know that you have been claimed. I am really sorry. I know that this isn't something that you were expecting or that I really should have done, but I didn't have a choice." Jared stared into her eyes, earnest and beseeching.

Cassie was speechless. They were mated, whether she wanted to be or not. Jared, or rather his wolf, had claimed her. "I don't know what to say. I think that I could fall in love with you, but I am not sure what that even means. To be claimed, mated, to you when I am not sure how I feel is quite startling. So what exactly does that mean? I wasn't even claimed when you picked Kraig up. Now, you would what? Hurt him?" She looked up in time to see Jared glance away and down. She had her answer.

"So, you have just made it impossible for me to see anyone else, or have someone even touch me. You made me yours without asking me if that is what I wanted to be." Cassie knew her voice was rising to a high pitch and she was getting loud, something she had never done before.

Too anxious and upset to sit still, she got up and began pacing, more agitated than she had ever been.

"Cass, I'm really sorry." Jared was staring at her. "I didn't mean for it to be like this. I was hoping we could talk before it happened, and that you would understand how much you mean to me."

"I think... I think you need to leave for a little while, Jared," Cassie whispered through the threat of tears. "I need a little bit of time to think about this and try to process."

Jared stood up. He looked down at the woman he loved and felt his heart begin to ache. "Please, Cassie, I need you to understand."

Cassie looked up at him. She could see the hurt in his eyes and the pleading, but she needed to try and sort this through. "Jared, it isn't forever. Just give me a little time to try and sort through what you have said. I have never had to deal with these issues before and I am overwhelmed and scared. I need some time."

## *Chapter Five*

Jared headed out the door. He didn't want to go home so he headed for the office. To his surprise, he found Ethan there. "Hey, what are you still doing here?"

"Oh, just finishing up some paperwork. Since Red closed the bakery today she is working tonight to try and get a whole bunch of stuff cooked up for tomorrow. She wants to give two-for-one to make up for being gone. Why are you here?"

"Cassie needed some time to think about the things I told her. And..." Jared stopped and looked at his friend.

"What did you do, Jared?" Ethan asked in a low, soft voice. While Jared was his friend, Ethan was still the Alpha of their pack.

"I... I claimed her without asking her first," Jared said quietly, knowing Ethan would not be okay with what had happened.

"What? You did what?" Ethan jumped from his chair and over his desk. Grabbing Jared by the shoulders, he shook him. "How did that happen?"

"I wasn't strong enough to stop my wolf. I'm sorry, Ethan." Jared stood there in Ethan's grasp, waiting to see what his Alpha did. He knew he deserved to have a consequence. He was supposed to have control of his wolf. It was what made them not dangerous to the non-shifters.

"This is unacceptable, Jared," Ethan said. "How could you have lost control of your wolf like that? This is not something I can just take lightly. As my second-in-command both here and in the pack, it is your job to be a role model and to help others learn to control their wolf. If you can't do it yourself how am I supposed to trust you to help others?"

Jared hung his head. "I really didn't mean to. We were in the middle of making love, she was so sweet, and my wolf was just overwhelmed. I

am not sure what happened, honestly. I had to mark her. With Kraig flirting with her and the news that there might be trouble in town, my wolf just took charge. He felt like he had to mark her to protect her from... from everything."

"I understand, but I think until you get this worked out with Cassie you need to take some time and work here at the station this evening. Some paperwork will help you remember that you are human first, wolf second." Jared found himself pulled into a quick hug. "I know you didn't mean to. Give her a little time, I bet not much, and she will find that she loves you just as much." Ethan stepped away from Jared. "Here. In the meantime you can help me with some of these reports."

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Cassie sat in her house for about an hour, not wanting to move from the couch, thinking about all she had been told. Red had told her she was Jared's mate, but she just wasn't ready for all that meant. Nor did Red mention the claiming. Of course, Jared was supposed to talk to her about that before he actually claimed her, not that she had given him much choice. She had sorta started it when she touched him. Okay. She couldn't just sit here, but she wasn't ready to find Jared yet.

Showing up at the bakery was habit. As she walked in, she didn't expect to find Red in the kitchen.

"What are you doing here?" Red asked, looking up her and raising an eyebrow.

Cassie laughed. "I think I could ask you the same thing."

Red laughed with her. "True. But since my parents and I own the bakery I am here at all hours. Besides, I decided that as I had closed down on all our customers today, we needed to do a two-for-one tomorrow. Now, what are you doing here?"

"Hey, that is a great idea. I think I'll go out front and start some signs." Cassie tried to scurry out of the kitchen and away from her knowing gaze. Just as she walked past where Red was standing she found her arm caught in a grip she knew she wasn't going to get out of.

"Red, I can't. Not right now." Cassie's gaze implored Red to let her go.

"Sorry, Cass. I know how it is and I know you are dealing with some things that you have never dealt with before. Tell me what is going on."

"Well, Jared came over and we were going to talk, really, but then

one thing led to another and the talking didn't happen until after the sex."

"I get that," Red said. "Something similar happened to Ethan and me the first time."

"Well, I bet he didn't claim you without talking to you about it first," Cassie whispered, and felt the hurt that crept into her voice.

"What? He did that? That stupid animal, he knows the rules. Ethan will have his head for this." Red was up and moving for the door. "Come on. I know Jared went to the sheriff's station and that is where Ethan is. We have to make sure the sparks aren't flying. It is against pack rules to do that."

"He didn't mean to, Red. You should have seen the hurt and remorse on his face when he told me about it. I know he loves me and I am pretty sure I love him too. You don't think Ethan has hurt him, do you?" There was horror in Cassie's voice as she asked this last question.

"No, Ethan won't hurt him. But he will remind him who is Alpha of the pack and what the rules are. Let's slow for a minute," Red said, as she reduced her pace. "Are you sure you love him? Because the wolf won't let go now and he won't be able to stay here if you can't accept him. He won't be able to see you with another man, or be around you and not touch you, or want to help you with things. That is all part of the mate stuff. So if you don't love Jared you need to let him go now, before it gets worse." Red's voice was gentle as she talked with her. Cassie could hear and see the worry in her friend as she explained what it really meant. "In his wolf's eyes you are as good as married, only deeper."

"Red, wait." Cassie stopped walking altogether. "How do I know? I haven't had to deal with these emotions before. Help me, please."

"All I can tell you is that you need to look deep in your heart. Can you live without him every day? Can you go on with your life if he isn't here for you? Search deep, Cass, and you will find your answers."

Cassie stood still as Red walked into the station. A few minutes later Red and Ethan walked out together. "Cass, he is in there. Go on in now and let him know what is in your heart, okay." Red walked up to Cassie, gave her a hug and then went back to her husband. They quietly walked back down the street toward the bakery.

"I have someone for you to meet in the morning, darling. Someone new to town, who is going to need our help," Ethan said to Red as they were walking along.

"New? That is great. I can't wait. I am sorry she is going to need our

help, though, unless you are talking about simply moving in help?" Looking up at Ethan, Red could see him shake his head in the negative. Sighing, she said, "Nope I didn't think so." Wanting to thank her husband for helping their friends as well, Red wrapped him in a big hug. "Thanks for taking care of Jared. Cassie needed some time." Glancing past his shoulder, she watched her friend move toward the building.

Cassie walked into the station and saw Jared right away. He was watching the door from his desk, knowing she was out there and going to come in.

"Hi," she said, as she stopped next to his desk.

"Hi." Jared stared at her. She was the most beautiful sight in the world. No matter what she said to him now, he knew he would always remember this picture. Standing next to his desk, hands twisted in front of her, bottom lip being nibbled on by those little teeth.

"I love you Jared and I am okay with the fact that your wolf claimed me."

Cassie rushed everything out in one breath and gazed at Jared.

"What? I'm sorry, honey, but I really didn't understand anything except my name and wolf." Jared was still tense. He thought she had said that she loved him, but it was all so rushed. He just wasn't sure. He couldn't move until he was sure.

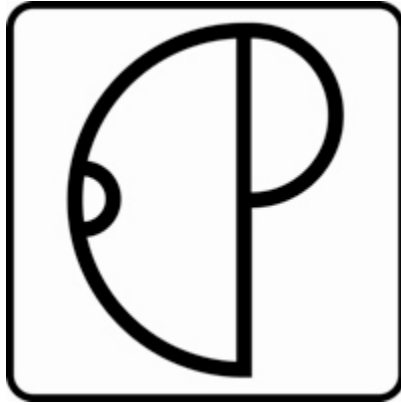
"Stupid wolf," Cassie mumbled, "I tell you I love you and the only thing you hear is your name. Would you like me to shout it? I love you!" she shouted at the top of her lungs.

Jared jumped up from the desk and grabbed her into his arms, bringing his mouth down on hers in a crushing kiss. "Thank God. I don't know what I would have done if you didn't love me. I am so sorry for the way that it happened, but I am not sorry for the end. I love you."

With that, they turned off the lights in the station and walked out, arms around each other. Tomorrow would be soon enough to deal with the rest of it. For now, they had each other and their love.



*Brigit Aine*



## *About the Author*

Brigit Aine is an educator by day and a writer in her spare time. She has a fabulous husband and two wonderful boys. She lives in sunny California and loves to hear from her readers.

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*Available now from Eternal Press*

# *Rise of the Wolf*

*by Kat Duarte*

City girl Hilary Samuels has no idea Murphy's Law will kick into high gear the first night of the Hunters' Moon. One country road, a flat tire and a skid into a cornfield later, and Hilary finds herself face-to-fang with a seductive vampire. Add to that one super-sized wolf who challenges her attacker and you've got one weird night out.

Anyone else would retreat to the more conventional hazards of urban life, but Hilary moved to McKenna with an agenda. If she can successfully run the small town's Café Lotti, her promotion to managing one of the hippest cafes in Chicago is in the bag.

But how to build a customer base when stalked by the undead? Not to mention the hunky head of the company turning out to have some steamy supernatural secrets of his own! Will Hilary join forces with her new and powerful ally, or will their entanglement rip her world apart?

But why should you wait? Your skin in the moonlight looks as soft and radiant as a pearl. Do you not yearn to be caressed?

She would have sworn his lips didn't move. His voice was so gentle, warm, sensuous and intimate, as though he were inside her thoughts, her soul.

Then somehow, without moving, he had covered the space between them and stood next to her, pressed against her, leaning over her. His soft hair tickled her cheek. His breath whispered across her lips as he parted them with a flick of his hot tongue. The kiss was light, soft, then firmer and deeper, the deft movement filling her with the promise of

such delights to come that her knees actually began to give way. He caught her, one of his arms bracing her at the deepest curve of her back, the other wrapped so that he cradled her neck in the palm of his hand.

*Available now from Eternal Press*

# *Dhampir Passions*

*by Mary Corrales*

Raduslav Dracula is hunting for the vampire who stole the Draculesti Bloodstone from his family's gravesite. When Radu's attraction to Linea turns physical, he knows he will have to battle with his heart as well as the demon Desmondi.

Is the half-blood Dhampir strong enough to embrace his own cursed nature to defeat Desmondi?

Radu had been too long without vampyr blood. Her desire made her blood scent all the more potent to his flaring senses. One hand seized her against him while the other clutched the moonstone beneath his tunic for strength.

He had to resist her or they might both be sorry. It was pure foolishness to feed from her with the Bloodmoon, or Harvest Moon as mortals know it, so close.

His entire body shook, instinct calling out the demon within him. With fangs elongated and fingernails lengthened to lethal tips, his eyes turned a brighter blue, almost glowing.

Her hand burned a path up his chest to stroke his neck.

He released the moonstone and touched her shoulder. Soft feminine skin, and the scent of sweet grasses, annihilated his willpower. He swept her up into his arms and carried her to the bed.

He laid her down gently, following her down and lying by her side. He listened for a moment to the loud thump of her mortal heart, powered by desire and fear. In the hours she'd been unconscious he'd watched her, memorizing every breath and expression that crossed her sleeping face.

*Brigit Aine*

*Available now from Eternal Press*

# *Unholy Alliance*

*by Tom Olbert*

*Where only hatred lived in total darkness, an impossible love is born, between a human and a vampire.*

The story of Chris, a young vampire hunter who has known only hatred, battle and killing. His life changes dramatically when he falls in love with Sara, a female vampire. Their love is an impossible one, and the alliance of necessity that forms between them equally so. They find themselves pitted against dark forces that would exploit or destroy the innocent. The odds are against them, but Chris's greatest battle is within his own soul. He must choose between his love for Sara, and his faith in a greater good...

The killing fever was on him, his brain swimming in the joyous delirium of death. Chris slogged through blood in a crack house full of dead bodies. Some with twin puncture marks in their throats, their bodies drained of blood. The ones who'd killed them...decapitated, their bodies even now being hacked apart, their disembodied hearts burned in pretty bonfires by his laughing homies. Catching a stirring in the shadows, he spun and raised the axe to kill another of them. He froze. She was just a girl, maybe 15 or so. Her large blue eyes shined like ice in the firelight as she looked up from the throat of her kill, his blood filling her mouth and splattered across her face. Her long black hair was matted with blood.

She didn't look much older than his sister, Karen when she'd died, he

thought. Deceptive, of course, he reminded himself. For all he knew, she could have sired the one who'd killed her, eleven years ago. He saw no pleasure in her eyes, though; no cruelty. Just hunger and pain. And, innocence. He looked down at the face of the man she'd killed, his ashen visage frozen in pain, illuminated in the ebbing flames. His dead hand still clutched the Gloc 9-mil. he'd emptied in vain. Chris knew the man by reputation, as everyone in the neighborhood had. Rosco. A dealer who loved to do little girls. The fever burned out and died in him. He slowly lowered the axe.