

ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



Werewolf Me

Amarinda Jones

Truro Simpson is confused. What the hell is going on in the sleepy town of Ludlum? One moment her life is quiet and boring and the next she's having orgasmic sex with a hot, tattooed stranger and odd people are turning up talking about werewolves and soul mates. Do the wolves of Ludlum have something to do with that? And does any of it really matter when she is having the best sex of her life?

Every fifty years, a clan of wolves seeks new mates. Murphy Green is a werewolf. He is in Ludlum for Truro, his soul mate. The problem is the lady doesn't believe it. That's okay. His plan is to seduce her with sweet words and hard cock until she's as breathless with need and as hungry to touch and taste as he is.

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Werewolf Me

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WEREWOLF ME

Amarinda Jones

Dedication

Dedicated to readers, dreamers, lovers and screamers.

And as always, to my long-suffering editor, Helen Woodall. There are not enough chocolate frogs to thank you with.

Trademarks Acknowledgement

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Chapter One

“What are you doing?”

Truro Simpson’s mouth slid off the man’s cock with a loud, wet pop. “If you have to ask then I’m not doing it right.” And to be honest Truro wasn’t sure she was. This was the first time she had ever taken a penis into her mouth. She was making it up as she went along. It wasn’t quite the lollipop experience she’d imagined but it wasn’t bad either. In fact it was quite exciting having a man’s attention focused solely on her.

His hand cupped her chin and lifted her head. “Oh you are—but why?” His eyes locked with hers.

Well, that’s not the answer I was expecting, though the subtle Irish lilt to his voice is so damn sexy. But then there was something about this tawny-haired man that had caught Truro’s attention the minute their eyes had connected at the local diner. She had felt compelled to look at him and when he had smiled at her, Truro had almost forgotten to breathe. She could say that was the reason she had accompanied him to the quiet motel on the edge of Ludlum. Or she could have said it was all to do with that New Age stuff about feeling an instant connection and that she was pulled toward someone without a chance to think. But, in reality, it was probably more that Truro was needy and just wanted to touch a man to get back some of the sensual power she was missing in her life. Maybe a feminist might have called that ridiculous but Truro didn’t care a great deal about what others thought about her. What she did care about and like was the sensual feel of a hard-bodied male under her fingertips. She’d missed that. *Okay, so I’m basically alone and horny and I want to play with a man. What’s the harm in that?*

“I want to see you lose control.” Truro liked the power of making a man come. Of course there was more to it than that but there was no way she was going to tell all her needy secrets to a stranger. The fact that he was unknown was perfect. Truro had

something to prove and if she failed with him then it didn't matter. *It's not like I'll ever see him again.*

"Why?"

What was this? Twenty questions? She had her mouth poised over his cock. *A lot of men wouldn't be thinking with their brain about now.* "Because." It was her standard noncommittal answer to everything. Luckily few people challenged her, so few delved deeper.

He pushed back on her shoulders. "Wait a second."

"Are you serious?" Sudden feelings of inadequacy and the nasty words of her last lover flashed into her mind. *Am I that unattractive? Is he repulsed?* The pain Truro hid deep within started to leech into her veins making her doubt herself once more. *What the hell am I doing? Like this guy would ever want me. Get up off your knees and get out. You're a failure.*

"This is a mutual thing, petal." His voice was as gentle as his hands resting on her shoulders.

Petal? Not in this lifetime. There was nothing flower-like about Truro and sweet words were too hard to rely on. "No, it's about me giving you pleasure. Isn't that what you want?" Truro had only just met him. She had no idea what he wanted other than quick sex. That he was a stranger was the reason she had taken a chance on him. He was an experiment for her. Turn him on and feel better about herself. She didn't want to know his name or who he was. Truro just wanted to feel something other than ugly. Maybe Freud would have had some psychological reason why that wasn't sound but Freud wasn't living in her skin.

The tawny-haired man pulled her up to sit beside him on the bed. "What do you want?"

Truro almost said "you" but she stopped herself. He was naked, hot and most definitely lickable, especially the tattoo of a wolf's head on his chest. It just begged her tongue to lean forward and taste it. It was sexy, wild and yet noble. The eyes of the

wolf, like the man, searched for answers. He was every woman's fantasy. Tall, muscular and strangely sweet. Truro hadn't expected that. What she had been contemplating was sliding on down over his thick cock to feel a rush of heat and an instant orgasmic high. But orgasms couldn't be relied upon. They happened so fast that they often clouded what was really happening between two people. When the haze of the moment disappeared often the reality was too hard to deal with.

"I, um—" *I want to feel something other than ugly and stupid. Yeah, like I could say that. He would think I'm nuts. Maybe I am.* She licked her lips and crossed her arms over her scantily covered breasts. Only a thin mauve slip covered her nakedness. "Well, if you're not interested—"

"Oh, but I am—even more so now. What's going on in there?" His fingers touched the bare skin of her chest. They slid slowly under the lace of her slip.

Truro shivered and swallowed hard as she tried to control the trembling his touch evoked. *Oh crap, not only am I shaking, I'm going to cry too. I do not want to cry. I refuse to.* She had worked too hard at keeping it all inside. Truro could not let one man get to her like this. "Oh, the usual thing. Blood pumping and arteries hardening due to the constant onslaught of excessive chocolate consumption." When she looked in his golden-brown eyes, Truro knew he didn't buy it. Flippant only worked on the uncaring and superficial. She knew instinctively he was neither. "This was a mistake," she murmured as she started to get up from the bed. He was the wrong man to take on to prove something to herself.

He sought her hand and pulled her toward him, not letting her get away. "Why?"

Oh please let go. I cannot handle gentle right now. "I just wanted—"

"Meaningless one-sided sex?"

No. Maybe. I don't know. "Yes." How could she possibly explain to a gorgeous man like this her feelings of inadequacy? Truro bet that he never had an inadequate thought in his life. There was a power emanating from him that was both mesmerizing and commanding. It was the reason she had been drawn to him. That and the fact that he

said he was just “passing through town”. If she made a fool of herself she would at least feel safe in the knowledge that only he would know.

“So you suck my cock and make me come. Is it a power trip for you?”

If only he knew. “No.”

“Are you trying to prove something, petal?”

That’s when the first teardrop fell, betraying her. *Fuck. Keep it together woman.* Truro wiped it away quickly. *This is embarrassing.* Weakness was not something she wanted to show any more. She had learned her lesson about giving in to need. It was a flaw that Truro knew weakened her. *I will never allow that again.*

“What could you possibly need to confirm to yourself? That you’re attractive? That you can turn a man on?”

His hand tightened on hers and Truro swallowed hard. She needed to get the hell out of there before she started bawling her eyes out. Truro hadn’t cried in a long time so it would be really ugly if she did so now.

“No.” That didn’t come out as firmly as Truro wanted it to.

“You are.” He looked at her thoughtfully. “This is about some other guy.”

Truro snorted, as she blotted the tears that betrayed her. “I can assure you I hold no torch for any man.” Her ex-lover had killed any feeling she had inside her.

“He hurt you, didn’t he?”

So badly there are times I can barely speak without crying. “This is a mistake. I should leave.” And yet she couldn’t. Her mind told her to flee but her legs refused to budge. Truro was scared yet not. *I must finally be going mad.*

“Why?”

“God, you ask that a lot.”

“So tell me, petal.”

“Look, I don’t want anything deep and emotional, nor do I want to be pushed into it by you. I just wanted to feel—” *What? What the hell did I expect to find here?* Truro had

avoided any real relationship with any man. She had sex, it normally ended badly and she moved on with her life. It wasn't an ideal way to live her life but it was better and less complicated that way. If Truro felt nothing she could never be hurt. *Yeah, so why did I allow Rodney to hurt me?*

"You wanted to feel something to make yourself feel good." He stroked the skin of her hand with his thumb.

Truro shot to her feet, survival instinct finally kicking in. "I have to go." Stroking was making her wet and in need of cock. *Cock is bad. Actually it is good but it never solves any of my problems.*

"Why?" He didn't move. He just looked up at her. "Did I get too close?"

"Yes." There was no point trying to hide it. He saw too much. He was not someone she should experiment on.

"What if I want more?" He stood up in one graceful move.

Lordy, he is beautiful. Sleek, firm muscle and a mouth that would make an angel rebel.

"You can't have more." It was time to go. *Find my clothes and get out now before I do something stupid.* Some men just had the ability to take a woman with a smile.

"Why not?"

Another frigging "why." What is that about? Truro found her jacket and jeans. "Because I don't want to feel anything." She saw his eyebrow arch with interest. At least he had not asked "why" again. "It's a long story." *With an ending that makes me feel stupid.*

"Tell me." He came to stand before her, their bodies barely inches apart. He pulled the clothes from her hands. They dropped to the floor, leaving Truro defenseless.

The close heat from his flesh made Truro close her eyes. *What if I moved forward and leaned against him? Would it hurt? Just for a second?* "I can't do this." She wasn't sure if

she was saying it more to him or herself. Her eyes opened on his. This man was dangerous.

"What? Making love?"

"It's sex." Truro was only too aware of the difference. Making love meant strong emotion and deep commitment. Sex was body parts colliding. It did not always mean adoration or respect. Anyway, couldn't he see the difference between them? He was everything she wasn't. Tall, attractive and sensual. Truro could feel the raw sexuality of the man washing over her. And that cock? It pointed high and bounced with every move he made. The man had some command over his body. But then he probably had more experience and control than her. Having sex with him would be like mating outside of species and opposites did not always attract. Truro had learned that lesson the hard way. But he was right. Truro had wanted to believe a man found her attractive. Problem was she'd found a man with a brain, and not just a loaded cock looking for gratification. That was dangerous. *Time to go, Truro.*

"This man—"

"Was a prick but I'm over it." Truro stepped back slightly. His warm breath made her skin tingle.

"Maybe you are but he left a scar." He stepped into the space she'd made.

Truro retreated back one more step, her legs hitting the edge of the bed. "Scars heal."

"Or they just get deeper." He moved forward once more.

Truro felt threatened but not in a fearful way. It was more a threat to the barriers she had so carefully erected to avoid situations like this. "You're quite the philosopher."

"And you suck at trying to be hard and unemotional."

Yeah I do. "Let's just consider this one of those moments that should never have—" And then his lips were on hers and whatever words she had been about to say were swallowed up under the gentle pressure of his mouth. Truro sighed as his hands moved

down to the small of her back and held her close as the kiss between them deepened. She found herself clutching hold of his shoulders, shaken to the core and scared of falling. It was crazy but there was a solid protection in this man that made her want to hold on to him. And the kiss? It was the best kiss she'd ever had. Warm, soft, sexual and caring. There was no pretense, only need. It was the kiss futures were built on. That was if you were anyone but Truro Simpson.

She pulled her lips from his. The sudden loss of heat made her gasp for air. It was almost like she had lost connection with a vital life source she needed. "Don't." Pulling away proved useless. He held her close not allowing her the distance she needed to think, to rationalize and to run.

He tipped her chin up and looked at her. "Why? Because you feel something?"

"Yes. I mean no. I mean, I'm not capable of feeling." It was her mantra. Truro told herself often enough she felt nothing about anything and yet with this man it was different. All her nerve endings were suddenly alive and demanding more.

"Oh, petal, that is so wrong, and after tonight you'll know that."

After tonight? Truro gulped. This was not going as she planned. It was supposed to be a moment to prove something to herself and then to move on, untouched yet in control. "But—"

"I will never hurt you."

Oh God, I want to believe that. "But I—" Once more he was kissing her and her thoughts were scattered as her hands moved down his back, caressing the strong muscles that flexed under her touch. It felt so good to touch a man without cringing at the possible pain he may bring to her. *Just one more moment then I'll let go. I have to.* Truro knew she could not rely on this kind of warm and strength. It was nice but not possible in her life. Once more she pushed away from him. "I can't think straight." *I need to think straight.*

"That's the plan." He placed a slow, lingering kiss on her mouth, smiling against her lips as she sighed.

The cock at her stomach made Truro realize what was at stake here. Sex. *And Lord knows I want him.* There was the added bonus that he was a nameless stranger. There was a certain safety in that. Some may not look at it that way but knowing she would never see him again made her feel like taking a risk. Before it was just about proving a point. Now she wanted that nice hard point inside her body, heating her up and making her feel, if only for a moment, alive once more. *I deserve that.*

"Um, I'm not good at, er, well you know." Truro had been told in no uncertain terms she was frigid by the last idiot she had allowed to touch her. *Yet how can that be when I'm so hot and wet right now?* Truro hadn't felt like that in a long time. Stranger sex was looking all the more doable.

"Sex?" The man smiled down at her. He looked amused. "Says who? Some prick of a man who didn't know his ass from his elbow?"

That, in turn, made Truro smile. "Well yeah." That summed up her ex. Her hands ran up and down the back of the man before her. Who was this tawny-haired giant? And why out of all the possible women he could have would he want her? "Why?" It was her turn to ask.

"Why do I want to make love to you? Because, petal, you have completely blindsided me. And no, it was not your mouth on my cock that made feel that way."

Oh God. That was right. She had been sucking this stranger's cock only moments earlier. Now he wanted to have sex with her. "Are you feeling sorry for me?" That would be truly pathetic. Pity fucks were too horrible to contemplate.

"I don't want to take your hand and help you cross a busy road. I want to slide into your body and make you understand how beautiful you are and how being with you, inside you, makes me feel special."

That was the nicest thing anyone had ever said to Truro. She started to cry. His mouth and tongue lapped up the tears as he cradled her in his arms.

"Give in to need, petal. You will never feel stupid or ugly again."

Truro stiffened at his words. "How do you know that?" She desperately wanted to believe him but how could a stranger really understand her when there were times she no longer believed in herself?

"I just do." He picked her up in his arms.

Whoa. This was different. Truro grabbed his shoulders as she was hoisted into the air. "Um...that bed's no more than a step or two away."

He smiled. "I know but I like holding you."

This man must be immediately cloned and given to every woman. "I'm heavy. I don't want you breaking anything useful." The most useful aspect of him was rigid and pressing into her side. *What will that feel like inside?*

"You're a featherweight."

Truro looked at him in cynical disbelief. "Were you drinking at the diner?" He dropped her down on the bed making her bounce twice. "That's not very romantic." *It was fun though.* Truro leaned back on her elbows and looked at him. The only thing she wore was her slip that covered her to mid-thigh. She rarely if ever wore knickers. That was just a quirk of hers. She opened her legs, knowing he could see all.

"Remove your slip." His voice was low and husky and indicated a man trying to keep control. He had her pinned to the bed, his legs apart straddling her hips.

"Take it from me." The minute she said it Truro did a double-take. *Good grief did I say that?* Truro was never one to ask for sexual favors. But right at that moment she felt more daring and free than she ever had. "Rip it."

"Yes, ma'am." Her lover's hands made short work of the delicate lace. His eyes went to her breasts.

This was the moment that always made Truro nervous. She was naked. On display. Every flaw could be seen and like all real women she had a few. "I know they're not exactly perky and —"

"Shut up," he said as he leaned down and his mouth covered one of her nipples.

Truro closed her eyes and moaned. The tug of his lips and the swirl of his tongue on her breast were the most fantastic feelings. "Oh boy, don't do that." Anything so good had to have a price. *Fuck it, I'll pay it.*

"Why not?" he lifted his mouth momentarily to ask the question. He licked his lips as he ran the pad of his thumb across her wet, pink nipple.

"Because I'll scream." *Probably beg. Possibly cry.* She was so wet with need she could do almost anything at that moment.

"You'll be screaming a lot by the time I'm finished with loving your body." His mouth was once more at her breast sucking one then the other nipple as his hands held Truro close.

I could love this man. Head slap. Where did that come from? "Um..." Was there a politically correct way to ask him to place all that lovely, length of cock inside her?

"Yes?" His tongue moved from her breasts to her stomach.

"I really need —"

"What?" His hands caressed her hips as his mouth moved across her skin. skin.

"I'm empty."

"As am I."

Truro rolled her eyes. "I don't mean it in the transcendental, emotional sense of the word." She wanted cock. She wanted it now. "Besides you look pretty full to me, wolf man."

He lifted his head and smiled at her words. "Wolf man?"

I want him. I want him. Any thoughts she had of this being just one-sided sex were gone. "Well, you have that hot tatt and all."

"You think it's sexy?"

"You are—er, I mean it is." Truro ran her hands down the inked image to emphasize her words. She could feel his heart beating madly. That he wanted her made Truro totally lose all control. "Please fuck me." Her eyes locked on his letting him know

whatever he wanted she was ready to permit. The hard cock resting against her inner thigh needed a home. *Come home to me.*

“Soon.”

Soon? What sort of a response was that from a man with an erection that would probably kill her? Damn it would be worth dying for though. “How soon is soon? I ask because I really need you inside me now.” Truro had never liked the whole needy side of life. Needs made her weak and whiny. *Please don’t let me whine.*

“I need other things,” he murmured against her skin.

Truro squirmed under the reverberation. It tickled. “This is not about you.”

“No, it’s about us.” His mouth moved down her lower abdomen to the curls of her pussy.

Oh good Lord. No man had ever put his mouth there. “Don’t.” Truro pushed at his shoulders. While she wanted sex, what he wanted to do was a level of intimacy she had never wanted to venture into. In the past, sex was a function, a need, not something that crossed any forbidden barriers.

He stopped and looked up at her. “You say that a lot. Besides, you had your mouth on my cock.”

It was weird having a conversation with a man whose head was in line with her vagina. “Yeah but I had no idea what I was doing.”

“Really?” He smiled as if pleased. “You’ve done that with no other man?”

Truro knew she was turning twelve shades of red but it was hard to look sophisticated when you were naked and trembling with need. “Yeah, well, it’s embarrassing but—”

He caught one of his hands in hers. “No, I think you’re beautiful and funny and sweet.” He kissed her hand and then pushed Truro back on the bed. “Now lie back and don’t think.” He moved his hands under her ass and lifted her pussy toward his mouth.

Thinking would have been impossible for Truro as her brain went all fuzzy when his tongue touched her clit. His hot breath on her skin and his questing lips on the pink inner folds between her legs made her tremble with need. Never had she felt so alive under another's touch. Truro clutched at his shoulders trying to pull him closer. His mouth was insatiable in its quest to make her come. "Bloody hell," she moaned through clenched teeth as she tried to keep her body still but it shook so much under his ardent attentions.

Her lover looked up from what he was doing. "You like?"

"This is better than chocolate." Truro held him tight to keep control. "I love chocolate."

He smiled. "I'm humbled by the comparison."

Truro blushed. *Who knew I could still do that?* She was sure her amateur attempts to suck and give him such pleasure did not even come close to what she was feeling now. "If I had time with you I could have been better. Not, that I'm asking for more...or your cock – oh crap that sounded weird...what I mean is –"

He moved up her body, smiling at the way her legs wrapped around his waist. He caressed her thighs in light, sensual strokes. "Petal, I'll teach you anything you need to learn about sex." He leaned in and kissed her slowly and deeply.

The taste of her own body on his lips was frightening yet strangely exciting to share with him. His voice sounded so sure and possessive. Truro wanted to believe in him and her and the whole thing. If only for the moment. And as moments went this was pretty damn perfect. "Wolf man?" Truro's lips left his. She was on fire with need for the stranger.

"Yes, petal?"

"Please." No other words were necessary. Truro could see in his eyes he understood.

"I thank you and I am honored."

His words were so sweet and old fashioned that Truro blinked in wonder. No one had ever spoken to her like this before. Crazy future visions of her and him together played in her mind. It was all madness. *But I like it.* "What now?" Sure, she was the woman who had taken a strange man's cock in her mouth. That had been an unusual move for her to make. It had taken courage. Now Truro needed him to lead the way. *I do not want to mess this up.* While it was only one night in her life, Truro knew in her heart it was special. *And I may never do special again.*

"This." In one move he flipped her over onto her stomach and pulled her to her knees. "Now you become mine as I am yours."

It was then the wolves howled loudly in unison at his words. *Spooky.* "This is not forever." Truro's body jumped as she felt his cock prodding in between the cleft of her ass. "And you sure as hell need a condom with me, wolf man." While Truro may have had her mouth on his cock, she was never going to let him freely come inside her body without protection.

He leaned in and ran soft, wet kisses down her spine. "You are adorable and you have a great ass."

Truro felt him move from behind her. "I have a fat ass but it's comfortable to sit on."

"And be cushioned against," he added as he retrieved his discarded trousers and found a condom. "I can hardly wait."

Truro had to love a man who made a woman feel good about her cellulite. She turned her head and watched. It always fascinated her how so little rubber could cover an expansive cock. She licked her lips in thought. *All that just for me.* It had been so long since she had felt this excited. *Have I ever felt this way before?*

He winked and moved back behind Truro. "Better?" He nudged her legs apart with his knee.

"Perfect. Fill me." That's all Truro wanted. Hot, hard possessive heat filling her and making her feel something once more.

"Forever."

The wolves howled once more. "It's like they do that on cue." Truro felt the head of his cock at the entrance of her vagina. "As for forever? For now is just as good too."

"Forever." he repeated once more as his cock slid into the wet, tight, heat of her body.

Truro gasped at the hard yet welcome intrusion. His cock slowly filled her to the hilt as he held her body close against his. It was the most amazing feeling. This was not random sex. This was a joining in the true sense of the word. For one crazy moment Truro felt like crying. The whole idea of being complete with someone had always struck her as pop psychology. But this, with this man, made her catch her breath in wonder. As he started to move back and forward, Truro moaned at the intense, hot pressure of his cock. "Oh, wolf man..." It was hard to find the right words to describe what she was feeling.

He stopped momentarily. "Are you okay?" he whispered against her ear.

The tenderness of his voice made her tremble. "Don't stop." *I want this forever.* Once more the wolves howled. "Please move." Truro liked the possessive growl of amusement he gave.

"Anything you wish I will do."

"I need deep and fast." If the wolves still cried in the distance, Truro no longer heard them. There was no one but her and this man and the wild need to take and be taken. *I am his.* They were enfolded in their own little world where no one could intrude. It was about driving need and the passion to give of herself to one person alone. "Oh, wolf man," she panted as his balls slapped hard against her ass, his cock pumping harder and faster at her request. Truro was so close to coming. She rammed her butt back against his thighs taking all he could offer. As the orgasm hit, she arched her back up and pushed against him for more. Truro was hungry for whatever he could give her. The feeling was so intense and exciting then she felt like the tattoo on his chest

was burning into the skin on her back. It was hot and delicious and she had a mad urge to be marked for life by this man.

"Hold on, petal," he growled low against her ear, his mouth brushing the skin of her neck.

It would have impossible to stop the shuddering that shot tearing into her body sending off spirals of delight through her. Truro had only ever come under her own fingers. This primitive, male-induced orgasm beat her own hand. Truro tried to keep pace with his thrusts, but her legs were shaking. She screamed out as she gave in to all she was feeling. The man behind her howled in loud satisfaction. It was a sound of pure primal need and possession. *I am his.*

Her lover collapsed against her body and shook as he was overcome by his own release. "You are mine." The wolves howled almost as if in agreement.

"Yes." It was madness to say but at that moment it was what Truro believed.

Ten minutes later, Truro was still too limp and relaxed to do anything but lie within the cradle of her lover's arms. It would have been sensible to get up and leave, yet she couldn't. She felt the need to stay with this man as long as she could. *A man whose name I do not know.* But this was more than just pleasantries and names. It was—what? She had experienced fantastic sex that Truro knew she was going to remember forever. Maybe it was crazy to think that way but she knew in her heart, this was an unforgettable gift that had been given to her.

"Feel better, petal?" His hands stroked from her back to her ass in a soft, sensual motion.

Oh, the voice. It was as smooth as Irish whiskey and as velvety as chocolate. "Yes." Her eyes locked with his. There was such sweet understanding in those golden depths. "Thank you." Truro would never forget this man who had made her feel so beautiful and desired.

"My pleasure."

Once more Truro heard the lonely sound of wolves howling. *What is it with wolves at the moment?* They weren't even native to Australia. Legend had it that a pack had been brought over from America more than a century ago. They were often heard and seen in the hills around Ludlum. But this year they seemed closer than ever. Truro shivered. There was something about the lonesome wolf's cry that made her tremble with a strange feeling of anticipation. But of what? She touched the tattoo on his chest and shivered once more. For one second Truro saw a flash of this man and a wolf standing side by side. *No wait, they became one. Huh?*

"They'll never hurt you, petal," her tawny-haired lover said, his lips almost on hers. "They're searching for their mates. Every time soul mates meet the wolves cry out in recognition and satisfaction."

Before Truro could ask how he knew, his mouth was on hers and the sound of the wolves could not compete with the man in her arms.

* * * * *

"It has begun."

Bess Calvert nodded. "Yes. It has been a long time coming." She ran her hand through her long gray curls. No one but William ever saw her with her hair down. "Where have the last fifty years gone?" Bess said it more to herself than to her lover. She was worried yet she knew some things could never be changed. The sound of the wolves howling told her that.

William smiled "Ah, Bessie, my love, time as we both know is irrelevant." His pushed back the hair from her face and tweaked her nose. "We've had a good life."

"Oh yes, the best." Bess' eyes were soft on his. She had made hard choices in her life but they had been the only ones she could have made. To be anywhere but with William would have been denying a part of her soul. Many years ago there had been those who had not understood the decisions she made. They were long gone now and

what others thought of her no longer bothered Bess. William was the only person she had truly ever loved.

“No regrets?”

He was as handsome as the first day he had loped into her world. Like her he was older, grayer and not as spry but he was still the most beautiful man she had ever seen. His smile still made her heart skip a beat. “None at all, William.” Regrets were for those too scared to take a chance. Bess had never been afraid with William by her side. Others never understood that, but she didn’t care. Bess thought about those who would soon follow her path. “Do you think they will handle it as well?”

William smiled. “Miss Simpson will struggle.”

Bess nodded. She loved Truro Simpson. That girl was an old soul in a young body. She had seen much and endured more. Bess had known the minute she came to Ludlum that Truro had walked into her fate with no knowledge at all of how her life would change. “She has been hurt a lot in her life.” While Bess had those who had disapproved of her choices, no one had physically hurt her. Truro Simpson had been beaten within an inch of her young life and wounded emotionally by her last lover. Maybe that was why Bess had immediately identified with her. Both of them had been hurt, in different ways. Both of them had come to Ludlum to hide and to lick their wounds. Bess smiled faintly. For a town that had not much to offer on a tourist level, it was a sanctuary to those who really needed it.

“It is exactly the reason she needs to embrace what is to come.”

Bess knew that. Everyone had choices in life. Not everyone made the right ones. She had. Would Truro? “I worry about her. She is so tense and terribly alone.” It was a loneliness that made Bess want to cry.

William’s arm wrapped around her. “You were very much like her.”

“Yes, in some ways.” But unlike Truro she hadn’t built walls around her. William had still been able to reach her, to make her understand the truth and what she needed to do in order to be happy. In the two years she had known Truro she had seen those

walls thicken and harden. *Will she give in to what is to come? Will she love the one who loves her?*

"You changed."

"Because of you, William." If not for him she would have been a lonely old woman wondering what she had done with her life. Bess looked at the man she loved. "I adored you then and I adore you now."

"As I have loved you." William lifted her hand to lips. "I must go soon."

"I know." It was almost midnight. It was his time to act as his nature intended. Bess would no more stop that than she would ask the sun not to shine. That was when her beloved came back to her and the peace and solitude of the old homestead set far up in the hills where no one but the animals chose to roam. Most of the townsfolk thought her odd. That didn't worry Bess at all for they were together. "I must go and talk to Truro tomorrow."

"It's her destiny."

They both stood silent as the wolves howled in the cool night air. It always sounded like a lonely lament to Bess but William assured her it wasn't. She leaned in and kissed her lover with a passion that had not waned in fifty years. "Go, they are calling." She knew better than to hold back William from his clan.

* * * * *

Two men stood outside the motel room and listened to the sighs and moans of the lovers inside.

"We cannot allow William's clan to become any stronger."

"Don't tell me what I already know." It was the most irritating habit Tavernier had. He acted as if he was the one in charge. Tavernier was a lackey who answered to him. Absolon was in charge of this operation. He needed Tavernier to do the legwork for at seventy-two, although quick in mind, Absolon was no longer spry in body. *I am still strong but not strong enough to defeat my enemy.* The younger man was needed to do what

Absolon could no longer do. "I have employed the Scott woman to make sure the clan is crippled."

Tavernier snorted in derision. "She is a joke."

Some people never saw the bigger picture. "We both know that but she has the genetic ability to bring down William's peaceful little world. Add that to the flighty Simpson woman and those werewolves are doomed." Absolon had employed Joan Scott under false pretenses. He knew the woman advertised as tracking down supernatural beings. That she could, Absolon doubted. Though her lineage was impressive, she did not strike him as someone who could organize a grocery list let alone track down a werewolf or the like. The important thing about Ms Scott was her blood. She was descended from the being known only as the Destroyer who had terrorized mankind in the sixteenth century. All his blood kin could kill on contact if they chose to. Most were unaware of it or their connection to the Destroyer. Some learned of it by fluke, while others had been prepared from birth to harness their power. Many became no more than common murderers and thieves. No one had descended to the depths of evil the Destroyer had. Not for one second did Absolon think the Scott woman would either. He had traced all the descendants and she was the only one left. While she would not sink to the level of her ancestor, she did have his blood and the ancient enemy to all his descendants was the werewolf. Although she may be unaware of the connection, Absolon knew the minute she came into contact with one she would change. It would be impossible for her to do otherwise. Unbeknown to the woman, she was about to cause the downfall of William's clan of werewolves.

"I still can't see how she is going to do anything other than make us laugh our asses off at her antics. For God's sake, she dresses in black. It's so clichéd."

"She may be an unlikely hunter but she will be compelled to act against the werewolves. It is her nature."

"Maybe, but she's hardly going to mate with the one called Montague if she has this inherent dislike of werewolves."

"She will. This one did with the Irishman. It's their nature to do so. Like most people these two women believe in soul mates. These men are theirs." Absolon knew that only too well about kindred spirits. The connection was so strong that breaking away from it could kill a weaker person. While Absolon was still standing, he had paid dearly for a love that could never be his. He knew that now. *But back then, I was a fool.*

"Soul mates?" Tavernier looked disgusted. "They are nothing but sluts."

"Well, clearly you have no soul or you would know differently. It's human instinct to recognize your mate and act upon the mutual lust you feel. Besides women who are mated to the clan are not sluts." No one could ever call Bess Calvert a whore. *How I loved her.* Absolon closed his eyes once more as a vision of the woman in question came to mind. *How I still love her.*

"Are you okay? You sound like you are defending them."

Absolon opened his eyes and sighed. Explaining his thoughts to this man was not something he was about to do. Tavernier was beneath him. He was a flunky. He was expendable. "I understand them. There is the difference."

"You never said why we were going to destroy them. Surely it's not worth all this effort. Why can't we send real hunters with guns in to break up this wolf pack?"

"You are about as subtle as a sledgehammer." Absolon had his reasons. He wanted William dead. Killing his clan would do that. Tavernier did not need to know the specifics. No one did. He absently ran his hand down his thigh, flinching at the pain. *I have lost so much to William. Now he will lose.* It had taken half a century to get to the point where Absolon knew he could defeat William. Werewolves were at their weakest every fifty years when vital, life-changing blood was welcomed into to clan. While lovers met their match in the clan, only every fifth decade were the matches so powerful that they could change everything around them. In the shake up, weaknesses were uncovered and bonds created. But like every moment of great change there was a period of flux when people were caught off-guard as rules were relaxed to allow entrance to their clan. It was the only thing that kept them alive. That was what

Absolon had been waiting for. Catch the werewolves while their shields were lowered. Normally werewolves were ferocious enemies who could not be fought and the pain they inflicted when angered was terrible. "But we are not in normal times," Absolon murmured to himself. *And how I live with that constant pain.*

* * * * *

Fifty years ago, almost to the day, William and Absolon met in battle. Each loved the same woman but only one could have Bess. Although Absolon knew Bess did not have the same feelings for him, he wanted her and he always got what he wanted. The only person in his way was William. This meeting in the forest would remove him from Absolon's goal.

"She will never be yours, Absolon. Bess loves me."

The knowledge of that was galling to Absolon. "You're not even a real man. You're a thing, a monster who can only be with her in the day. What about the nights, William, when a woman needs a man and not an animal?" Absolon could see that the other man flinch momentarily. Absolon beckoned one of the two henchmen he had brought with him. He did not require them for this battle but he did need the two swords they carried. One for him, one for his enemy. Although the low growling of nearby wolves could be heard, Absolon knew William would never call on them to fight his battle.

William stood tall and looked at the other man in disgust. "I'm proud of who I am and the clan I belong to."

"Clan? A bunch of salivating wolves?" He took the swords and threw one down at William's feet.

"Leave now, Absolon."

"Or what?" They were evenly matched. Both men were strong and toned.

"Or I will make you leave."

Absolon smiled. This was what he had waited for. This was his chance to kill his enemy and take his woman. "Fight or die. Unlike you, William, honor does not mean a

great deal to me when I want something.” As soon as the noble William was dead, Bess would be his.

William picked up the sword. “So be it.”

Absolon had been fencing since he was six. His father had beaten into him the need for a man to be able to survive at all costs and maiming or killing a foe was the only way to ensure survival. He sneered at William. “What are you waiting for?”

“For you to attack.”

Absolon raised one eyebrow cynically. “Is that all?” He charged William, sword in hand. He was driven on by sheer, red hatred.

William lifted his sword and deflected the volley of hacking blows. “You cannot kill me.” He moved back lightly, never taking his eyes off Absolon.

“Watch me.” That William made no move to attack him back infuriated Absolon. His sword swung hard and wild and anything he had learnt as a young man about patience and sword fighting was forgotten as he attacked his victim. “You are a freak. Bess will be glad to be rid of you.” Absolon’s words were hard and breathless as he threw all his strength at William.

“Bess loves me.”

Those three simple words made Absolon crazy. Even though his arm ached and sweat poured off his body, he renewed his attack driving William farther and farther back into the forest. He smiled as William stumbled under the assault. “Poor William. I guess they don’t teach wolves to fight like men.” One of William’s knees buckled slightly under the onslaught, urging Absolon on to the final kill. He knew his strength was depleted. His arm ached and his chest hurt from the exertion. Unlike in the movies real sword fights did not last long. Absolon slashed out at William. The man lost his footing and fell yet he kept his sword up as he scrambled along on the ground trying to recover. “Goodbye William.” The sword blow Absolon delivered was designed to cut through William’s chest and ribs. It was a death blow.

With a sudden burst of strength, William rolled, his sword thrust out. As Absolon tried to regain his balance from his forward momentum, he ran straight into the razor-sharp edge of the other man's sword. An intense burn almost like fire shot into his upper thigh and groin as the blade sliced into his genitals. The pain was so horrific that Absolon could barely breathe. His hands went down to his cock. He felt nothing but useless, ragged flesh being held together by bare sinews of flesh.

Absolon clutched at the wound to his groin. The blood flowed freely from it. "I do not need your help," he said spitting in the direction of the hand his enemy held out to him. Though he was in terrifying pain, Absolon dragged himself to his knees, the sword now useless on the ground.

"I'm a werewolf Absolon. You could never have killed me."

"You're a freak and every freak can be killed." Absolon could not stop the cry of pain that burst from his lips as he staggered up, making the blood flow more. "I will kill you. I will find your weakness." He waved a trembling hand at the other two men. "This is not over."

William threw the sword down and sighed. "No, I know it's not."

* * * * *

"What?" Tavernier looked confused at the sudden silence from the other man.

"Never mind." *I have waited most of my life to kill you, William, for taking my manhood. I will destroy your woman, then your clan, then you.* "They will find the body soon." Absolon cared not for the man he'd had Tavernier kill. His life was forfeited to serve Absolon's cause. He needed to panic the townsfolk of Ludlum. They'd co-existed too long in peace with the wolves. He wanted them panicked and distrustful of the vermin who inhabited the bush around them. While Absolon was sure he could take out most of William's pack, the fewer he had to deal with the better. "The lovely thing about fear is people overreact." The idea of William's clan running panicked through the night to flee men with guns amused Absolon.

“You really hate him don’t you?” Tavernier observed, not appearing to be the slightest bit fazed by the situation he found himself in.

“You have no idea.”

Chapter Two

"I am not putting a red ribbon around its neck."

Truro raised her eyebrow in surprise. Gillard Montague, Gil to his friends, was the most obliging man she had ever known. He helped everyone with any errand no matter how big or unusual. "Why not? A bow would look jaunty."

"Truro Simpson you have lost your mind."

Like I haven't heard that before. "And your point is?"

Gil pointed to the large wire cage. "This is a possum."

"Hell, I know that. He's the pesky little bastard that has been keeping me up at night rooting around under my van." While it was true that the Rambling Rose caravan park was positioned in possum territory, Truro, having no understanding of nature, felt that possums should have enough sense to stay in the trees and not create havoc under her van. "Anyway, he's a gift." For Rodney the big, fat rodent who treated her like crap and broke what little was left of her heart. That was probably the thing that hurt Truro most. Rodney had gotten through her defenses and crumpled the one little piece of her heart she still had hidden. *Asshole. Call me ugly? Call me fat? Make me feel lower than a snake's belly? Well fuck you.* "I think Rodney will like a feral possum for a pet. It could be his little brother." Truro leaned down and looked into the cage. The possum charged at the wire. "I can actually see the family resemblance. Same beady eyes, non-existent chin and no balls."

"Jeez, he really did a number on you."

Truro waved her hand dismissively. "I'm over that toerag." It was six months ago yet the chance to say "I think you're a prick" with a possum should not be passed up.

Gil snorted in disbelief. "Sure you are. Everyone sends a possum to an ex-lover. Remind me never to piss you off." Gil slid one finger in between the wire bars and stroked the fur of the possum. "I'm letting it go."

"Well, it was just a thought." Truro watched as Gil, local handyman who did just about anything and everything in Ludlum, petted the possum. Truro was sure if she did that it would bite her finger off. But Gil was someone who had a definite affinity with animals. If the town vet was busy people came to Gil. He always knew how to treat the sick and injured, and not just animals. Truro often thought he was the most peaceful, healing man she had ever met. Just his presence soothed her and that was unusual for generally Truro was on edge. She wondered once more why there was no woman in his life. He was a sweet, attractive man. It seemed odd. But he was alone and seemingly it did not worry him. *Some women are blind to potential.*

"He's not worth it, Tru."

"I know that." Now she did. If only she had back then but then she had been lost and wounded and open to the power of sexual persuasion. *Dummy.*

Gil smiled. "I have to admit I would have liked to see his face when he got the possum – and no, I'm not changing my mind."

"Spoilsport," Truro muttered, grateful though that someone could counterbalance her wild temper and make her see reason.

"There is someone better out there for you."

Truro rolled her eyes. "Oh please, spare me the soul mate crap."

"I believe it."

And the thing was, Truro could see in his clear blue eyes that he meant it. That was the thing with Gil. He was not the slightest bit fake. "So where's your woman then, young Gillard?"

"She's already here."

"In Ludlum?" The town was so small. It had barely three hundred people. Truro pretty much knew everyone. In her capacity as manager of the Rambling Rose, which the reclusive Bess Calvert owned, people either ended up living at the caravan park or visiting someone. She wrinkled her brow trying to work out who Gil could possibly be interested in. Sure, there were the Burnett twins who had been after him for months. Though, to be fair, any man who was breathing and had an operational cock was Prince Charming material to them. "Wait a sec—you're not talking about the Lara Croft wannabe staying at the Red Kangaroo?" It was the only pub in town and the main accommodation apart from the caravan park. Truro could see by his eyes and easy smile he did. "Seriously? Her?" Truro had only seen the woman a couple of times but the whole wearing black thing was weird. "I guess she's attractive in kind of dark and weird way." *As opposed to me, I'm just weird.*

"She is mine. She is my soul mate."

Whoa. Shades of the wolf man there. Once more an image of her one-time lover came to her mind. Truro shook her head. That was last night. He was gone and she was alone. *And fantasies do not come true.* "Have you met Lara?" It was better to focus on the here and the now and someone else's problems.

"No."

"What do you know about her?"

"Only that she is mine."

"Oh please, don't get all mystical on me." Gil was freakishly good at that. It was almost like he had a seventh sense no one else did. Gil knew stuff before others did. Old Bess said he smelled it in the air. Only thing Truro could smell was burning meat from caravan number twelve. The serial renters—she liked to call them the barbeque boys—liked to drink and barbeque. There was nothing wrong with that but for the fact they got so drunk, fell down and left the barbeque hot plate on and Truro always had to go turn it off. "Why her?"

"You can't deny the one who is meant for you."

"Now you sound like Bess," Truro scoffed.

"She's right." Gil left the cage and came to stand before her. "Burying the need to feel is wrong."

"And yet, it's been working perfectly well for me so far." When Gil looked at her she sometimes felt like he could see inside her. Her mind flashed back to the other man. The one who had made her come alive under his touch. That touch of feeling was okay. Anything deeper or long term was too hard and had to be avoided. "Besides feeling stupid and vulnerable isn't all that crash hot." *Been there, done that.*

Gil's hands came to rest gently on shoulders. "Soon it will be different."

"Uh-huh."

"Trust me, Tru."

If there was anyone on the planet she could trust, Truro knew it was Gil. She looked back at the cage. Gil saw too much and his touch was too relaxing. Truro felt safe hiding and remaining tense letting nothing in. Gil had a habit of getting under her skin. "So, no red bow around his neck?"

"Nope." Gil's smile was soft was amusement. He turned and picked up the cage. "I'll let this little guy go somewhere he can find a home."

"Lucky him." She'd never had a real home. There were times she longed for one. And other times, she told herself to get on with life and expect nothing more than what she had earned.

"Everyone has a home, Tru. It comes to them when they least expect it."

Truro swallowed hard. It was spooky having someone who could hear your unsaid thoughts. "Okay, mystical man," she said as she pushed her hands against his arm. "Go and check out Lara Croft or something."

"Her name is Joan."

"Really?" Truro was about to ask Gil how he knew her name when he hadn't met her but sometimes it was better not to ask. Gil just knew stuff. Without even telling him

her life story Gil had simply wandered into her world applying a gentle pressure until Truro had felt strong enough to confide in him. "She doesn't look like a Joan."

"You know people hide behind facades."

Truro was a great advocate of doing that. Never show your true self because when you did you got hurt. She had learned that lesson a long time ago but every so often, like with Rodney the rodent, she showed a part of herself and got hurt. "But it doesn't matter anymore," she mumbled to herself.

Gil heard her. "It does and it will get better."

"Do you know every dumb thought before I speak it?"

"Not always, the red ribbon thing caught me by surprise."

* * * * *

"Hello."

Holy crap. It's him. Truro whirled around at the sound of that voice. She almost dropped the gas nozzle she held into her fuel tank. "Why are you here?" While she was excited he was, he was not someone she expected to see again. The amusement and pleasure she saw in his eyes, made her heart run riot. Truro wanted to walk into his arms and press against his solid, hot body and never move.

"I'm here for the same reason you are." He pointed to a late model sedan parked in the next bay. "I've been thinking about you."

Yay! Me too. It was exciting to be wanted by a gorgeous man. True she had no idea what his name was or what he did but maybe that was part of the mystique of this attraction between them. However thoughts like that would get her nowhere. Truro knew she had to set a roadblock. He would move on and she didn't want to be pining over him like some pathetic simp. "Look, about last night —"

"It was amazing."

Oh God yes it was. "It was a one-off."

"I need more."

Yes please. Take me I'm yours. Truro cleared her throat and felt the gas click off. She busied herself with stowing the hose and replacing the fuel cap while she thought about what to say. "The thing is, I don't usually do that."

"I know."

"How do you know?" There were times she barely knew herself. Six months ago she had made the worst mistake when she had fallen for Rodney Dowell straight away. He was a gorgeous and charming stranger, like this man, passing through Ludlum. Rodney had said all the right things. In hindsight of course Truro knew there had been a level of desperation within her that she was unaware of. It had been a need to feel and belong and give into something she craved but couldn't name.

Rodney had been the wrong person because he had wanted only one thing. Unfortunately, Truro hadn't worked that out until the end. She had been available pussy and nothing else. He had smoothly charmed her fears away until she gave in to whatever he wanted. After he had taken and tasted and used, his attitude changed. While he still wanted her body, Rodney started to pick faults. She was too fat, too pale and too unattractive for him. His taunting words ate away at her self-esteem until Truro had felt lower than she ever had before and she had thought that would have been impossible.

Truro had never really had anyone in life to depend on. Her mother was a violently abusive alcoholic and her father had never returned home after his stint with the minefield in Western Queensland. It had been just Truro and her mother for two of the longest years of Truro's life. Nothing she did for her mother was good enough. Truro was never pretty or smart enough and seemingly her mother believed all her problems were because of Truro. At seventeen, fed up with the bashings and the abuse, Truro had left home and begun her travels around Australia, working and sleeping where she could. She had made many mistakes, taking the wrong lovers here and there, all because she had needed to feel something—anything—other than being alone and

unloved. When Rodney came along and treated her as he had, Truro had realized she was her own worst enemy. She was looking for something that did not exist.

Until now. Truro looked her lover up and down. Was this man any different? And how could she blame him for approaching her with such an eager look in his eyes. She had been only too available last night. Naturally he would think it was an ongoing offer. "You know nothing about me and I'm not offering more of what happened last night." Even as she said the words, Truro felt a rush of wet heat between her legs. When he took her hand, she felt herself blush once more as a shiver ran through her body. His words from last night rang in her ears. *You are mine as I am yours*. Had he meant that? Did he feel the same crazy need that she did? "I have to pay for the gas." Truro tried to pull from his hold but he remained fast.

"I'll come with you."

"That's what I'm afraid of," she mumbled as she edged around the car. It was weird holding someone's hand. Weird but nice.

"You never have to be scared with me."

Oh boy. "I—er—um..." What the hell am I trying to say?

"What do you want?"

The obvious answer was *you*. "I need—"

"I need too." He gently pulled her along toward the first available door. It was to the ladies room. After a quick glance around, he opened it and looked around. "Inside."

"Why?" *Duh*. Her wet inner thighs were answer enough. *Incoming cock*. There were so many reasons why Truro knew she should not step over the threshold but none of them were compelling enough for her to turn away. She followed him inside and he locked the door behind them. "Wolf man, I—"

He came straight to her, wrapping his arms around her body and pressing her close. "I don't want to pretend or play games, petal. I want you and I believe you want me."

Truro sighed as she leaned against him. *Wonderful.* "This is not rational." *But oh how I love a man who knows what he wants and is not afraid to say it.* It was so sexy to Truro.

"The best things never are."

The solid, reliable strength of his body was weakening any resolve she had to pull away. "I need to get back to work." Though there was not a damn thing she could think of that needed doing at the caravan park where she worked.

He brushed the hair from her face. "No you don't. You're just scared."

"Yes." There was no point denying it.

"I will never hurt you."

He sounded like he meant it. "Me either." For some reason she couldn't fathom, Truro needed him to know that.

"I want you naked."

The thought of his hot skin against hers made Truro shiver. "Naked is not good for me." She had barely glanced at her surroundings. The man in her arms was the only thing that mattered.

"I saw you naked last night."

"I look better in half light."

He chuckled and stepped back from her. "I don't believe that. Take your clothes off for me."

Only for you. "You too." Truro wanted to see him naked one last time. She knew the reality of the situation would sink in and he would move on. *At least I'll have an amazing memory to think back on.* It was the whole *carpe diem* thing. Take the moment and make the most of it.

"Whatever you wish," he responded as he pulled his shirt over his head.

The sight of his hard chest and wild, yet beautiful wolf tattoo made Truro's fingers clumsy as stripped off. She wanted to touch and taste and she rushed to get naked.

Nudity was not something she embraced. But being so with this man was as natural as breathing.

“You are so lovely.”

His words made her feel that she was beautiful and this gave Truro a power she never imagined she could feel. A wave of just wanting to be who she was and take a chance gripped her. “As are you.” Truro trailed her fingers down his chest to meet the tip of his stiff cock. She smiled knowing that was for her and she was going to make the most of it. Truro’s hands moved back up to caress the tattoo. The eyes of the wolf were sharp and perceptive yet strangely warm. *Like the man?* She pushed him back against the wall and melded her body tightly to his. The heat from his skin and the spicy musk of his body made Truro close her eyes. For just one moment she felt an overwhelming sense of belonging. Truro wanted to hold onto that feeling as long as she could.

“This is not an ideal place to make love,” he said as his hand moved down to cup her ass and hold her close.

Truro opened her eyes and focused on the man. *This man is special.* How, she wasn’t sure. She just knew it in her heart. “Anywhere with you is perfect.”

He pushed her back slightly. “Do you mean that?” His eyes searched hers for answers.

“As crazy as that sounds, strangely enough I do.” Truro kept her hands on his chest, almost as if the tattoo had drawn her to the muscled flesh. “Who are you and why do I feel this way?”

“How do you feel?”

“Totally out of control.” Truro wanted to throw caution to the wind and just hold on for the wild ride this man would give her. Yes, she had learned a lesson after that disaster with Rodney, but this was different. How? It was something Truro couldn’t put her finger on. It was about her needs being fulfilled.

He smiled at her. “You know why, petal.”

"We are strangers." Yet here I stand naked, your cock pressed against my stomach and I want to swallow you whole. I am so wet with my need for you.

"Are we?"

Yes. No. "I don't know any more." The only thing she was sure of was she wanted him. "Condom?"

"Why?" His voice was light and teasing.

"Because I want you to fuck the stuffing out of me." Truro felt his cock jerk at her words. His lips met hers in a deep, passionate kiss that made her stand on her tiptoes to taste every delicious moment of it. She surrendered her mouth to his, too overcome with desire and the sweet taste of his kisses to worry about how rational any of this was.

As his mouth left hers, he ran a finger along her wet, lower lip. "It would be a privilege to be inside you once more, petal." He gave her a gentle push and bent down to reach for his trousers. "Turn around and put your hands on the wall."

The idea of being taken once more from behind excited Truro. There was something so possessive and primal in mating this way. "Hurry up." She positioned herself so she stood with her ass out and her hands above her head. Thankfully the door was locked. There was no way this could be passed off as anything other than what it was. Pure, hot sex between two consenting adults. The last thing she waited was one of the Ludlum locals walking in and finding her like this. The news of it would ricochet around the town like a bullet. "I'm waiting."

"Needy?"

"I'm so wet, wolf man."

"Oh man, you shouldn't have said that." Her lover's voice was hoarse as he quickly worked on covering his cock with the thin rubber.

"Why?" Truro knew why. She wasn't the only one losing what little was left of their control.

"I wanted to go slower this time."

Truro rotated her hips in a deliberate manner to entice him to touch and enter. The thought of his body against her and his cock buried deep inside were the only things that mattered. "If you go slowly I will scream."

He chuckled as he hurried back behind her and slapped her ass. "You are adorable." Truro squealed in excitement. "Did you like that?" His hand spanked her ass two more times.

"I like your cock better." Truro pushed her ass back at him, feeling his cockhead hard and full nudging her ass. "I need you." Never had she thought those words would come out of her mouth.

"As I do you."

"So come on inside." It was quaint and sweet and sexy to invite a man in without fearing her would take and not give back.

"Yes ma'am."

As his cock slid inside her wet core, Truro realized she was holding her breath, wanting to feel every hot inch of male flesh take over her body and make her his to control. She gripped at the wall looking for purchase as she spread her legs wider to accommodate his entry. When his cock was lodged all the way inside, they stood still and close so only the sound of their breathing could be heard.

"I don't think I will ever get enough of you," he whispered against her ear.

The soft, sucking wet kisses he placed down her neck and onto her shoulders made Truro shiver with anticipation at what was to come. There was something so sensual and seductive about being filled and waiting for a lover to move. "Wolf man?"

"Yes, petal?"

"What am I going to do when you go?" Truro stiffened in surprise. That wasn't what she had meant to say. She was going to urge him to move and to make her come and yet the need to know what came next was more important. Was that even rational

considering neither knew the other's name? Truro shook her head. "Forget I said that. I'm really very needy at the moment." She edged back to make him move.

"There is so much I need to explain to you."

Was there? What could there be for two strangers having sex? Truro turned her head to look at him. "I just want you to please move within me." She needed to remember that rush of feeling she'd felt last night.

"We will talk." He pulled halfway out of her body and pushed back inside.

Oh yes. "Fuck first. Talk later." His chuckle reverberated down her spine as he continued a slow and deep thrusting back and forward. Truro panted softly, eager to take whatever was on offer. His balls grinding against her ass made her heart race. She felt the perspiration on her upper lip as she tried to hold back the small whimpering sounds the plunging heat of his cock drove her on to make. Once more Truro felt the wolf tattoo burning into her skin. She felt an overwhelming feeling of rightness, that what was happening was not just sex between strangers. It was something more. Something indefinable.

"You are so tight and delicious," he growled, his hands moving around to caress her breasts as he continued with kissing her shoulders and back.

Truro sighed as his fingers played with her nipples. She was so hot that it was no surprise to her when she felt her body start to tremble under the beginnings of an orgasm. As if he knew this, her lover quickened his pace, thrusting harder. Truro bit her tongue as she felt the scream come to her lips. She didn't want anyone rushing into the ladies room to investigate. "Oh, wolf man..."

"Next time I want to go slowly," he murmured against her ear as he pushed himself on to release. "I want to start licking you from your toes up, not missing an inch of skin. I want you wet from my tongue and your own juices."

Oh God. If only there would be a next time. It was then that Truro screamed. The orgasm that shot through her loins and up her spine, was so powerful that she knew she would have fallen to the ground if he had not held her so tightly. His laugh of pure,

masculine delight was cocky yet sweet. Truro held on to the wall, loving every pounding thrust he delivered until he came with a strangled howl of satisfaction.

“Good?”

“Amazing,” Truro gasped out as she tried to catch her breath and make her heart less frantic. *Please God let there be a next time.*

* * * * *

As they walked back to the cars, Murphy smelled the blood before he saw it. He grabbed hold of her arm and held on fast. Although he was yet to learn her name, Murphy did not want the love of his life walking into danger.

“Holy crap! There’s blood trail.” Truro looked agog.

There was a wide swathe of bloody red, trampled grass that stretched off into the surrounding bushland. “Stay here.”

Truro took his hand. “Not likely, wolf man.”

Despite the situation, Murphy gave a small smile. He loved it when she called him that. It was a sweet intimacy he was looking forward to enjoying for the rest of their lives together. “Stay behind me then.”

Truro rolled at her eyes at him. “I’m not useless you know.”

“I never indicated you were. It’s just this much blood is not going to be good.” Instinct told him this was not animal blood. Murphy’s hand tightened on the small one within his. There was no way he would allow any danger to touch his woman. He started following the trail. He knew they were following a path of death.

“No, but I feel better going with you than staying behind and wondering.”

Murphy made sure he took the lead. As he parted the shrubs, he saw it. “Oh hell. Don’t look.” He barely wanted to look at the bloody, torn flesh of what appeared to be a man scattered in a messy pile before them.

Regardless of his words, Truro looked. “Is that human? It doesn’t look real.”

"Yes." It was only too real and it spelled instant trouble to Murphy. *I have to tell the others. Something like this, at this time, was no coincidence.*

"Is that an arm? And that hair—" Truro gasped and staggered against Murphy clutching him for support. "T-that's Rodney or was Rodney...how could that be? He hasn't been in Ludlum for months." Her voice trailed off in shock.

Rodney? *Who the hell was he and what did he have to do with my woman?* Even though the man was dead, Murphy felt a burst of jealousy tear through him. Was she upset by this? Her eyes were wide and saucer shaped in shock. What had this man meant to her? "You knew him?"

"He's the asshole who told me I was fat and ugly."

As pleased as Murphy was to hear the anger in her voice, he was annoyed that he didn't have the chance to teach this Rodney a lesson before he was killed. "He deserved to die then." What sort of man told a woman something like that? No man should make any woman feel unattractive. It was wrong and dishonorable, but then not many followed the code of honor Murphy did. Only an inferior breed blamed another for perceived shortcomings.

"Maybe, metaphorically speaking, but not like this." Truro shivered at Murphy's side. "He looks like he has been ripped limb from limb."

"Yes." The creature that had done this would have inflicted maximum pain on his victim. But why?

"What could have done this?" Truro leaned against Murphy for support. "Ludlum is so quiet and boring. Could it have been the wolves?"

"No." As he gave her strength supporting her, she made him feel strong being able to do so. "Wolves do not kill like this nor do they attack larger predators. Someone wants us to think it was a wolf." But who? Murphy saw the puzzled look in her eyes. There was no time to explain. He would later when they could be alone. When she was ready for the full truth. "We need to report this."

"Yes, my cell phone is back at the car. I'll get it."

"I'll come with you." Murphy was not about to leave her unprotected.

"I'll be fine."

He suspected she was used to dealing with things on her own. That was going to change. Murphy was in her life now. "Regardless, petal, I will escort you."

"Look, we had sex. You owe me nothing."

"I owe you everything." He pulled her close, needing to feel her heart beat strong against his.

Truro looked at his askance. "Is this how you react to random sex?"

Murphy snorted at her words. This one had much to learn and he was going to enjoy teaching her. "There is nothing random about you or me. There is a connection between us. I know you feel it too."

"Maybe."

He shook his head. "You're stubborn." *And sexy and smart. All the things I love.*

Truro took one last look at Rodney. "That's a lot of hate there. As horrible as he was, I would never have wished that on him."

"People like Rodney bring it on themselves by their own careless thoughts and actions."

"Karma's a bitch," Truro murmured as she turned away from the body on the ground. "I feel nothing for him. What does that say about me? I should at least feel sorrow."

Murphy gathered her in his arms. *I will protect this woman for life.* "Some people are just not worth crying over, petal." And then the wolves howled and Murphy knew as they did, trouble had come to Ludlum.

* * * * *

"There is a problem." Murphy had no time for friendly greetings as he met up with the two men. They had all known each other for a long time and neither would take

offense at his abruptness. In the darkness, Murphy could see both men looked as concerned as he felt.

"Yes, we heard." William nodded at his words. "The whole town believes the wolves are responsible for the man's death."

That was no surprise to Murphy. People were inclined to think ill of those they did not understand. "The victim was my woman's, my mate's, ex-lover." Was that a coincidence or just bad luck?

"Is Truro okay?"

Murphy smiled for the first time since finding the body. "Her name is Truro?" It was an odd name yet strangely fitting for the woman he intended to spend his life with. *I just have to convince her of that.* Truro was like the rest of Ludlum. Even though he had told her the wolves weren't to blame for the death, Murphy couldn't be sure she believed it. If she continued to feel that way it would make their coming together a problem.

Gil chuckled loudly. "You didn't ask her name?"

"Well, we were preoccupied. Truro does call me 'wolf man'."

"Quite fitting under the circumstances." William looked eager to resolve something. "Was Truro shocked?"

"The man hurt her badly. She says she doesn't care."

"Truro is a tough lady," Gil murmured knowledgeably.

Maybe. "People hide behind layers." Truro had more layers than anyone Murphy had ever come across. There was such pain and wounded pride within. That Truro trusted him was important. That she didn't trust or believe in herself saddened him. The words she had spoken at their first meeting about being empty and ugly and needing to feel nothing still stuck in his mind. Who would wound someone so deeply that they believed that? *I will make it up to her.* "We spent a long time at the police station. They also believe it's the wolves."

William sighed. "That's what someone wants them to believe."

Gil looked at William in concern. "You're worried."

"Yes, I feel something is going to happen."

"As do I every time it comes close to midnight," Gil responded. "It's that rush of power that surges into your veins."

"It's that but something else. I feel that approaching evil is going to jeopardize the clan."

Murphy sucked in his breath. This was the last thing they need. "Because of the man's death?" He felt it too. The death was not a random occurrence.

"Yes." William sounded weary. "As much as we should embrace this coming together in the clan it weakens us. This death has been planned to place blame on the wolves – on our clan."

Murphy knew that. He had hoped to hear otherwise. He looked at the moon. It was almost time. The change was usually a peaceful time of freedom. Yet how could it be peaceful when their world may be in jeopardy? "Who is our enemy?" Like any close-knit group they had them.

"Fifty years ago I felt exactly like this. I was young and in love with my mate yet a shadow was cast over us by great evil. There was also killing back then too."

"Absolon is dead." Murphy had heard the stories of what had happened. They were clan legend.

"So we're told and yet in my heart I feel malevolence akin to Absolon stalking us once more."

Gil looked thoughtful. "I have read back through our history. Every fifty years, it's always been a time of caution. With the coming of new blood and of new mates."

"And it weakens us too." Murphy knew that was what worried William. He looked at the older man. Murphy was only too aware what battles this man had fought on

behalf on the wolf clan. "We will be stronger when the clan is complete once more." New blood and links forged with their mates would make it so.

William nodded. "Maybe I am getting too cautious in my old age." His eyes settled on Murphy. "Do you foresee difficulties with Truro?"

"Oh hell yes." While Murphy may be able to seduce her into making love, he knew having Truro accept the other side of him, his life with the wolves would be harder. She was not someone who trusted easily. Him telling her he was a wolf by night would probably have her running in the other direction from him.

"I believe I will have the same problem with my lady staying at the Red Kangaroo." Gil grinned as if that was only a minor inconvenience. "However as we all know no one can escape their true love."

William smiled at his words. "They are interesting women who have been through a great deal of pain but are stronger for it. Bess was the same."

"Yet neither would see that." Truro would not. She was so closed down in some areas of her life. Murphy was going to make sure that changed.

"Wounded people rarely see their own strength." William looked at the moon. "It's time to join the others."

The men walked directly to where the moon was the brightest. Each stood apart from the other and closed their eyes. As they did, a beam of the purest light touched them, encasing them in a cool, white, calming glow. The men did not fight it. It was all a part of their two lives becoming one – man and wolf. They held their hands up in the air and greeted the light like an old friend.

First one, then the others began turning and twisting, moving with the light, their clothes falling to the ground. While there was strain on their faces it was not due to pain, more to concentration. As their bodies moved within the gentle light, they started to change shape and size. They each dropped to the ground, writhing as the change overcame them. What were once tall, strapping men started to morph into shorter, hunched beings with powerful shoulders and four strong legs. Where once were smiles

of teasing amusement, sharp teeth protruded. Where was once the musky, firmness of male flesh, a soft pelt of thick hair covered their bodies.

First one wolf then another broke free from the light and padded to the edge of the forest and waited for the others. They were of the one clan. They never left a member behind. It was all or nothing. When all three gathered together they nudged each other with their powerful jaws in acknowledgement of who they were. Then they loped off into the forest in search of the other wolves.

Chapter Three

The next day

"I'm looking to hire a van."

"Well, we got 'em." Truro didn't glance up from the bank deposit slip she was filling out on the counter in the office. She had to make it to the bank by five o'clock. Two days in a row she had forgotten to go and a third would just be sloppy. "I'm not that slack," she mumbled to herself as the pen slid along the form. Bess Calvert, the van park's owner, had some old-fashioned ways when it came to banking and filling out forms was one of them.

"Did I say you were slack?" The man's voice was full of amusement.

"No, I'm talking to myself." *Running late, stressed and no idea what I'm doing so why not talk to myself and let everyone know how nutso I am.*

"Do you do that a lot?"

A sudden shiver of anticipation ran down Truro's spine. *Crap I know that voice. But I couldn't be.* Her head shot up. "You again." *But how? Why? Yum—I mean oh hell, I don't need this. Or do I?*

"Yeah me." He smiled and held out his hand. "Murphy Green."

"Huh—interesting name." Truro looked at his hand. The memory of his flesh against hers made her tremble. *Get a grip. It was just no-name sex.* Well, it had been no-name.

"My father was Irish."

"Murphy and Green. I can see that... I thought you were just passing through town?" Enough with the pleasantries. Why was he there? One-night stands were just that. They left after one night, hence the name. Oh yeah, and then there was yesterday...

"And you are?"

"Confused."

Murphy leaned his side against the counter. "I never said I wouldn't stick around."

"Well I thought —"

"A couple of quick uncomplicated fucks and you'd never see me again, petal?"

"Well yeah, and don't call me petal."

"Well, you were wrong and you remind me of a flower."

Okay, Houston we have a problem. Hot, sexy man with a killer smile. I just know I am going to do something stupid. Again. "Look, I'm not interested in you."

Murphy arched his eyebrow. "I'm not specifically here because of you."

"Right." Truro wasn't sure if she was more relieved or annoyed that he hadn't had a wild urge to stay in town and make love to her until she could think of nothing but him. *And what's with the word "specifically"?* That made her wary. It indicated options of contemplation. There was nothing to contemplate as far as Truro was concerned. She didn't want any more with him. He was exactly the sort of guy she could quite easily fall in love with. He was the opposite of Rodney the rodent. He was quiet, watchful and he listened. She knew from his stance and soft brown eyes his entire attention was focused on her. "I never indicated you were here because of me." Truro picked up and twisted the deposit form in her hand. She wasn't about to get all pathetic over a man she'd had great sex with. "How many nights?"

"What can you give me?"

Were they talking about accommodation or something more? Truro dropped the deposit slip and reached for the antiquated guest register Bess favored. "The van? Up to you. How long do you plan to stay?" Even as she said the words, Truro closed her legs together tightly.

"I'm uncertain, petal," Murphy responded, his voice light yet pointed as he watched her every move. "It depends how my — er, business goes."

God, he had the sweetest, most soulful eyes. Truro gave herself a mental shake. *It was sex. It was good. You are over it. This is business. Rent the van. Collect money. Be responsible. O-kay.* "What do you do?" She tried to concentrate on finding the current page and not on the man.

"I'm into nature."

"And you make money out of that?" Truro doubted it.

Murphy reached over and took the book from her hands, easily flipping forward to the present date. "Not everything in life is about money." He handed her back the book, fingers brushing as he did. "You'll have to tell me."

"W-what?" Truro swallowed hard. Who knew she had so many nerves in her hand? She felt all girly and giddy from one simple touch.

"Your name."

"Guess." It was an inane thing to say but she was feeling a little crazy.

"Truro."

Of course. A small town always had big mouths. "Wow, you're psychic."

Murphy chuckled. "Someone told me."

Truro rolled her eyes in cynical amusement. "Not psychic then? Bummer—I was going to ask you to read my palm and get me the winning lotto numbers."

"I know your future."

Again, the shiver ran down her spine. "Crap pick-up line," Truro murmured, unable to avoid the knowing look Murphy gave her which indicated the pick up had already occurred quite nicely. "Right well, you want a van. Let's see what we have."

"Something simple will be fine."

Which probably meant he was broke. "So does nature turn a profit?" Would he pay the bill? Would she have to go all premenstrual on him to get payment? She had done it before. She scanned the register. Most vans were occupied. They only a couple left

including the one closest to hers. *Hmmm...should I do that? It's not like I'm going to let him touch me again is it? It was a one-off – er two-offs. Three-offs never worked.*

"I get by."

"I see." It was none of her business what he did and getting by meant different things to different people. Truro herself had made an art form of getting by. She had vague plans of what she should do. Mostly they centered on leaving Ludlum and travelling the world in search of something. What exactly she wasn't sure. Problem was there was something about Ludlum that kept her there. "Well, I don't get the whole nature thing. I'm city girl."

"Yet you're in Ludlum," Murphy pointed out the obvious and Truro was anything but. He could see she was on edge and trying to control it. Murphy wondered what effort that took. He himself believed in just going with his emotions and right now he wanted to take the trembling woman in his arms and let her know everything would be all right. But he knew she would fight that. There was a wary look in her eyes. This was a different woman from the one who he had made love to in the last couple of days. That Truro had no defenses. She just gave. This version was cornered and trying to decide how to act and what to do. Murphy smiled softly at her. Truro blinked rapidly as if trying to control herself from whatever wild thought she was thinking.

"Yeah well, I took a wrong turn."

"Maybe it was one you were meant to take." Murphy wondered what Truro would say if he told her straight out that he had been searching all his life for her and that he would protect and love her forever. That he was led to Ludlum by the call of his wolf clan. *She would probably beat me over the head with the guest register.* Although beautifully curvaceous, Murphy had a feeling Truro was quite scrappy when it came to a fight. But he had a goal. He had come to meet up with his clan and for Truro. She could fight against him as much as she liked but she would not win.

"Um, van six is available. It's quiet and it has its own facilities."

"I'll take it." *Anything to be near you.*

Truro peered over the counter and looked down on the swag at his feet. "That all you got, wolf man?"

"That's all I need." The sudden sound of multiple wolf cries broke through the air. Murphy smiled. It was not yet dark and yet they urged him to come and be with them. Some wolves never changed shape or form. Others, like Murphy, were werewolves and nature dictated they live as both man and animal.

"Oh right, you probably like wolves what with the whole nature thing going on."

"Yes, it's a comforting sound." Murphy hoped one day it would comfort Truro as well.

"It freaks the hell out of me. Especially the other night when we —"

"Yes? Made love?"

"Anyway it's just an unnerving sound."

His hand moved to rest on hers. "How so?"

Truro pulled away before he took full possession. "It's such a lonely sound of longing. It scares me." She looked surprised at her own words.

Murphy wasn't. Truro was beginning to recognize something he had always known. Every being recognized their soul mate the minute they met. Some instantly accepted it like Murphy. Others, like Truro, knew it subconsciously but fought against it.

"There is nothing to be scared of." *And I have found you.* "The wolves are looking for their mates."

"Isn't everyone," Truro murmured as she started writing in the register.

"Are you?" Murphy held his breath in anticipation of her answer.

"I have no feelings." The words came out bland and disinterested.

Murphy knew, as he had the other night, he would do whatever he had to in order to make this woman feel loved and wanted. "The other night – the other day – what did you feel?"

Truro pushed the hair back from her face. "Look, wolf man, I was just lonely and angry."

"And?" Murphy knew there was more to it than just that.

"And nothing." She shrugged her shoulders and looked at him in defiance.

Murphy grinned. Truro was adorable and complicated and his heart beat a little faster knowing she was his. *I just have to convince her.* That she had felt something, he didn't doubt. Murphy suspected she was burying it deep inside her so as not to acknowledge it. That was okay. He was a patient man. He took the keys she handed him, his hands enclosing hers in a firm, yet gentle hold. "I think you felt what I did."

"Um –"

Murphy pulled her from the office. "Come show me the van."

Truro waved her hand in the direction of the accommodation. "It's over there." She tried to dig her heels in to stay her progress.

"Show me." It took no effort to move her. If they were not in such a public place, Murphy would have lifted her into his arms and carried her to bed, for that's where he was headed. To bed his woman once more.

"I – er, have work to do."

"Come on, petal. Let's not deny ourselves any longer."

"Denial works for me." Truro swung all her weight backward to avoid any forward motion. The problem was Murphy was a lot stronger than she was. Truro looked around for help from the van park residents. They just waved and continued on with their newspapers and general doings. The barbeque boys did snicker some before they

focused their attention back on the charcoal sausages on the grill before them. *Great help this lot is.* "I don't want to have sex." There. She said it. The declaration was out there.

Murphy reached the door of the van. "Liar."

Okay, I am. The thing was just touching Murphy made her want to rip open his shirt and lick his tattooed chest. That was not rational. Truro was not looking for a relationship. Murphy's interest in her appeared to be heading that way. "I need to freshen up." *And maybe run the two miles into town before I do something dumb – again.*

"What are you scared of, petal?" He thrust the key into the lock and opened up the caravan.

"You." There was no point denying it. Murphy was everything she craved in a man. Problem was she didn't want to put effort into something that would not work out. Truro was too battle weary from life to put herself through any more angst.

"Why?" Murphy's hand reached out to encircle her waist.

Truro shivered under his touch. *Will it always feel like this for us? Oh – Forehead slap! Get a grip woman. One minute you want to run a mile and the next you were wondering if you can have sex at seventy.* "Because you know too much about me."

Murphy lifted her effortlessly up into the van. "And that's bad?"

Truro was up in the air and back down on her feet before she realized what had happened. "Well, yes." *And that whole move was awfully hot and sexy.*

"How?"

Why all the questions? No other man she knew wanted to know that much about her. "Because I –"

"What? Have no defenses against me? Do you need them?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"You're very..." Truro hesitated as she watched Murphy remove his shirt. *Oh boy.* "Hot as hell."

Murphy smiled at her words. "I am?"

"Oh crap, I said that out loud." This man was bad for her. Truro had trouble thinking straight when Murphy was clothed. Half naked was as hard as hell.

"Yeah you did but I liked it." His hands settled on the buttons of her shirt, making short work of them. "What else am I?" Murphy peeled back the edges of the fabric that covered her breasts.

"Sexy and pushy and...er..." His gentle fingers on her skin set her whole body alight.

"You smell great." Murphy leaned in and placed soft kisses just below her ear.

"Really?" Truro gasped out in a breathy voice.

"Oh yeah. Remember what I said about licking you from your toes up?"

Truro jumped at the thought, her pussy wet and ready. "Um, I have work to do." *Be sensible. Be rational. Licking might be fun though.*

"As do I." Murphy crowded Truro giving her no other option but to move backward. The back of her legs hit the double bed in the small van. He pushed her onto the mattress. Murphy held onto her legs, his hands removing her shoes one by one.

When Truro felt his hands move to the snap of her jeans she tried to fight them off. "I can't." *Well, I can but – but what? Why am I fighting this again?*

"Why not?" The snap came undone and the zipper slid down.

"Well, I just can't." Truro's jeans were around her ankles before she could blink.

Murphy pulled her legs free of the denim. "Hmm, white functional knickers."

"I wasn't expecting you." *Or maybe I was. Maybe I wanted to test fate with white granny knickers that no man would find attractive.*

"And a white bra too." His finger strayed into the deep cleavage on display.

Truro tried to get up. "I'm sorry I'm not a lingerie model."

"I'm not." Murphy moved down to her feet. "I want a real woman not a prefabricated one." He lifted one of her ankles toward his mouth. "Stay still, petal."

"Wolf man, I—oh boy..." Truro moaned as his tongue started licking her foot. She had never understood why some people found feet sexy. But now, with his mouth on her instep, Truro could. It was all that hot, ticklish heat that sent a spiral of pleasure up her spine.

"Stop squirming," he murmured between kisses.

That was impossible. She wanted to grind her body against his to relieve the ache that was building up inside her. "How would you like me to lick you?" *Dumb question.* Truro really wanted to do that.

Murphy's eyes locked on hers. "I would love it and in fact I will insist upon it."

This made Truro giggle as he tickled her foot. "You're very silly."

"You're delicious." Murphy's tongue lapped at her ankle before starting a slow, seductive slide up her calf.

It was hard to concentrate on pushing him away when she wanted to pull him so close he was inside her. "Murphy, we have to talk."

He appeared unfazed by her words as he nibbled on her knee. "About what?"

There was only one way she could handle this and that was the truth. "I'm scared."

Murphy parted her legs and moved in so the length of his body touched hers. "You never have to be with me."

The tender hands stroking her face and the rough denim on her bare limbs made it hard to concentrate on what she wanted to say. "This is too fast."

"It's meant to be. I want you to be so aware of me that you can think of nothing or nobody else. I want you to be so full of me that you don't know where I stop and you start. I want you to come looking at me and know that I'm the only man for you."

"Oh—" His words were so hot and possessive that Truro felt she could have had an orgasm then and there. While she wasn't into dominance, a strong, confident man was as sexy as hell in Truro's eyes.

Murphy smiled as he removed her bra. “Yes, ‘oh’.” He leaned down and kissed her in a soft, thorough manner that declared ownership and devotion. “What do you need, petal?”

That he cared enough to ask made her love him a little more. *Uh-oh. Love him? A little more? What the – ?* “Um,” Truro murmured as she tried to process the wild thought that had just shot into her head. *How can I love him when I have no idea what love is? This has to be just sex. Yes, think sex and don’t complicate this with dumb feelings.*

“Petal? What’s wrong?” His hands had moved down to the white cotton of her knickers. They were off within seconds.

Take them off and fuck me. Can I say that? Truro licked her lips. “I want you – naked – now – inside me.” His words reverberated in her head. *‘I want you to be so aware of me that you can think of nothing or nobody else.’ I am already there.* Truro pushed against his tattooed chest. “Strip.”

“For you – anything.” Murphy moved from her body and stood up. He made short work of kicking off his shoes and shucking his jeans.

Truro ran her gaze along his muscled flesh. *He is mine.* If anyone had told her a week ago she would be thinking like that she would have called them crazy. The last thing she wanted in her life was a man. “I want to –” She hesitated. Truro had never been one to initiate sex. *How do I ask for what I want?* The object of her desire was hard, ready and in her line of sight.

“Just say it.” Murphy sat back on the bed.

“How do you always know what I’m thinking?”

“Because we are soul mates.”

A chill ran up Truro’s spine. *Soul mates.* First Gil, then Bess and now Murphy. Was there something in the water in Ludlum that was making people all soppy? “I want to taste you.”

“I would love that.” Murphy moved to lie beside her on the mattress.

While he had certainly seen her naked, Truro felt a moment of hesitation before climbing on top of the hunk of male body that was hers to play with.

"Don't think, just feel and do what you want." Murphy held a hand out to her.

Truro took it, grateful that he was someone she did not have to explain her fears and thoughts to. She climbed on top of him until her pussy was rubbing against his cock. Truro wiggled her ass back slightly down his thighs. His growl of approval at her actions made her smile. "You like?" She rubbed her wet pussy against his skin.

"Anything you do to me I love."

Love. This is not love. This is wild glorious sex. Believe that and enjoy what you have. Truro reached down and wrapped her hands around the base of Murphy's cock. The pulsing throb of power within her hands made her feel an answering strength that had never occurred to her before. Truro ran her hand up and down the length of his cock. That one person could make another bold and strong was sexually exciting. She dropped her head down and licked the tip of his cock. It was spongy and soft but firm. When she first tasted him at the motel, she had been surprised at her own reaction. Cock sucking was not something ladies did. It was supposed to be vulgar. *But I like it.* Truro sucked the tip of his cock inside her mouth and began leisurely stroking her hand up and down his shaft.

Murphy closed his eyes and groaned in satisfaction. "Oh, petal..."

His response made Truro want to make him lose control. There was so much power in that. It was like giving so much of yourself that the other person felt free to act and be without judgment. She allowed more of his cock to slide down her throat. While the idea of him coming freely in her mouth turned Truro on, she had been around long enough to know that was not something she could allow yet. *Yet?*

"If you keep doing that I will come." Murphy's voice was hoarse with suppressed need.

Truro lifted her mouth from his cock. She enjoyed how the swollen, pink tip bobbed wet and eager before her. "I have faith in your control."

"Petal, any time you touch me I lose control." She fingered the head of his cock enjoying the fact she was not the only one who squirmed in need. "We're going to need a condom pretty damn fast."

Truro smiled. She swirled her tongue once more on the spongy flesh. Tasting Murphy was as exciting as eating that first piece of chocolate. It left her wanting more.

"There's a condom in my jeans pocket."

"What if I want to play some more?" Truro leaned down so her breasts bounced against his cock.

"Petal –"

Truro had often wondered what it would feel like to have a cock between her breasts.

Murphy almost jackknifed off the bed when Truro sandwiched his cock between the two fleshy globes of her breasts. "As much as I love this," he choked out. "I want to come inside you and if you keep doing that, your skin is going to be hot and sticky and both of us are going to miss out on what we really want."

The idea of thick ropes of cum on her body was kinky and exciting, but Murphy was right. Truro wanted him tight and inside. Reluctantly she slid off his body and gathered up his jeans.

Murphy breathed deeply as he watched her search his for a condom. "You have a great ass, petal."

That was a first. Most men considered her ass too fat and pudgy. But then, Murphy was not most men. A forbidden thought came to her. *Oh why not ask?* Had he not given her the promise that she could do anything? "Would you come in my ass?" Truro turned twelve shade of red just saying it. But she really wanted to feel him inside her.

"Yes – but not now."

Truro turned and looked at him. She would have been lying if she didn't say she wasn't disappointed. She handed him the condom. "That's okay. It was a dumb suggestion anyway."

"No, it's not dumb at all and I want to take you every way you want me to." His fingers moved fast to cover his cock with rubber. "But petal, I want it to be slow and perfect and the way I feel right now is explosive with need to fuck you."

"Really?" The idea that she had made him feel that way made Truro happy. *He really wants me.* No one had ever made her feel that way.

"I need you now." Murphy's hand reached for hers. "Please."

Truro willingly took his hand. Murphy moved her quickly so once more so his cock was prodding her ass and she could see nothing but a wall. "Why am I always on my knees with you?" Not that it was a complaint as such. She was so wet and ready to be filled that Murphy could have done anything to her and she would have enjoyed it. Truro spread her legs and waited for his cock to slide inside the wet core of her.

"Have patience, petal."

"I have no patience. Do it now."

Murphy chuckled at her words. "You're so bossy."

"I am n—" Truro swallowed her words as his cock was inside her in one quick move. She closed her eyes and gave in to the super-heated flesh melding with hers. It was the best, most intense feeling. *I love it. I love him. Uh-oh – to hell with it. I'll worry about semantics later.* "Y-oh—yes," she moaned as his fingers found her clit began to play between her legs. Her eyes snapped open when one long finger started to push inside her anus. Truro's fingers dug into the threadbare carpet and she was relying on his strong thighs to keep them from crashing to the floor.

"Do you want me here?"

Truro stiffened as his finger penetrated the tight ring of muscle. It felt tight and strange yet she wanted more. "Please, wolf man."

Murphy leaned in, his hot breath against her ear. "What do you want me to do, petal?"

"Fuck my ass." There was no need to use flowery words. They were both aware of what she craved. His finger moved in and out in time with his cock. It was the most powerful, delicious feeling. Truro panted softly trying to keep up with the pace. *I do not want to miss a second.*

"You are so tight."

"You are so large."

"We are perfect together." Murphy added a second finger into her ass.

"Yes we are," Truro choked the words out as she held onto the bedclothes as his thrusts became harder. The bed was rocking and the van probably was as well. It would not have taken a genius to work out what was going on. But then geniuses were few and far in the caravan park. The barbeque boys would probably think it was an earthquake or they had drunk too much. Either way it would be doubtful they would leave their barbeque to find out.

"Terrible springs in this van, petal." Murphy's tongue licked over the flesh of her shoulder as his hips pummeled her ass in an effort to make them both come.

"You can always stop moving, wolf man." *And I would burst into tears.* Truro was so close to an explosive orgasm that stopping, while a tease, was not an option.

"Okay." Murphy slapped her ass and stilled both cock and fingers.

"Not now." If that sounded whiny, Truro didn't care. She need fast, friction and hot cock.

"Why not?" Murphy placed soft, sucking kisses along her jawline.

Oh boy. The love thing shot back into her mind. "I want to come."

"With me?"

"No, with the creepy man in van number thirteen."

Murphy pulled both cock and fingers almost from her body. "There will never be anyone else for you than me."

"That's a pretty big call to make, wolf man." Truro wiggled her ass against Murphy to entice him all the way back in.

He slapped her ass once more. "Say it or I can quite easily leave you like this."

"Liar—you want me." Truro knew she was not the only one going up in flames here. When both his cock and fingers left her body, Truro whimpered. *Damn, I need him and he knows it.*

"Say it."

"I want you."

"And?"

Truro groaned loudly in frustration. Her call was mirrored by one of the Ludlum wolves. "Okay, fine. I want only you. Now please fuck me before I burst into tears and then eat a gallon of ice cream."

"Huh?"

"It's almost as good as sex." Truro gasped as once more Murphy filled her.

"You'll never have to turn to ice cream for satisfaction again." Murphy increased his speed, his balls slapping against her ass.

Oh yes. This is my happy place. "Oh, wolf man," she groaned as the orgasm gripped and shook her body. Her knees wobbled and her back arched as she gave in to the wildest feeling of pleasure. She felt every spasm and shudder as Murphy came against her.

"I love you, petal."

Those simple words whispered in her ear gave Truro hope.

"Bloody hell." Truro sat up and ran a hand through her hair. *Why did I do that? Again?* She swung her legs over the edge of the bed. As she did she grabbed for the

sheet to cover her body. "You were supposed to leave town." *Damn it. Why didn't he? Did he say he loved me? Was that heat of the moment? What am I supposed to say to that?*

Murphy pulled the sheet from her hands. "How could I? I needed to see you again. I needed to touch and taste you once more." He grabbed hold of her bare leg to stop her going any farther. "I believe you need me as much as I need you."

"Bullshit." Truro kicked out at him. It was a pretty weak kick as her knees were still wobbly and her body was sated after being full of hot, pounding cock. "I don't need anyone." *Jeez, what part of that didn't he get? Or what part did he get and I didn't?* This was so confusing. "The other night was a one-off." Truro saw the look he gave her. It was one of smug, male satisfaction. It was a pretty damn sexy look. *Focus woman.* "And granted, the moment at the garage was technically a two-off but it was also a farewell fuck."

"Do you really believe that?"

"I have to, wolf man." Truro shouted the words in defiance. Her neat little world was being turned upside down and she wasn't sure how to deal with it.

"Why?"

"Why? Because— Well, crap, I just do."

"So this was technically a three-off fuck."

Truro sighed and stopped struggling. "I don't know." *And why I am kidding myself? I want this man. I very possibly love this man.* "Very possibly" gave her an out in case it all turned pear-shaped and he walked away. Then she could just shrug her shoulder and say "whatever".

"Stop fighting me, petal." Murphy pulled her close against his body.

"I have to."

"Why?"

"I have no idea." It was like fighting the inevitable. It was always going to happen.

* * * * *

Five minutes before midnight Murphy stood and stared at the moon through the window. He had spent what was left of the day following Truro around helping her with her chores at the caravan park and even taking her to the bank. She had made it very clear she did not need his assistance. Murphy had made it equally as clear that he was going to help whether she liked it or not. It was cute watching her pointedly try to ignore him. Whether she like it or not, Murphy was not going to give her a chance to try to shut down and block him out.

Murphy turned to look at the woman in the bed. "I love you," he murmured. The words were soft yet Murphy meant every one of them. Truro was his woman. He had travelled the country searching for his soul mate. When William sent a message to come to Ludlum to join up with the clan, Murphy came as bid. *And I found her.* He wanted to take her in his arms once more and feel their bodies slide slick with sweat as he pumped inside her until she screamed his name. But Truro had been so worn out from working and fighting her feelings that Murphy let her rest.

After they returned to her van, Murphy had gathered her into his arms and lay down under the covers beside Truro, despite her half-hearted protest.

"Petal, I just want to hold you in my arms as we sleep." The open-mouthed look of shock she gave him was comical. "Or we can have sex." They were both fully clothed but for their shoes. It would take little to remove the rest.

"Sleeping is good." Truro had rolled onto her side to ignore him.

Murphy had simply moved in behind her and pulled her back close against his chest. "Just relax."

"You make that impossible," she had mumbled. But before long both of them were asleep.

Murphy had enjoyed the best sleep of his life with Truro wrapped in his arms. And despite her initial hesitation, she had easily turned to him in her sleep and he had willingly given her the comfort of his body. Lying beside Truro gave Murphy a sense of

calmness he had been longing for. It gave him a great feeling of peace that this lonely, wounded woman could trust him enough to surrender to him like this. While sex was one thing, the simple act of being together with no other motive but to give comfort was harder to do. He doubted Truro had allowed herself much comfort in life. William had filled him in on most of what was known of Truro's life. It was not pleasant. Murphy vowed to try to do whatever he had to in order to make her happy for the rest of her life.

"Murphy?"

He smiled at the sound of concern in her sleepy voice. "Yes, petal?"

"Are you okay?"

"Oh yes." Murphy walked back to the bed and looked down at his woman. Her clothes were rumpled, her hair was a mess and she was screwing up her face squinting at him through the darkness. *She is beautiful. She is mine.* As much as he longed to gather Truro into his arms once more and make love to her there was no time and this was a lady that he wanted to savor. "I have to go."

"Why?"

That she wanted him to stay made him almost wish he could defy his calling. "Nature calls."

"I have a bathroom you know."

Murphy chuckled and leaned down to kiss her nose. If his mouth met hers, there was no way he could walk away. "I want to go check out the wolves."

Truro yawned. "Oh right, that nature thingy. Well, be careful. They're wild animals. We saw what happened to Rodney."

It was not the wolves. But that was not a discussion he could have with Truro yet. He needed to speak to William and Gil to find out if there was any more news on who had done the killing. "I will be careful."

"And it's probably cold out there so wear a jacket," she murmured as she rolled back onto her side.

"You're so sweet." That Truro cared about him meant everything to Murphy. *I am home.*

"No, not at all. Because if you die of a chill I won't get payment for the rental."

Despite all the reasons he shouldn't, Murphy leaned in once more and kissed Truro hard. "I adore you."

"Yeah well. Go and do whatever it is you do out there." Truro snuggled deeper into the blankets.

"I will show you one day soon."

Truro snapped one eye open. "Oh God no. I'm not wandering out in the dark to look at feral animals. Now go."

"I'll be back."

"You better be. I need payment."

"You need more than that. You just have to admit it."

Truro grumbled under the covers. "Save me from freaking sensitive New Age men."

Oh yeah, life was going to be good with Truro.

* * * * *

They stood in the moonlight and watched the transformation of man to wolf.

Tavernier was horrified. "That is the most fucking grotesque thing I have ever seen. Do you think these women realize who they are sleeping with?"

"They wouldn't care. People in love only see beauty in their lover." Absolon once knew that feeling. That was before William took away any chance of happiness he had and left him with the bitter, driving need for revenge. *I am an old man but I am not useless. William will pay. I have waited years for retribution.* "We can use this caravan park

woman." By herself she was nothing special but she did have one use. She would be protected by the clan from now on. She could be used as leverage to get what he wanted.

"Her? How? She's no better than the Scott woman—actually she is less so for she has no power."

"Oh, but she does." But Absolon wasn't about to let this man know any more than he needed to. The woman called Simpson was a friend of William's woman. Added to that, the Irishman was more powerful than Absolon initially thought. That had taken him unawares. He was so focused on the Destroyer's descendant and the probability of Montague trying to mate with Joan Scott that he had almost not seen the Irishman was the next leader of the clan. The Simpson woman was the wild card. The lowly van park employee had more power than he suspected. Absolon could see the Irishman taking William's place when he passed. Not even a werewolf lived forever. The Irishman loved this woman. That weakened him. Weaken the clan and their attack is not as strong. *I will win this last round, William.*

"What now?" Tavernier looked at his employer in confusion.

It was so hard working with someone who had no imagination. "We stir up trouble."

"How?"

"The townspeople are worried about the wolves. We give them something to really worry about." Before Tavernier had time to react, Absolon reached into his overcoat pocket and pulled out a long-bladed, rake-like weapon that had five razor-sharp prongs. He slashed the blades at Tavernier tearing through clothes and flesh. Blood spurted through the deep cuts in his arms and chest as he tried to defend himself.

Tavernier fell to the ground bleeding profusely. "What are you doing? Are you mad?"

Absolon looked down at his handiwork. It was just enough not to raise suspicion but sufficiently gory to horrify the locals as he dragged his colleague back into town. "You've been attacked by a wolf. I think the locals need to go hunting."

Chapter Four

"Bess!" Truro was amazed to see the older woman. Her last visit down from the mountains had been almost four months ago. "How are you?" Truro constantly wondered how this seventy-year-old woman managed to look as fit and as spry as she did. She lived in a remote location alone. To Truro's knowledge she had no help at all and yet Bess seemed none the worse for any of it. In fact she looked pretty good in her faded jeans and flannelette shirt. The only sign of her age was the curly gray hair she had bundled up on the top of her head.

"I've come to see how you are." Bess dumped her backpack on the ground at her feet.

That was typical of Bess. She was always caring for others. "Oh, muddling along." *I am having amazing sex with a hunk of man and can't stop thinking about him – but other than that just swell.* Like Bess would want to know that. "Wanna check the books?" Truro asked, hoping she would say no as she always did. Truro was a terrible record keeper. While she made sure everyone paid on time and followed the caravan park rules, she was lax in recording the details. The most she managed each couple of days was filling out a bank deposit slip and banking the money in Bess' account.

"No, I'm sure you're doing a good job." Bess moved over and sat down on one of the split post-and-rail beams that were fashioned to make a seat. "I want to talk to you."

Truro felt a sudden shiver shoot down her spine. "Oh yeah?" She crossed her legs and sat down in one fluid move on the grass beside Bess.

"It's about the wolves."

"Yeah—what is it with them? They seem louder and closer this year." Not that it scared Truro. She just couldn't fathom why she was more aware of them this year than in the past.

Bess nodded her head in confirmation. "They are closer but there's no need to be frightened. They won't harm anyone."

"They're wild animals, Bess." As an ex-city girl, Truro was no expert on anything with four legs. But anything that had a mind of its own and could not be controlled was something to be wary of. "Rodney was killed by one."

"Yes, they are—but they're not." The older woman's eyes were intense and bright. "And something else killed Rodney. Most likely his own greedy and ignorant heart."

"O-kay." There were times with Truro wondered if Gil and Bess were related. Each had the ability to look at you as if searching your soul.

"What was he even doing in Ludlum?" Bess looked at her with concern.

"Well, he's probably between girlfriends and looking for a warm body to slide into." *He would be damn wrong if he thought it would have been me.* If he had even suggested it to her, Truro may just have tried taking him out herself. She looked at the older woman with interest. "It's not that I'm not glad to see you, Bess, but I'm wondering what's going on." She had the look of a woman who had something on her mind.

"I want to tell you something but I want you to remain open-minded, my dear."

To Truro's way of thinking that was never a good way to start a discussion. It usually meant it was going to be something she didn't want to hear. "I always am, Bess."

"Yes." The older woman nodded her gaze shrewd on Truro. "But this will test you. Tell me, what do you know about werewolves?"

Whatever Truro thought Bess was going to say it hadn't been that. "Um—well, only what I see in late night television when I can't sleep. They hang out with Dracula and Frankenstein. They are generally in need of a shave and they tend to terrorize people. I think it's because of the no shaving thing. Stubble rash can be a killer." Truro knew. Her skin was red and blotchy from the ardent kisses Murphy had placed on her body. Just thinking of him made her wet.

Bess snorted in derision. "That's Hollywood. I mean real werewolves."

Real werewolves? Wow. Bess needs to come into town more. "Well gee, Bess, I can't say I've met one. Have you?" That would be something. Werewolves in Ludlum. That would set the town on its ear. It would be bigger than when someone who looked like George Clooney passed through town driving a cattle truck.

"Yes."

Right. The word "dementia" shot into Truro's mind. Maybe Bess being alone in the woods wasn't a good thing. Although Bess had always appeared capable to Truro, she was now beginning to wonder about the state of the older woman's mind. It had to be lonely at the old homestead. Truro had only been there twice at Bess' invitation. Each time she knew in her heart she was a city girl and that scenery belonged on postcards. "Bess, I think maybe you should move back in here with me." Although Truro had no family of her own, she considered Bess to be the closest to that she had. Besides, she wanted to help the woman who had given her a job and a home and a new start in life. Truro owed Bess that.

The older woman reached down and gripped Truro's shoulder. "It's important you listen to me, Tru. What I'm about to say effects your destiny."

For a woman Truro had been worrying about getting older and more fragile, Bess had a powerful grip on her shoulder. "My destiny?" Truro rarely thought beyond what to eat for dinner. Destiny sounded ominous and like it needed planning. Truro didn't plan. She stumbled and fell into things and made out as best as she could.

"Yes, your destiny." Bess' gaze never left hers. "The stranger who has come to you. Tell me about him."

While Truro knew that gossip was an art form in Ludlum, Bess didn't strike her as being an advocate of it. Besides, Truro doubted anyone had seen her with Murphy. Though there was that meeting at the diner and the moment yesterday in the van. *Hmmm.* "We get lots of strangers staying at the van park, Bess. You know that." Truro decided it was best to act vague until she knew more about what Bess knew. Besides the

caravan park was halfway between Brisbane and the whale watching tourist spot of Hervey Bay. People often stayed over in transit. Bess could be talking about anyone.

"The one who has touched you, Tru."

Okay, well that narrowed the field down to Murphy.

"Well Bess, the thing is—" Truro wasn't about to explain her sex life to anyone. However, she didn't want to hurt her friend.

"Not just your body but your heart."

"I don't have one of those." That was Truro's usual response. It was the line of defense she hid behind. If you believed something enough then eventually it made it true. Besides, hearts got you in trouble. It was better not to acknowledge one.

"Don't be flippant," Bess snapped in irritation. "Look girl, I know what you think. I used to be like you. I hid from that which I did not want to feel."

This was unusual. Bess never got irritated. Added to that, while they talked, neither had ventured too deeply into personal territory. Sure, Bess knew vague details on Truro's life but not enough to make it awkward for Truro. To her, pity was pitiful at the best of times. "Bess, I—"

"Why did you come to Ludlum?"

Truro looked up at Bess. "You know why. I ran out of money and the car broke down." The fruit-picking season was over so Ludlum seemed as good a place as any. When Bess offered her the job it seemed crazy to turn it down. Truro had a car to repair and some cash to bankroll until she made a decision where to head next.

"It's been two years, Tru. Why did you stay?"

"I—" Truro stopped and thought about that. There was no answer that came instantly to mind. Her car was fixed and she had stashed some money aside for emergencies. *So why am I still here?* It was hardly her scene. A small town surrounded by bush. Sure fruit picking was located in the country but she never stayed in any one small town for any length of time. Normally as soon as the season ended she went back

to Brisbane and worked as a waitress or bartender. Had it really been two years? It was the longest she had stayed anywhere. The time seemed to go so fast. "I really don't know." The sudden lonely sound of a wolf caught and held in the air. A shiver ran up Truro's spine. Wolves. Werewolves. Truro was not a great believer in coincidence. "I've never heard them during the day."

"There is a reason you are meant to be here now at this time."

Truro shook herself. Maybe this was a wake up call. Maybe it was time to move on. "Are you okay?" Bess would be only person she would really miss. Her mind went to Murphy. It wasn't like he was going to say around anyway. Falling for someone just passing through was madness.

"Yes, but I need you to focus, Tru." She patted the seat beside her and beckoned Truro to join her. "I know what you're thinking. You think I've lost my marbles."

Truro sat beside her old friend. "Well, that would, of course, be rude to say."

"But you think it." Bess smiled. "I always liked you, Tru. From the minute I saw you I knew you belonged in Ludlum."

"I was kicking my car's tires and swearing when you saw me."

"But you did it with passion."

Yep, give me something to kick and I will kick the crap out of it. "So what's going on, Bess? You rarely make a trip into town." It had to be something important.

Bess reached over and took her hand. "Do you believe in fate?"

"Um, no. Stuff just happens and you go with it."

"Soul mates?"

"Greeting card philosophy to make people search pathetically for 'the one'? That would be another no." Yet, as she thought it Murphy's face instantly sprang into Truro's mind.

Bess shook her head in mock reproach. "You're not as cynical and tough as you make out, you know."

"You know if you tell anyone that I'll have to kill you." Like most people, Truro had developed a shell-like layer that kept her safe from being hurt. It was not something she was about to abandon any time soon. And yes, some people like Bess, and now Murphy, could see through it but her private, deepest thoughts remained her own. "So, you have something to tell me."

"It's about the wolves."

"And werewolves apparently." Truro grinned at her friend. It was not everyday that someone mentioned that particular creature. "You haven't been mixing up your blue pills with your orange pills again, have you?"

"I know what you're thinking. It's what I thought fifty years ago when I was told the truth."

"The truth?" Again Truro heard the cry of the wolf. "Do you have them trained to do that on cue?" The small, secretive smile Bess gave her raised the hair on the back of her neck. "Bess?" *Lordy, she wasn't playing with wolves as pets, was she?*

"About the werewolves—and don't look at me like I'm mad—they exist. Do you ever wonder why I live so far out of town?"

"Well I just figured you were—"

"Crazy?" Bess laughed yet her eyes were clear and focused as she looked at the younger woman. "In some ways I am."

"No, I was going to say you had your reasons and I don't believe in questioning what other people do."

"But you question what you do?"

"Well, I do some very dumb things." Like have sex with Murphy. Like falling in love with Murphy. While it was excellent, it did not smack of longevity. *Not that I'm looking for happily ever after.*

"Would you like to stop tying yourself in knots like that?" Bess' eyes were shrewd on hers. "Do you want to be at peace?"

This was starting to get too deep and meaningful for Truro. "You've not come to sell me something out of a catalogue or something to bring order into my life? You haven't been taken in by a plastic container or make-up cult and now you want me to become one of you?" Truro had sold some of that stuff door-to-door for about an hour until one person told her it was a load of crap and she had to agree.

"I need you to be serious."

"About werewolves apparently." How does one do that when they don't exist? The sudden howling of wolves sent a chill down her back. *Spooky how they do that on cue.*

"Yes." Bess's eyes were locked on hers.

Truro felt the sudden urge to look up. *Murphy.* He was walking toward them. A wild thrill of hunger shot through her body. *He is mine.* Truro saw the look he and Bess exchanged. It was one of deep knowledge and also a kind of intimacy that made Truro jealous. *I want to be the only one he looks at like that.* She shook her herself. *Get a grip. Like I'm going to scratch Bess' eyes out for looking at a gorgeous man.* "Do you two know each other?"

"Sort of," Bess responded.

"Somewhat," Murphy added with a nod.

Vague and noncommittal. Truro was excellent at that. *What were they hiding?* He was a drifter and she was a loner. One had lived in Ludlum for a couple of years. The other was in transit. "What's going on?"

Bess sighed. "She isn't ready to hear the truth."

"What truth?" Truro stood up and demanded.

Murphy nodded at Bess. "Soon she will be."

"She? I am standing right here."

"Yes, petal." Murphy reached out a hand to her.

Truro pulled away. If he touched her she wouldn't be able to think. "What truth?" she repeated.

Bess raised herself up. "I'll be ready to answer the questions you will have."

Truro looked from one to the other. "Questions?"

"You know where to find me, Murphy." Bess turned to Truro. "I'll be back in a day or so to Tru. Promise me you'll remain open-minded."

"What?" Truro was more confused than ever.

Murphy picked up her hand and linked their fingers together. "Problem?"

"Who are you people?" This was not normal conversation that people had. This was strange, shades of gray words which meant nothing to anyone but those who spoke it.

"Just people."

"Bullshit. Bess was trying to discuss werewolves as if it's a normal thing and then you rock up and she goes all quiet." Truro's eyes searched his. While she saw no lies, she knew Murphy was hiding something.

"What's that about? I know you two have something going on."

Murphy lifted her hand and kissed it. "My heart belongs to you, petal."

"Ha — frigging — ha."

Murphy smiled at her. "So you don't believe in them?"

"Hearts? Nope." *I stopped believing in them to until you made mine beat so fast.*

"Oh, hearts exist, as do werewolves."

Once again a wolf howled. "Jeez, that's getting annoying." It was almost as if nature was having a laugh at her.

"I believe every myth has a basis in truth."

Truro rolled her eyes. "Werewolves? Nope. Some men acting with the sensitivity of feral animals — yes — that I would believe."

"All men are not alike, petal."

"No." Truro had to concede that. The man who held her hand was beautiful inside and out and she had not noticed true male beauty in a long time.

"As for werewolves it's more about a primal instinct and being who you are meant to be."

"A man who turns into a wolf?" *News at eleven.*

Murphy was undeterred by her skepticism. "A powerful being belonging to a family who makes you stronger and at peace."

It was a nice thought but not something Truro had experience in. "Well I've never been powerful unless under the influence of hormones and chocolate and I haven't had a family for a long time and even then it wasn't peaceful."

Murphy massaged her thumb against her flesh. "I'm sorry."

Truro shrugged her shoulders. "Anyway, whatever." Things happened and you moved on stronger than before. Dwelling on what you could not have made you weak. "I get you're into the nature thing but werewolves are from Hollywood, wolf man." Even as she said the words, Truro's mind went to the tattoo on his chest. Coincidence was an amazing thing. But it was just that. Coincidence.

"What if I said werewolves were real and I was one?"

"Thank God you're so pretty because you're no comedian."

"It's the truth." Murphy's words were quiet yet strong.

"Pardon me while I laugh my ass off—actually that would be good I would like to lose some pounds." Thoughts of her ass against his thighs shot into her mind. An instant rush of wet heat pooled between her legs.

Murphy pulled her toward him. "You have a great ass." His hands dropped down to cover it.

"You just want in." *Please.*

"You want me in."

Oh yes. Truro leaned back. "Show me your teeth." Murphy bared them. "You've got an overbite." It was sexy. "But it doesn't make you a werewolf."

"I can see I'm going to have to prove it to you."

"How?" Was there a membership card to werewolf-dom? And why was it so important she believed this crazy tale? Murphy didn't need to come across any more exciting than he was. Truro was already hooked.

"At the right time and place." Murphy cupped her ass. "Jump up and wrap your legs around me."

"I never jump." As fitness went the most Truro could manage was a fast walk.

"Humor me."

"Why?"

"I want to fuck you fast and hard and give you something to think about all day long," Murphy whispered against her ear.

Truro immediately jumped into his arms. "I don't think that van can take another earth-shaking moment."

Murphy's eyes locked with hers. "Did I shake your world?" He started carrying her off toward the trees.

From the moment you walked into my life. "Where are we going?" Not that it mattered. All she could feel was the promise of rigid cock and a hard, male body.

"Back to nature."

"I'm not good with nature. Once I ran into this huge spider's nest and I screamed and screamed until Gil came and removed it from my hair." Truro shuddered at the thought of it. "Gil told me I was a wuss."

Murphy laughed at her words. "That sounds like Gil."

"You know Gil as well?" What was going on? Murphy had been in town for a couple of days and yet he was more of a local than she was.

"I know him somewhat."

Right. The “somewhat” thing again. Her feet touched the ground as Murphy lowered her. His hands were fast on her body as he started to remove her clothes. “You a little desperate there, fella?” It was exciting to have someone need her so much.

“Every moment from you kills me.”

Truro reached over and unzipped his fly. His cock sprang out in gratitude. “Not everything is dead.” Truro was naked before she knew what was happening. “Why am I naked and you’re not?”

“Feeling vulnerable?” Murphy pushed her up against a tree.

The papery bark of the gum tree tickled her back and ass. “Yes.”

“Good.” His hand reached into his pocket, his cock bobbed and swayed awaiting action.

“How is that good, wolf man?” *And am I turning into a complete slut just at the thought of this man’s cock inside me? And if so, is that a bad thing?*

“Because it shows the real you, petal.” Murphy found the condom he was looking for and made short work of covering his cock.

Truro knew she could have said “no” at any time with Murphy but it wasn’t a word that came naturally to her lips with him. “What? Desperate?”

Murphy closed the distance between them. “Yes, I want you as helpless with need for me as I am for you.” His hands caught hers and held them above her head as he started to kiss her.

As primitive as it was to be naked in the bush and under the control of this man, it was also sensual and sweet due to the loving kisses he placed on her mouth. Murphy’s lips slid and sucked, nipped and devoured hers making Truro want him with a hunger she was unaware she possessed. He kissed her for what seemed like hours. Truro didn’t care who may see them or what they would think. There was only her and Murphy and kisses that drugged her senses yet begged for a completion that only he could give her.

Truro pulled down her hands and tore at his shirt, needing to touch his skin, see his tattoo and feel the heat of his body against hers.

Truro broke off the kiss when she caught sight of the long scratch down the side of his body. "Oh crap, did I do that last time?" The thought she had hurt him bit into her.

Murphy lifted her into his arms, pressing her back against the tree. "It's of no consequence."

"It is if I hurt you." Truro jumped up and wrapped her legs around his waist ready to meet his thrust. *I need him. I want him. And God help me, I love him.*

"It wasn't you, petal." Murphy guided the head of his cock into her wet vagina.

Truro sighed as the length of his shaft plunged into her, filling her up and making her forget about anything but the two of them. "You make me feel —"

"What, petal?" His mouth teased her lips as his hips bucked against hers in a slow, rhythmic pace.

"Like I belong." That was a feeling Truro had never felt until Murphy.

"You belong to me as I do to you," Murphy growled in a low voice of possession. His thrusts became deeper and harder.

It was impossible to stop the scream that tore from her lips as the rush of orgasm spread through her body, making her shake and pant with need and fulfillment. "I love you, wolf man." Truro stiffened as she realized what she had said. Her eyes locked with his and she knew there was no way she could deny what she had said. *This is meant to be.*

"Thank you." Murphy kissed her hard as his release made her body bump and thrust against his. It was primal and passionate and each held onto the other, not wanting to let go. "I will never get enough of you."

* * * * *

Two hours later

"Another man was attacked." Gil was grim-faced as he delivered the news. "They are sending out men with guns to kill the wolves."

William sighed tiredly. "We cannot relocate now. It is too close to the time of the clan's full coming together. The circle has not been completed yet." There was still Truro to commit to Murphy and Gil had gotten nowhere with the dark woman in town.

"What choice do we have?" Gil didn't look happy that he had to say the words.

Murphy shook his head. "We stay and we hold our ground." He turned to William. "Is it Absolon?"

William looked at the younger man and felt relief. This was their next leader. The clan would be in good hands.

"Yes. I feel it in my bones." They were old but they had seen and endured much and only one man had ever made William feel as he was feeling now. "But we're not just fighting him. Now it will also be the town against us."

"They can't shoot at night," Gil pointed out.

"They can with spotlights," Murphy countered back.

William was still leader. *And I will save my clan.* "We go carefully in the night and move everyone to the farthest part away from town. Down near the old mines we will find safety."

Murphy nodded. "How do we find Absolon?"

"He will find us when he's ready." William had no doubt of that. "He doesn't expect the locals will be successful in killing us. He wants to scatter and divide the clan and hope one of the locals will take the odd potshot and kill a few wolves."

"He will never succeed in that," Murphy declared. "I will see him dead first."

Chapter Five

"I want to hire a van."

Truro looked at the man who was limping toward her. Tall with gray hair and dressed in a fine leather overcoat and well-cut trousers. He could not have looked less like a van park resident if he tried. The long-term inhabitants who called the Rambling Rose home were generally dressed in torn jeans, flannelette shirts and some heavy metal band t-shirt. It didn't matter which rock god adorned the shirt. They all looked alike. The odd tourist who stopped by on their way to Brisbane was usually a blend of chain store chic and tourist stand couture. This man was neither. He clearly had money. So why was he wanting to stay in a seen-better-days caravan park?

"What are you staring at?" the man asked in a hard voice.

Am I that obvious? "Well you just don't look the van sort." Nor the Red Kangaroo. Actually what the hell he was doing out in the middle of nowhere was the question.

"I want to rough it for a while."

"I see." Trendy urbanite wanting to play trailer trash for a while. Well, what the hell. It was his fantasy and Truro was happy to take his cash. "I have one van left but—"

"I'll take it."

"It's not glamorous but I guess if you want to 'rough it'..." Truro looked him up and down. "You know, those are not really 'roughing it' clothes."

The man bristled in defense. "I have to purchase some yet."

"Sure you do." Step one: purchase rough clothes. Step two: eat beans out of a can. Step three: learn how to belch like a commoner. Truro knew the sort. He probably had some strange idea that he was going to find himself in the simple life. She sighed and

headed into the office to do the paperwork and get the keys. "So what do you plan to do in Ludlum?" Once you got drunk at the Red Kangaroo and had seen the 1967 photo of the monster fish caught down at the Ludlum waterhole there wasn't much to do in town.

"Just check out the local color."

"Well, we've got that." The last van for rental was beside the barbeque boys and their language and antics would be plenty colorful.

The sudden sound of the wolves once more echoed around Ludlum. Truro saw the man grimace. "You don't like wolves?" It was strange, more and more, they were active during the day. In the past it was only at night. While Truro was yet to see one up close, she wasn't keen to see them wander into the van park.

"They're vermin."

"Well, some nitwit imported them here from America and we're stuck with them. Sort of like *The Simpsons*. They are continuously there on the television because someone thought it was a good idea."

"They should be hunted."

"They're cartoon characters." Truro snorted as she pulled open a drawer to find the keys to the last van. "Though, when you think about how annoying they are—"

The man snatched the keys from her hand. "The wolves."

"Oh yeah, them. Do you have a hunter's license?" If he was here to hunt, Truro would have to tell Gil. In an unofficial capacity Gil looked after the local wildlife. The last thing they needed was some townie coming out and shooting up the place. "You know, folks around here are kind of fond of the wolves. I don't know why but if it makes 'em happy then that's all that matters." Truro was a live-and-let-live person.

"Happiness is vastly overrated."

"Yep, I'd have to agree with that." Truro took his money and scribbled off a receipt. "But it's not up to me to judge what others need."

* * * * *

Truro spent the next couple of hours looking up werewolves on the internet. While she loved and admired Bess, Truro knew it was crazy to take her words seriously. Yet Murphy seemed to be caught up in the whole werewolf thing as well. *I am a werewolf.* "Sure you are and I'm really twenty pounds lighter than I say I am," Truro mumbled to herself her fingers clicked over the computer keyboard owned by the Ludlum Library.

What started out as a vague interest to see what Bess and Murphy were talking about soon became more. Truro was quite surprised at how quickly she became caught up in reading werewolf mythology. Or in this case mythologies. Everyone had a different interpretation of werewolves from the hairy-faced schlock horror film characters, to bloodthirsty killers terrorizing a town, to soulful men looking for their true love. Truro stopped and thought about that. It sounded like Murphy. "Or maybe I just need to get out more and not have my head turned so easily by sex." Her fingers skittered across the keys in search of more information. "But damn, it was bloody good sex." She closed her eyes and crossed her legs as she thought up the surge of power that was Murphy as he took control over her heart and body and made her his own.

"Falling asleep in the library instead of at work, Tru?"

Truro looked up to see the amusement in Gil's eyes. "No, really, if anyone tells you you're not funny, don't believe it."

"You're adorable."

Truro grinned. "I know."

Gil sat down beside her. "Anyone new at the caravan park?"

"Well gee, Gil, I suspect you already know the answer to that if you're here to pump me for info."

"Did I mention you're also smart?"

Truro turned her attention to her friend. She could see something was worrying him. Truro had heard about the second wolf attack. She knew some of the local men planned on hunting the wolves. Truro had a feeling Gil, nature lover that he was,

would be worried about what else they shot in the bush. "There's a new guy in van eleven. He doesn't like the wolves."

"He a hunter?"

He's a predator. Gut instinct told her that. The man seemed to watch everyone and everything. He even freaked the barbeque boys out and that in itself was unusual for they cornered the market on all things odd. "He says not nor is he from around here. He sticks out like a sore thumb."

"As do you."

"Oh come on, Gillard. I've been here two freaking years. I'm a local." *Sorta. Kinda. Oh hell, I never fit in anywhere.* That was why Truro kept on moving. Until now. *And why was that?* Visions of Murphy came to her.

"A local who chooses not to go farther than the edge of town." Gil gave her a playful nudge.

I'll have you know I was fucked up against a tree and I loved it. Too much information. "Well, animals lurk in the bush." If Murphy had not literally taken her there Truro would not have gone by herself.

"This is all because you ran into the spider's nest nearly two years ago."

Truro punched him on the shoulder. "Well, it was freakin' huge. It could have eaten me whole."

Gil snorted. "It ran away."

"That's not the point. Scary things lurk in the bush and my feet prefer concrete." She thought back to the new man in town. "I suspect the old guy in number eleven is not a bush dweller either."

"How old is he?"

Truro blew out a sigh. "I don't know. Mid-seventies and he walks with a limp."

This caught Gil's attention. "A limp?"

"Why?"

"No reason."

"Seems a lot of people are getting pretty vague around town when I ask questions."

"Like who?"

"You and Bess and Murphy." Truro noticed Gil didn't blink when she mentioned Murphy's name. *So Gil knows him as well. What is going on?* Had a secret club formed and she had missed out on membership? "So you know Murphy?"

"We've crossed paths."

"Uh-huh." Truro knew she would get no further information from Gil as he was sphinx-like unless it suited him. "Got all the research done you wanted?"

"Yes, thanks." Gil reached over and tweaked her nose affectionately. "Anyone ever tell you you're cute?"

"Bugger off, Gillard."

* * * * *

"Have you seen him?"

"No but it may not be him." Gil pointed out to William. "Truro gave a description of a stranger that could be just about anyone."

"A seventy-year-old man with a limp? Ha! I think not, Gil. That's Absolon." William knew in his heart it was so. It was just like Absolon to hide in plain sight like this. *He's taunting me.* "The clan is uneasy. They feel it too."

Gil nodded. "Yes. Initially, I thought it was to do with the coming of the next fifty year change."

"I agree with William. That man is Absolon and I'm not happy he has chosen to stay at the caravan park." Murphy's hand clenched into fists. "He has come back when we are weakest."

"Yes, he wants me." That was only too obvious to William.

"But why not just come at you and get this battle over and done with?" Gil questioned. "Why be at the van park just waiting?"

Murphy's shoulders stiffened. "Because he wants us to know he knows who Truro is and her importance to the clan."

William was not surprised Murphy had worked that out. While it was not openly acknowledged, everyone knew Murphy would be the next leader and the leader's mate was always his weakness.

"Then he would know about Joan." Gil did not look the slightest bit happy.

"Yes." There was no point trying to pretty the words up. Both men's women were targets, as Bess had been all those years ago. William thought for a while. "The woman—Joan—she is unusual. There is something about her I cannot put a finger on." It was disquieting to feel that way. Knowing yet not knowing.

"Apparently, Joan Scott hunts paranormal beings. I tried to ask her more; however, she just fobbed me off like it was a joke. She doesn't seem to like me much."

"Oh but she does, Gil." William remembered when Bess had been like that. Bess had surrendered to the inevitable as all true loves did. "She's fighting it. All the best women do. It's all about independence."

Gil shook his head. "I would never take that from her."

"I know but some people fear losing themselves when they fall in love." *How well I remember the fight Bess put up.* William cleared his throat. He needed to focus and not reminisce. "About Joan and the mention of her hunting the supernatural." Was she to be more of a foe than a friend? Those who hunted the paranormal were often a force to be reckoned with. That she was a woman made it even worse. Unlike most men, William had a wary understanding of the true strength of women.

"I thought it was cute," Gil responded with a smile.

"What do you know about her?" *And will she turn on us?* "Truro, we know." But this Scott woman's appearance was almost too sudden. Add to that the fact that Absolon was in town and it made William all the more careful.

"You think they are connected?" Murphy's voice indicated he understood straight away. "You need to speak to her, Gil."

He sighed. "She doesn't seem too keen on chatting to me."

Murphy chuckled. "I'm sure you have your ways."

"I sense no evil in her, William."

"No, but sometimes people are thrust into evil without their knowledge."

Gil made a move. "I cannot allow her to be hurt. I will talk to her now."

"And I will go speak to Absolon." William did not doubt for a minute he was the man at the caravan park. *I will destroy you this time.* The clan depended on it.

* * * * *

"Hey," Joan Scott called out to Truro as she came out of the small supermarket that all the locals frequented.

"Hey yourself, Lara Croft." Truro had to smile when she saw the woman dressed in black. While Truro was a great fan of black looking slimming, she wasn't into the whole black hair, nails, boots, pants and shirt. It was gothic and sort of funny on such a small, chubby woman. She spied the leather scabbard at her side. That was unusual even for a Goth. "Pretty fancy knife holder you've got there." *Who the hell walked around with a knife? Who needed one? Who was this chick?*

Joan came to stand, hands on hips, before Truro. "It's a make-up holder."

"Uh-huh." *Bullshit.* "I bet you carry you a deadly shade of lipstick in there."

"Kiss to kill? What a quaint mind you have. It must be from living in Hooterville. Anyway, let's cut the girly chat. I want to talk to you about something specific."

Truro had to admit she admired the whole attitude thing. Not many women could carry that off as well. "Oh yeah? What about?" Town gossip was this woman was some weird psychic babe. Of course that's what the barbeque boys had told Truro but then they had told everyone that aliens often came every second Tuesday to eat burnt sausages with them, so their words were not exactly gospel.

"You've been here a while."

Truro dropped her two shopping bags on the ground. She had an idea this woman was not someone who could be easily fobbed off. "Not that long. About two years." *Good grief, even her eyes are black. And black eyeliner? So nineties.*

Joan flicked her shoulder-length raven-black hair from her shoulders as if it annoyed her. "That's long enough. About the wolves—"

"What about them?" *And is this chick going to venture down the werewolf track as well?*

"Would you say they are unusually more active?"

Truro raised her eyebrows. "What is it with everyone being interested in wolves?"

"Who's everyone?"

Truro wasn't about to tell her. *Let her work it out herself.* She couldn't put her finger on it but the woman irritated Truro. "Why do you want to know?" Are you a hunter?" *If so we have enough of our own local shoot-'em-up people here.*

"Why do you ask?"

"You're dressed weird." Why not call a spade a shovel?

"How so?"

Answering a question with a question. Truro admired that. "You look like Lara Croft."

"Maybe she looks like me."

Oh yeah, there was attitude there. It was exactly the same answer Truro would have given. *Oh, that's why she irritates me. She's like me.*

"I heard you talking about wolves."

Both women turned to see Gil. Joan stiffened visibly. Truro was amused. *So, Lara Croft is scared of someone.* The look she gave Gil was one of bravado mixed with fear. *It's probably how I look at Murphy. I want to be tough but my resolve just disappears under his hot, sexy gaze. Mmmm, Murphy.* Where was he? Truro pulled her thoughts back to the present. "I know nothing about wolves other than that they have four legs, fur and they do that howling at the moon thing."

"Are you sure?" Joan avoided looking at Gil and focused Truro.

"I'm positive about that, Lara."

"My name is Joan."

Oh yeah. Gil had his work cut out with this woman. "My apologies. I have stuff to do." She didn't but Truro didn't want to be hanging around like a fifth wheel. She picked up her bags and moved off.

"I still want to talk to you," Joan called out.

"I know nothing," Truro yelled back.

"I doubt that."

* * * * *

"I knew it would not take you long to find me, William."

"Absolon." William was neither shocked nor surprised. He had been waiting for this moment for fifty years. Old enemies held a grudge and did not die easily.

"You have aged." Absolon stood on unsteady feet.

William was aware like most men that what they lacked in one area, like strength, they made up for in another. Absolon had always been a tall man. William had never been intimidated by that but he understood his old foe needed to look like he was coming from a position of strength. "As have you, Absolon." If he was a different person, William may have felt sorry for him but all he felt was contempt. Absolon had come perilously close to destroying everyone William loved and believed in five

decades ago. As Absolon held a grudge, so did William. Fifty years seemed only like yesterday. Hatred and revenge always remained fresh.

"You made old age worse for me." Absolon's fist clenched, his pale blue eyes filled with anger.

"You shouldn't have tried to take what was not yours." If he had let them live in peace then neither man would have had a burning need to kill the other back then or now.

"How is Bess?"

That this creature ever thought he had a chance with someone as sweet as Bess still amazed William. While opposites did attract, evil had no constant lovers. "Safe."

Absolon smiled. "No one is ever safe, William."

William smiled back. There was no humor in it. He was mirroring his enemy until Absolon made his move. "Even think of harming Bess and I will kill you." *I will kill you anyway but touching Bess would guarantee it would not be an easy death.*

"I know you will try." Absolon shrugged his shoulders in dismissal.

"I will succeed."

"William, you are weaker than you were. I see the passing of time has changed you. While your words are strong we both know only one of us will win this battle. And now with the clan reshaping as it does every fifty years, I know you are weaker than you have ever been."

That was true. To allow others in, barriers had to be dropped and need given preference to strength. "We are strong." William knew that even with the changes that were happening if the clan held firm and together, they could defeat anything or anyone.

"You'll need to be."

"Why?" William knew he would get no answer to his question but he had to ask. The longer he kept Absolon talking, the more chance he could determine his next move.

Like everyone, Absolon gave out nonverbal clues. His body trembled and his breath was labored. He was not carrying out his plans by himself. William could see he was too weak for that.

"I can't divulge everything straight away, William. How boring would that be?"

"I know you killed that man and wounded the other one."

Absolon smiled. "Are they hunting you like the animals you are?"

Not yet. So far the clan was safe and hidden near the mines. Only he, Murphy and Gil were in any risk being so close to town. But they remained careful when the time came to shift into their other form. "The woman in town —"

"Miss Scott? Yes I brought her here." Absolon allowed him that information. "And no, she doesn't know the full reason or even who she really is."

William felt the icy shaft of fear that shot through him. *Who she really is?* There were a handful of demons and hunters who hated werewolves. Some held a grudge. Others just liked the thrill of the chase. Who was she? "Why her?"

Absolon tapped his nose. "Because of her ancestry. Blood will out, William."

He had spent enough time with Absolon. William knew what he needed to know. Nothing had changed. He had to kill Absolon or risk everything he loved. "Touch anyone I love and the pain I once inflicted on you will be nothing compared to the hell I will put you through."

Absolon just smiled. "Go run with your pack while you still can."

* * * * *

Truro ran into full bore into Murphy as he came out of the camping goods store. The hot contact of his body against hers made Truro close her eyes and think about the last time they were up close and personal.

Murphy's arms steadied her. "Are you okay, petal?"

Truro opened her eyes to see the amusement in his. *Oh for God's sake snap out of it woman. He's just a man you have the most amazing, unforgettable sex with. Be cool. Be calm.*

"Er—um, I, ah," Truro mumbled as she pushed away from him. *Oh yeah, smooth, Truro.* "Going camping?" When in doubt state the bleeding obvious. "Are you moving out of the caravan park?" The thought that he might smacked at her hard. *What did I do wrong?*

"I think its best."

Truro shrugged her shoulders as if she didn't care what Murphy did. "Sure, Whatever. Go for it." *It's not like I'm going to sit and cry over you.*

"I came here for a specific reason." Murphy reached down to take her bags.

Truro had the perverse need to hold on to them. Why? Maybe it had to do with being seen as capable and not needy. "Oh right, the whole nature thing." *I cannot compete with Mother Nature. She has the whole Earth under her control. Like I can keep one man from her.*

"That's right."

Truro got the feeling she was in the way of a man who had plans. "Well, let me know when you're moving out."

"Why?" Murphy reached out to touch her arm.

Truro side stepped him. *Touch me now and I will beg you to stay.* "I need to rent the van out."

"No other reason?"

"What could there be?" Truro looked at him as calmly as she was able to. She wondered if he remembered that she blurted out she loved him. Or, was he like a lot of men? Did they just expect a woman to feel so grateful for an orgasm that a declaration of love was like a condom? Something that was expected but not always used or believed in?

"If I asked you to come camping with me, would you?"

Yes. No. Camping? Oh puke. "I would rather stick a needle in my eye." *Sweet man. Great body. Shame about the camping thing.* "I hate the great outdoors."

"I seem to remember a moment when—"

"I'm a city girl." And while making love against a tree had been fantastic it did not compare to a mattress within four walls.

"Ludlum is not the city." Murphy grinned at her.

Lord, he was always smiling. There has to be something wrong with that. Or am I comical to him? "Yeah well I'm in transit."

"For two years?"

Why did everyone keep pointing that out to her? "I ran out of money." It was not really an excuse that applied any more. Truro had enough money to move on. *So why don't I?*

"Uh-huh."

Truro's eye narrowed. "You doubt me? Why would I stay?"

"Maybe there's a reason for you to be here," Murphy suggested, his eyes never leaving hers.

Sometimes Truro swore he could see right into her soul. "Or maybe I just have nowhere better to go." She'd had this same discussion with Bess.

"You know in your heart where you belong."

Truro shook her head. "Do I?"

"He wasn't worth losing your heart to him, petal."

He wasn't. But you are. Oh who gives a fuck? I can deal with anything. I don't need love. "I have stuff to do."

"You have to let someone inside sometime."

"You've been inside."

Murphy leaned in and touched her chest. "I mean in here. In your heart."

Truro gulped louder than she wanted to. "Yeah well, I have to go."

"I need to talk to you."

"I'll be home later." *Wallowing in chocolate ice cream and taking a vow of celibacy.*

"I'll look forward to it." Murphy stiffened and turned suddenly. His eyes focused on an older man who was limping across the street. "Who's that?"

Murphy's reaction puzzled Truro. It was like all his senses were on alert. "He's a townie roughing it. He checked into the caravan park. Why?"

"No reason." Yet Murphy kept watching his progress.

No reason. Was anyone ever going to stop and actually explain anything to her? Why all the Secret Squirrel stuff? "I gotta go."

* * * * *

Six hours later.

"I thought we were supposed to talk?" Truro placed her hands on his bare chest.

"I wanted to relax you first." Murphy moved his hips against hers. "Ah, that's better." He leaned in and licked a lazy, wet path around one of her pink nipples.

Truro moaned softly and raked her hands through his hair. His cock was hard and full and unmoving inside her. Every inch of her body was covered by his. It was the most erotic experience she'd ever had. It was sex but it was more. It was about being joined and allowing your lover to be one with you as you were with them. While friction was excellent, quiet stillness had more meaning. For the first time in her life, Truro wanted nothing more than to just be with this man. No pretense. No act. No display of skills. Just two lovers enjoying each other.

"Wolf man," Truro raised his head from her breast.

"Yes, petal?"

"What the hell is going on in Ludlum?"

Chapter Six

Murphy knew it was time to tell Truro the truth. In his heart, he knew she loved him. With love came trust. He needed her to believe in him and who he was. "Do you believe there are some things that are beyond the realm of the normal world, petal?"

"Like politicians?" Truro's hands ran down his back to rest on his ass.

May we be like this forever. Joined. At peace. In love. As one. "No, paranormal beings." Murphy felt her body stiffen against his. His hand left her breast and cupped her face. *How I love this woman. I will do everything in my power to protect her.* Murphy kissed Truro's lips in a light tender kiss of promise. "Tell me what you believe in, petal."

Truro licked her lips. "I believe there are things that happen to people that we will never understand." Her words sounded careful and deliberate.

Yes. Good. He had always sensed, despite the false front she put up to deflect hurt, Truro was open-minded. "I need to tell you something."

"Is this about you being a werewolf?"

"Do you believe that?"

Truro arched her eyebrow. "To be honest, I have no idea what to believe anymore."

Murphy was not surprised. Truro had been thrown into a situation that was completely out of what was normal for most people. "Do you believe werewolves exist?"

"As much as I believe vampires and zombies do."

How surprised Truro would be if she knew those creatures were as real as she was. Murphy adjusted his hips slightly. He loved being tight inside his woman yet it played havoc with his self-control. "About the wolves—"

"Yes, what about them? Suddenly sleepy old Ludlum is being inundated by people interested in them. You, Lara Croft and even Bess has come down from the hills to talk about them. Not to mention two people out of the blue being attacked. You know we were pretty damn happy as we were in Ludlum before you lot showed up."

"Lara Croft?" Murphy was confused by this.

"The sheila all dressed in black wearing a scabbard – correction – 'make-up bag' at her hip." Truro rolled her eyes. "I think she's hunting them. Are you?"

"God no." The thought appalled Murphy. No wild animal should be hunted. "I'm not sure about Lara Croft though." He was amused by the name Truro used.

"I have to tell you she's weird." Her hands played over his ass, kneading the flesh and pushing him farther inside her.

Murphy knew if Truro continued to do that he would not last long. As it was now his control was almost shot. "I believe there is a reason 'Lara' is here. One that she's not even aware of." But the other woman wasn't his prime concern. Truro was.

"Huh? What does that mean?" Truro lifted her legs so they wrapped around his waist.

Oh man. Concentrate. It was hard to do when his ensconced cock wanted to explode through latex. That's her story – this is ours."

"Ours?"

"There is a connection between us."

Truro smiled. "That's a no brainer. You're inside me."

Murphy had to move. It was killing him not to. He groaned softly as his cock began pushing in and out of her body. "What do you feel about us?"

"Well, I'm naked with you, wolf man so –"

"I mean more than sex, petal."

"I like you." Her words came out a little choked as his pace increased.

Murphy well remembered when Truro said she loved him. It was the most unforgettable moment of his life. "What do you feel in your heart?" He could feel it beating madly against his. Her eyes were huge with a mixture of fear and wonder.

"I don't know there's — oh God." Truro bit her lip and panted softly. She clutched at Murphy's shoulders. "I — er, feel something about you but I'm not sure what it is — o-o-ohhh."

Murphy's mouth found hers and his kissed her hard as they rode out the wild tremors that racked their bodies. There was something so raw and sensual about holding onto his lover as their bodies found peace. After several minutes he pulled out from her and rolled over to discard the condom. Murphy was pleased and touched the way Truro instantly moved to his body and snuggled against him. *I have found peace.* "I need you to trust me, petal."

Truro blew out a sigh. "I'm not good at that."

If only she realized how far she had come with him. "You will be with me."

"Who are you?"

"Do you really want to know?" Murphy held his breath. He needed her to know. How game was Truro? What he was about to show her would test the beliefs of the strongest person.

"Yes."

The strength of that one word gave Murphy hope. "Come with me outside." He sat up and pulled Truro with him out of bed.

Truro dug in her heels at the door of her van. "Let me get some clothes on first."

"You don't need them. It's dark."

"We're in the middle of the caravan park and the barbeque boys are perverts." Truro shivered at her words.

"They won't see you." Few human beings could see as well as a wolf and as Truro was his mate, Murphy would protect her against any threat.

Truro nodded. "Yeah," she conceded. "They're probably too drunk and passed out to see their own feet."

Murphy opened the door and helped her down the steps. The moonlight illuminated her body and his cock jerked in reaction. *Now is not the time, man.* He took Truro's hand. "We're going beyond the caravan park."

Truro hesitated. "You know I'm not into the whole nature thing."

"I'll look after you." *With my life. I swear on it.*

"And I don't like spiders."

Murphy chuckled and wound his around her waist pulling her close. "We're not going to play with spiders. I need to show you something. It will make you understand who I am."

* * * * *

"So we're naked wandering around the bush in the dark." Truro had lived in Ludlum two years yet she had no idea where she was. One tree looked pretty much like another to her. "Where are we going?" Murphy's step never faulted. He knew the path to take. That was both comforting and odd. How did he know so much when she knew so little? Truro was, after all, the local.

"Yeah, fun huh?" Murphy winked at her.

Lordy, he was gorgeous. The subtle moonlight made every muscle and sinew of his body stand out in glorious male detail. "I guess that depends on how you define fun," Truro glanced at his cock. It was semi erect. *Now that would be fun to play with.* She pushed away a branch that scratched at her skin. "Is there a point to this wandering aimlessly?" The sudden sound of wolves howling made Truro grab hold of Murphy's waist. "Crap, they sound close." *Damn he smelled nice. Sex under the stars would be doable.*

Murphy leaned down and kissed her lips. "They will not harm you, petal."

"How do you know?" *Please kiss me again.*

He came to a halt near a small clearing. "I understand them. I am one of them." Both Murphy's hands caught hers. "I'm going to ask you to take a leap of faith."

"Oh God, first I have to wander around the bush naked and now I have to jump? I would rather have pants on to do that."

Murphy was amused by her words. "Faith, petal. Trusting in something even though it tests every belief you have."

"Oh right. I knew that. Faith in what? And is it something we both have to do naked in the moonlight. Couldn't faith be done just as easily in a bedroom?"

"As much as I would love to go back to the bedroom with you, petal, I need to tell you the truth. You deserve that. I also need you to have faith in me."

"Well, I do." Truro stopped and looked surprised. *Who'd have thunk it? For the first time in my life, I trust someone.* "I do have faith in you, wolf man." She watched as Murphy closed his eyes as if letting those words sink in. "What are you going to do?"

"Whatever happens, don't be scared." Reluctantly, Murphy pulled away from Truro.

"I have to tell you you're making me more scared with the 'whatever happens' bit." Truro stood and watched as he walked a short distance away from her. She had to admit her eyes were on his ass. She was a woman after all and that was her ass. Truro felt a familiar surge of wetness between her legs. She couldn't remember the last time she had felt so horny. "Why do you have to be all the way over there?" Truro started to move toward her lover. She stopped suddenly, fascinated how the moonlight seemed to concentrate on Murphy.

He turned and smiled at her. "Are you looking at my ass?"

"Maybe." She stepped forward once more, eager to touch the ass and the man before her.

"Stay away, petal."

"Why?" It was odd of Murphy to reject any advance she made.

"Just watch and don't be frightened."

A few minutes later when she was fully conscious, Truro opened her eyes and realized two things. One, she had fainted and she never fainted, and two, she had a spiky twig sticking into her butt. "What the—" Truro scrambled to her knees. "Why am I naked? In the bush?" She brushed the twigs and grass from her body as she tried to remember what had happened. And then it hit her. Truro slapped her forehead. "I must have been sleepwalking." That would account for the fact she wore no shoes. Although she enjoyed going barefoot, Truro was hardly likely to do so in the bush for fear of spiders.

A vision of Murphy shot into her mind. She remembered now. Murphy had walked into the bright shaft of moonlight and a wolf had loped out. "Right. A wolf..." Truro clambered to her feet, knees shaking and body shivering as the night air seeped through her skin to chill her bones. "That was one hell of a dream." Even as she said the words, Truro knew although it felt like a dream, there was a strange edge of reality to it. "And I never sleepwalk." The wandering around naked in the bush part Truro didn't want to think about. That one she could not reconcile. It was weird enough the image of Murphy and a wolf kept meshing together in her mind. *I am a werewolf.*

"Sure you are," Truro muttered to herself. She looked over to where she thought she had last seen Murphy. There was nothing but disturbed grass and an eerie silence. "And yet I feel like someone is watching me. Bizarro world." She swallowed hard. *Okay, maybe this is not a dream.* Even as she said the words, Truro stumbled over to where Murphy had last stood. Although she could not see him, Truro could swear she felt him.

Bess's words about werewolves came back to her. "No, that can't be possible." Truro looked up at the sky. "Okay, so we have moonlight...but what the fuck does that tell me?" The moon seemed unusually intense in its brightness considering it was only a crescent moon. Truro remembered how the light had encased Murphy and he had

begun twisting and turning and dropping to his knees. "And a wolf appeared. Uh-huh. Well, I'm officially out of my mind. I hear great sex can do that to you." The sound of her own voice made her realize how totally alone she was out among the trees.

Truro looked around. "Murphy?" she called. Maybe this was a joke. "Funny, I don't feel like laughing though." Truro called his name once more. She stood and shivered and thought. It was then that what she'd read on the internet came back to her. At the time it sounded like the typical Hollywood plot. "Man turns into wolf at midnight." And Murphy had. *I am a werewolf*. "At least I think he has." If the internet was right she wouldn't see him until sunrise. Truro shook her head. "You are seriously losing the plot here, woman. A werewolf? Murphy?" But then what other explanation was there? A man had become a beast.

Truro started to think back to what Bess had said about werewolves. "Typical. I was too stupid to listen. Story of my frigging life." Truro blew out a sigh. Both Bess and Murphy had wanted her to remain open-minded and have faith. "Maybe jumping naked would have been easier."

It was then Truro heard twigs snap. She looked around her. "Perfect. I'm naked and mumbling to myself. I hope to God it's not the barbeque boys." Visions of *Deliverance* came to her mind. Truro bent down and picked up a nearby stick. She was flabby and uncoordinated but she was not one to go down without a fight. She could hear the crunch of footsteps coming toward her. It was too late to run and hide. Besides, where could a naked woman run to without getting into trouble? She regripped the stick as the trees parted.

Joan Scott looked at her as if she were mad. "What are you doing out here? And why naked? And why no shoes? There are snakes out here."

Great. Snakes. Just when I'm reassuring myself I won't step on a spider. "What's it to you?" Despite the snake thing, Truro had never been so happy to see anyone in her life. That it was a woman and not a drunken barbeque chef was a huge bonus.

"Do you so this often?" Joan stood casually, hands on hips.

Truro crossed her arms over her breasts. "Things are slow in Ludlum."

"Would you like my shirt?"

"Yes please." Truro watched as Joan pulled it off over her head and tossed it to her. She stood only in her bra. Truro noted she was chunky yet in an old-fashioned 1950s movie starlet way. Like Truro she was all hips, ass and boobs.

"Sleepwalking?"

"Okay—sure." That was just as good as any other explanation at the moment. Besides, Truro wasn't certain about this woman. Why was she wandering around in the dark? Truro dropped the black shirt over her body. It almost covered her ass and pussy.

"Or were you playing with wolves?" The sudden silence between them was obvious and prolonged. Joan broke it. "Oh come on. I know you're with one of them."

"I don't do animals—that's not counting Rodney of course." Poor dead Rodney.

"What?"

"Exactly. What are you doing here?" Truro was not about to discuss anything about Murphy until she knew what was going on. "That's a dagger at your hip isn't it?" She could see the gleam of silver on the end of the hilt.

"Maybe." Joan's hand went down to cover the weapon. "Your boyfriend is a werewolf."

It was Truro's turn to put her hands on her hips. "So?" *Whoa I'm taking that calmer than I thought.*

"I hunt werewolves."

Truro snorted. "Oh, you do not." Though the dagger was hard to explain away. Not many women in Ludlum sauntered around with one—unless it was old Ma Kipner who had a penchant for whittling. And spitting. Crazy gal that one. So what was Ms Croft's story? Crazy or dangerous?

"I pursue paranormal beings for a price."

"What sort of a job is that?" Truro couldn't see that as a marketable skill on a résumé. "Have you ever caught any?" *And there is no way you are catching up with Murphy before I do.*

"Yes."

"Who?" Here she was having a chat in the dark, half-naked, with a woman with a dagger. All very rational. *Not.*

Joan glared at her in defiance. "Some things you don't need to know."

"Which means you've caught no one."

"I caught a witch."

"Oh yeah? Did you behead her with your knife?"

"No. She ended up in a retirement village."

Truro laughed. "Are you serious?" She looked like she was but what she was saying was crazy. *But then what do I know? I appear to have fallen in love with a werewolf.* "So you came to Ludlum expecting to find werewolves? Was it a psychic moment or a whim?"

"I was hired." Joan's voice was tired and snappy.

"By whom?"

"None of your business." Joan turned from the other woman. "Let's go back to town."

Truro stopped the woman by grabbing hold of her arm. "If you hurt Murphy, I will hurt you." She wasn't one hundred percent sure what was going on but Truro knew she would not allow Murphy to be hunted. *That is if he's a wolf. Which he appears to be. Why can't I just find a nice, normal man?*

"He's a werewolf." Joan was adamant on that.

"He's also mine and I will kick your ass until your nose bleeds if you harm him in any way."

Chapter Seven

Joan admired Truro Simpson. She came across a little flaky yet she was loyal to her man and that was not something Joan saw everyday. Normally she dealt with the dregs of society who “thought” they saw vampires and demons. They called her to rid them of the spirits. More often than not it was usually a whiskey and gin she poured down the sink. That they would buy more, Joan didn’t doubt.

Joan surveyed her surroundings. Other than Truro they were alone. There was no sign of the pack. They had to be close by. From what she read on wolves, Joan knew they never let one of their clan shift form unless they were there to protect them. The Irishman had shifted no more than ten minutes ago. Joan had heard the howling. She had seen the bright beam of moonlight. They were all classic signs of a man becoming a beast.

“No sign of the wolves.” They had to be watching. One of their member’s mates was alone and vulnerable. Joan was not stupid. She kept her moves casual with Truro. Risking the wrath of wolf was not something she wanted to do. She thought about the two men who had been attacked. The townsfolk said it was the wolves. Joan doubted it. There was too much of a coincidence with her arrival in town and that of her employer. It amazed her that Absolon thought he could slip into town without her noticing. That he thought she was somewhat of a joke didn’t bother her. Joan was going to use him – as he was her – to find out the truth about who she was.

“Why are you after the wolves?” The two women headed back to the caravan park.

Joan assessed the woman. In some ways, they were very much alike. Same build and attitude. Unlike Truro, Joan was never vulnerable to anyone or anything. She would not allow it. That was her mantra. *Let no one in.* “I’m not here to explain myself to you.”

"You're a pissy piece of work."

"So speaks the pot calling the kettle black."

Joan had to admit it amused her that Truro called her Lara Croft. She was anything but. However, she had to give it to the other woman. She was acting very calm considering her life had just turned upside down. Joan remembered the woman's words. *He's also mine.* She loved him. Joan shook her head. Once more she wondered what the hell she was doing there. She had already decided her half-assed agency wasn't worth keeping open. Just because she believed in the supernatural didn't mean anyone else did. The clients she usually got were people on crack, those who wanted a laugh at her expense or lonely people who just wanted someone to listen to them. *And that's what I do. I listen too much. I listened to grandma Elspeth and her crazy stories about how the family was descended from great evil on one side and white witches on the other. I wanted to believe her stories about fighting the dark side and helping people. I am such an idiot.*

Joan felt the weight of Elspeth's dagger at her side. *Here I am off chasing evil on the word of a woman who drank neat gin like water in the afternoons.* That her grandma even had a dagger floored Joan. It was the first thing that was handed to her after Elspeth died. "The crazy old coot said to give it to you," Barney, the next door neighbor said. There was also a letter.

My dear Joan

Someone will come to you and change your life. The dagger is your protection from the darkness. Always wear it. When you meet him, his light will counteract the darkness within.

Lovingly yours,

Elspeth

Of course now Joan knew that was a total load of crap. But back then she believed everything her grandma told her and even wanted to restart the same agency Elspeth had failed at. Ostensibly, it had been a storefront where palms were read and cards

were turned in search of answers. Tired of boring office work, Joan had taken the plunge. And tried to make it into something more than just a passing parade of freaks who spent too much time staring at the *I want to believe* poster. *And here I am with a naked woman, a bunch of possible werewolves and some guy with a limp who wants revenge.* Joan wasn't even sure what she was supposed to do with a werewolf if she caught one anyway. It was not like she would kill them. She had trouble with mice and mouse traps. But Absolon had offered her something she desperately needed. Money. A lot of it. Until he walked in her door with his creepy sidekick, Joan had been ready to quit.

As Joan came upon the caravan park, she got her shirt back and left Truro to go change her clothes. She wondered why someone like Truro Simpson was stuck in the backwater of Ludlum. Joan stiffened as she felt a presence suddenly behind her. She knew who it was. Absolon. Only he made her skin crawl. Joan turned to face him.

"So what's the story here? You tell me about werewolves terrorizing a town and clearly they're not."

"Have you seen them?"

"Have you?" Joan was not about to share any knowledge until she knew more about what he wanted. The offer of vast sums of money to find werewolves was one thing. Why Absolon wanted to know and how he planned to use that information was another. And why the hell were they meeting in a dingy caravan park? Joan had heard he was staying there. Why? This man had money. Why did he send her to do a job, only to show up himself?

"Yes. It was a long time ago." Absolon's eyes were hard on hers.

Even in the darkness the pale blue of his orbs was chilling. "So why aren't you chasing them?"

"It's a long story."

Yeah it always was. They were interrupted by a sudden coughing behind them. *Oh what now?* Joan turned and saw him. *Damn. I do not need this now.*

"Hello." Gil Montague greeted her with a nod. "Who's your friend?"

Joan stiffened as she always did when this man appeared. There was something about him that made her breathe harder and feel a warm rush of heat through her body.

"What do you want?" Absolon made no attempt to hide his impatience.

"I'm checking the lights for Truro."

Absolon waved his hand. "Everything is fine here."

"Yes it is." Gil only had eyes for Joan.

She jumped slightly under his scrutiny, much to her annoyance. Her hand went to her dagger. Why? Joan wasn't sure. She just felt safer with it.

Gil smiled "Nice dagger."

"Daggers aren't nice." *And why am I suddenly breathless?*

"No? It must be the way you wear it then."

Oh no, I'm blushing. I haven't blushed in years and yet I'm blushing.

"Um—I er—" *What am I trying to say?* Joan looked from one man to the other. "I have things to do." It was too late at night to deal with hot guys and weirdos. *I need hot chocolate.*

"Me too." Gil stepped aside to let her pass.

"You know what I require of you." Absolon called after her then left.

"Yes—you fruitcake," Joan added under her breath.

"You're making him fruitcake?"

Joan suppressed the crazy urge to giggle. She didn't want him knowing she found him amusing. *In fact, I do not want him at all.* Joan knew his name was Gil and that was all she needed to know. There was something about him that made her instantly defensive. "No, he's a fruitcake."

Gil took her arm. "I need to talk to you."

Joan pulled away easily. If she had been held there it would have been due to her own free will. "I'm flattered but I'm not interested in dating anyone."

"Of course you're not."

Huh? "What do you mean by that?"

"There's only one man for you."

The sea green eyes that held hers made her tremble. "I—er..." Suddenly she was at the door of a pickup truck and getting in before Joan had time to think. As her butt hit upholstery, with one booted boot she kicked at the car door before it had time to shut. "Where are you taking me?"

"I would love to take you but not yet." Gil grinned as Joan stammered. "And you blush. Most charming." He shut the door and rounded the car to take his seat beside her. "I need you to come see a friend of mine. He has the answers you seek."

* * * * *

"Hello." Murphy walked into Truro's van and leaned against the wall.

"Hello?" Truro wasn't sure whether to hug him or punch him. "Is that all you can say? Hello? I've been so worried." She charged up to him and slugged him in the arm. "Are you okay?"

Murphy pulled her to him and wrapped his arms around her body. "Yes—but are you?"

Truro sighed as a rush of tension was released from her body. "I have no idea. I really don't. First I was dazed, confused and then I was as angry as hell."

"Because you fainted?"

"Yes." It was a pretty wussy move that surprised Truro. She liked to believe she was stronger than that. "But also because you left me."

Murphy kissed the top of her head and sighed. "I couldn't stay. I thought it would confuse you more."

"More than waking up naked to Lara Croft and her dagger?"

"What?" Murphy leaned back from her and touched her face. "Are you hurt? Did you sustain a head injury?"

Truro pushed back from him and threw her hands up in the air. "You know, I have no idea what to think."

"I know it's a shock."

"Well yeah." Truro started pacing the small expanse of her van, only stopping when she ran into the corner of her bed. She swore and turned on Murphy. "My boyfriend's an actual werewolf. That's high up there on the shock scale."

Murphy looked pleased. "I'm your boyfriend?"

"You know what I mean, wolf man." *Now I understand the tattoo. Duh.*

He sat down on the bed and looked up at her. "I'm sorry I scared you, petal." Murphy's voice was full of remorse.

"I wasn't scared. I was more—" Truro stopped and looked at the man she loved. "Did I really see what I thought I saw?"

"Yes."

"You changed into a wolf?"

"Yes."

"So the wolves howling around here are —"

"My clan."

His words were simple and his face was honest. "Right." Truro began pacing once more. "Bess. She knows about you?" All the werewolf stuff was clearly not some out-of-the-blue conversation. It had been about preparing her for what was to come.

Murphy nodded and watched Truro's movement. "Oh yeah, she and William, our leader, have been together for fifty years."

This was all starting to make sense to Truro. "That's why Bess lives at her homestead in the bush all alone."

"No, not alone. William is with her," Murphy explained as he caught hold of one of her hands and pulled Truro down beside him on the bed. "They chose to live out there. It's something they want to do."

"Well, I'm glad she's not alone." The whole thing was weird but Truro liked Bess. "That worried me." *Why didn't I work out she had a man? Why have I fallen in love with a werewolf? These and other questions...*

"What about you?" Murphy's fingers linked with hers. "You're taking this better than I thought, petal. You didn't scream or run."

Truro snorted. "I would never run naked, wolf man. Too much drag." His eyes were so sweet and soulful on hers. Truro wanted this man but she needed to know so much more. "Why are you in Ludlum? Why now?"

"I'm here for you. You're my soul mate. I was called to your side."

Uh-huh. Bess had mentioned soul mates but Truro had considered it greeting card philosophy. *Clearly not.* She drew a deep breath. "Wolf man, I like you a lot but I'm scared of starting a relationship with you." Technically they were well passed "starting" but Truro had a feeling Murphy knew what she meant. That's what she liked about him. He understood every dumb thought she blurted out.

"You're scared of who I am? Who I become?"

"No, the werewolf thing is weird – sorry but it is. However this is all about me. Yes, how princess-like, but it is. I'm scared of who I am." Truro had never told anyone this before. "I'm not sure if I'm latching onto you and having sex because I'm desperate and needy or if I love you."

Murphy pulled Truro close and kissed her hard. "You love me?"

"I said 'if'." Truro licked her lips. No one kissed as sweetly as Murphy did.

"I know that your life has been rough in parts. I know you don't want to believe or trust anyone. I understand that you even think soul mates are a load of crap. But if for one moment you believed it was true and you had the chance to be happy with the one

person in life who is destined for you would you turn it up? No matter what obstacles may be in the way? Would you give up on true love?"

There was only one answer to that question. "No."

"I can make you happy, petal." Murphy's hands slipped under her shirt and caressed her breasts.

"I'm almost positive having sex with a werewolf is a bad thing." She tugged at the snap of his jeans. Not bad enough to make Truro stop of course.

"Oh very bad." Her shirt was up and off her head and Murphy's hands were on her bra.

"Lie down." It was her turn to be in charge.

Murphy unfastened her bra and pulled the lace from her breasts. "Why?"

"You and your questions. Just do it." Truro pushed him backward. It was easy to do as he was letting her do it. Murphy fell flat on his back on the bed. She climbed onto his prone body and pulled down the zipper of his jeans. His cock jumped out in eager anticipation. "I'm pleased to see you too, my friend." Truro tugged at his trousers so enough of his cock was free to ride. "Excellent. Don't move." She then jumped to the floor and made short work of her jeans. Once more Truro climbed on top of Murphy, her hands delved into his front pockets.

"That tickles." But Murphy didn't look like a man who wanted her to stop.

"I want—"

"You can have anything you like, petal."

"A condom." Truro squeezed his cock gently. "I always want this big boy."

"It's all yours."

Voilà. Truro found the condom she had been searching for. She tore the packet open and then hesitated. *Huh.*

Murphy looked puzzled. "What?"

"I've never put one of these on a man." The round condensed rubber disc in her hand looked too small to cover all that cock.

"Scared?" Murphy's words were teasing.

"Oh hell no." *I am woman.*

"That's my girl."

Truro bit her bottom lip in concentration as she worked the rubber down his shaft. "Stop wriggling so much."

"I defy any man to be still at a moment like this."

She rolled the last bit of latex in place. It was a shame to cover such a pretty cock and Truro could not say that about the appendages of other men. "Quite amazing." They could make a condom that could expand under pressure yet wonky shopping cart wheels were still beyond modern science to correct.

"Me?"

"No—well yeah but this whole cock-into-condom deal." Truro ran her hand along the encased shaft. "How it doesn't explode with the whole pounds per square inch thing going on."

"It's magic."

"Must be." Truro jumped as Murphy's hands went between her legs.

He smiled. "You're so wet for me."

"I always am with you." Truro didn't mind admitting it for it was nice to be with someone she could just say things to without worrying. "You know the expression 'you had me at hello'? You had me when you first looked at me."

"Oh, petal, I love you."

Truro looked into Murphy's eyes and she knew it was true. She fisted his cock as she poised the head at the opening to her body. "So love me some more, wolf man." Truro sank down on him, her eyes closing as her body swallowed his cock. "Oh," she murmured as the heat surged through her body. The jeans Murphy still wore rubbed on

the back of her thighs making the rise more exciting. Hard and rough versus soft and smooth.

"You like?" Murphy's hands caressed her hips as she moved on him.

"Oh yes." *I love.* "So..."

"Yeah?"

"Am I weird?"

Murphy grinned at the unexpected question. "In what way?"

Truro lightly slapped his chest. "You're supposed to say, 'No, of course you're not.'" Her eyes were on his as she rode his body at a slow, steady pace. "Do most people deal with the whole werewolf thing as easily as this or am I just in this for sex?" That second part of the question was the thing the concerned Truro the most. *This has to be more than just sex.*

"What do you think?"

She blew out a sigh. "A bit of both."

"I like that you're honest."

Truro wasn't completely. While what she was feeling was new and exciting and life-changing, Truro wasn't sure she was made of the stuff to accept life changes easily. She had been in a rut for such a long time that she was not sure she could or wanted to climb out of it. Ruts were like that. Familiar, well worn paths that required no energy or thought to navigate. She looked down at her Murphy. The need to open up and change for him was something she had never felt like doing before. *I will work on that. But first, an orgasm.*

"Uh-oh, I can see you're thinking." Murphy rolled his eyes. "That's a bad habit you have."

"Maybe I want to be bad. Truro lifted off him, his cock freed from her body. She rubbed the head of it over her clit enjoying the feeling of freedom.

"Bad is good." Murphy pulled her back down against him.

"Impatient are we?"

"The thing is any time you're with me or on me I want to come. Why is that?"

Truro giggled. "Because you're horny."

Murphy slapped her ass playfully. "And you are adorable, petal."

"Correct answer." As a reward she covered his cock once more.

Murphy growled his approval. "This will work between us."

"I want it to." *But can I? What if I mess it up?*

"Petal?"

"Yes, wolf man?"

"Stop thinking."

Yeah, it was a bad habit she had. Truro topped moving and looked at him quizzically. "Not even the thought that I want your cock in my ass?" *So, I'm blushing. So what? I know what I want.*

"Oh man, the things you say drive me crazy."

Truro smiled. "Women are programmed to do that. So—" Before she could finish her sentence, Murphy lifted her off his body.

"On your hands and knees."

Truro scrambled to do so. "Eager?" *Excellent.* A lover who matched her needs was sexy in itself.

"I want to be inside you." His body covered hers, his breathing warm against her neck. "I need lube."

"Hand cream?" While she wanted to try anal sex, Truro hadn't thought about the practicalities, only the desire.

Murphy got up, kicked off his boots and dropped his jeans as he and went to the drawer Truro pointed to. "Guaranteed to soften the hardest skin." Murphy read the label on the tube. "Hmmm, not sure under the circumstances that's a good thing."

"You have protection." She doubted much, but a thorough shagging could deflate his cock at that moment. Truro turned her head to watch as he slathered the cream on his penis.

"Ready?" Murphy asked as he dropped down behind her.

Truro jumped at the feel of his creamy fingers on her butt cheeks. She moaned as one slippery finger pushed past the tight ring of anal muscle and started moving. While it felt good, I wasn't what Truro needed. "I want cock."

"And you shall have it." A second finger slid in beside the first.

Her head dropped forward as she enjoyed the unfamiliar thrust inside her. "When?"

"When you are ready."

"I'm ready now." Truro whimpered as a third finger joined the others in a slow thrusting motion.

"I don't want to hurt you."

"If you do not come inside me now I will burst into tears." *Maybe not.* But Truro felt a wild desperation to be joined with Murphy once more.

Murphy removed his fingers and mounted his woman. "Whatever my lady wants."

"I want y-you." The last word came out choked as Truro felt the head of his cock at the entrance of her anus pushing at the tight muscle seeking entrance.

"Relax." Murphy kissed her neck and stroked her back as he pushed through inside her body.

A tight burning sensation caught at Truro. It wasn't bad. It was just different. The passage of his cock was slow and careful as it pushed inside as the entire length stretched her. It was the strangest sensation. *But I like it.* Truro was full and hot. She enjoyed the hard heat of the man who invaded her body.

"Okay?" Murphy whispered against her ear.

"Yes." She whimpered as she felt his balls against her ass. *Perfect.* "Are you going to move? I need more."

"You're very pushy." Murphy followed her request and started moving.

"Oh, this is good." *Why have I never had sex like this before?* Oh, that's right. Murphy had never been in her life. This was not something she wanted to try with just any man.

Murphy's body rubbed against hers as she he moved in and out. "*I'm pleased I please you, petal.*" His hands moved to her clit. Murphy smiled as Truro gasped. "You like that?"

The low chuckle he gave reverberated on her skin. It was delicious. "I like you a lot." The slow, sensuous yet deep thrusts made Truro almost incoherent as she panted and sighed as his cock and fingers drove her on to an orgasm that was different in intensity. While it shook her body and made her cry out, Truro knew that her life would be different from now on.

"Mine," Murphy growled as he came hard inside her.

"Yes. I am yours." *I have found my home.*

Chapter Eight

"You know Elspeth."

"She's my grandmother." Why had she gone with Gil? One moment she was about to say no and then the next she was sitting in a house, perched high on a ridge in the middle of the Australian bush with two people who looked at her with an interest that was confusing. Joan turned to glance at Gil. He just winked as if amused her confusion. *He suckered me in with the whole "answers you seek" thing.* How did he even know I craved knowledge of who I am and why I feel this mad stirring within me?

"I knew Elspeth."

Joan focused on the woman who introduced herself as Bess. Although aging, Joan knew she would have been quite the bombshell in her youth. "Really? And Gran was not completely sozzled when she mentioned werewolves?"

"Your gran was as smart as a whip." Bess smiled at Joan as if to put her at ease. "How is Elspeth?"

"She passed away a year ago." Joan swallowed hard. No matter how much time passed she still felt the ache keenly. Elspeth was one of the few people who ever really understood Joan.

William leaned over and patted her hand. "I'm sorry. She was a good woman."

"She was—um—a little odd at times."

"Yes." William acknowledged that with a smile. "She was but we liked her." He traded glances with Bess. "Why are you here?"

Two things struck Joan as interesting. One, William and Bess were very much in love. That was sweet. And two, she didn't feel threatened. It was almost like she was with friends. Joan hadn't been this comfortable in years. Generally, she was reluctant to

tell anyone anything but with these people she felt safe. *Or I am losing my mind? Either way it doesn't matter. I am out of this paranormal business after this.* "There's this man called Absolon." She felt all three sets of eyes glued on her. *Okay, clearly they know him.* "He came to see me and offered me a bucket-load of money if I hunted down a werewolf."

"You've taking up your grandma's calling." Bess nodded in approval.

Joan looked sheepish. "It's more of a failing really. I'm hopeless at it."

"Everyone finds their place eventually, dear."

"Anyway I came here and now I not sure what I'm supposed to do. Last night I went out and followed the wolves."

"Yes, we know," Gil replied, his eyes never leaving her face.

"You followed me?" That seemed impossible for she'd always felt this man the few times he had been near her. It was almost eerie the way she knew when Gil was around.

"Sort of."

"Well, um, anyway, I only found Truro naked and alone." Joan waved her hand to cut off their questions. "It's a long story but she said something that made me realize how insane this whole idea of mine was to charge out here in search of something that I have no idea what to look for let alone try to hunt." Truro loved her man. *How can I, even if I had a clue, harm that?*

Bess exchanged glances with Gil. "I'm sure you're here for another reason."

William held out his hand. "May I look at the dagger please?"

Joan felt no reason not to show them. After all they had known Elspeth. "Sure." She unbuckled it and handed it over. That's when the first flash of pain shot through Joan's body. She saw blood-red, her skin burned and she felt a surge of wild anger lift her to her feet. Joan staggered slightly and slapped at the hands Gil reached out to steady her with. "Get away!" Her voice roared, the sound of it hurting her own ears. Joan looked at the three people in great suspicion. *They are my enemies.* But she didn't know why. Joan wanted to hate them. The rational part of her tried to reason with the madness tearing

through her veins. "What the hell is going on?" Her blood was rushing through her body at an alarming rate. Her heart was pumping time as she backed away from them, breathing hard. She wanted to kill the two men.

William dropped the dagger on the floor and kicked it to her. Bess looked at him in alarm. Gil jumped up to defend the older couple. Joan snatched the dagger up ready to attack. But the oddest thing happened. Suddenly she felt a cooling wave of calmness wash through her body. "What is happening to me?" Joan sank down to her knees shaking.

"You are most definitely Elspeth's granddaughter." William went over to Joan and offered her his hand so she could stand. "Did your gran ever speak of your ancestors?"

Joan's legs were wobbly as both men helped her to a chair. *This was so embarrassing.* Yet she only saw compassion in their eyes. "Yes, some." Joan tried hard to catch her breath. *How did I go from wanting to kill to wanting to apologize?* "But none of what Gran said made much sense. It was something to do with someone who used to destroy things."

"People actually," William clarified. "Take another couple of deep breaths and relax and I'll tell you about it. Oh, by the way, we're werewolves."

Joan was gobsmacked. "Great. I'm related to a madman." Some nutcase relative of hers, centuries ago, was called the Destroyer. *And lucky me, I have his blood in my veins.*

"Yes," William confirmed, his eyes kind on hers.

"And my reaction to you is a genetic thing?"

"Legend has it the Destroyer became as he was when his family was attacked and killed by werewolves. And no, like all races, not every werewolf is peaceful nor is every human."

"True but not everyone turns evil as he did." The whole fact they were werewolves barely made Joan blink. Her own heritage made her ill.

"Some people always have evil within them." Gil sat close at her side, concern on his face. "You don't though."

Joan wanted to believe him. "How do you know?"

"I just do."

"So Absolon got me here to do what? Go all postal on you the minute I was away from the dagger?" What a sick bastard he was. Joan would have killed them and been jailed for it and he would have walked away scot-free.

"He is a desperate man who wants revenge. I believe he also senses what we know about you."

Joan looked at William. What more was there to know? "And that is?"

"You're part of our clan," William told her.

"I'm not a werewolf." Sure there were weeks when she didn't wax her upper lip but she was a busy woman.

"No, that's not it dear," Bess responded, nodding at her confusion. "I do understand what you are going through."

Huh? "Then how can I be a part of your clan?" Joan looked at Gil, then Bess then William for answers.

William was left to explain it. "Every fifty years our clan calls soul mates to it to strengthen the clan."

"Soul mates? Like in those dumb-assed romance books?" Joan preferred real life to fantasy. Fantasy got people in trouble. "That's all a load of soppy crap meant to make people buy a bunch of stuff to entice 'the one' to them, when in reality he or she never existed outside of a soap opera."

Gil grinned at her words. "You sound like Truro."

Maybe I misjudged the women. "Wait a second." A crazy thought struck her. Truro loved Murphy despite the whole werewolf thing, which had to have thrown her for a loop. "Murphy is Truro's soul mate."

“Yes.” William’s gaze turned to Gil.

“Oh no, fucking way.” Joan jumped to her feet. “I’m not here for this or for him and for love.”

Gil was not perturbed. “Then why are you really here?”

The sound of gunshots waylaid her answer. “The natives are restless.” William sighed. “That will be some of the locals shooting anything they move in the hope of bagging a wolf. Absolon was most smart in having those men attacked. If we run scared then we are weakened.”

“You’re not going to let that prick win, are you?” The thought of Absolon killing these people – er, werewolves – was abhorrent to Joan.

Bess nodded her head in satisfaction. “Spoken like a true clanswoman.”

Chapter Nine

William looked at those who stood before him. They had gathered at the home he shared with Bess. His lover, new friends and his clan members. Their survival was everything to him. "We have to think of a way to trap Absolon." It was not something he was happy about but it was something that had to be done. *I always knew this day would come along.* "There is great risk to us all if we do not act."

Truro shrugged her shoulders. "Everything in life is a frigging challenge so why not this?"

William admired that Truro was gutsy and she understood the situation straight away. She was a risk taker. Anyone who wandered aimlessly around the countryside as Truro had for so many years was. Murphy was lucky in his soul mate. She had the strength to deal with what life brought her. "Well said, Truro."

She, in turned, pushed at Murphy. "You're crushing me, wolf man. I'm perfectly safe. We're just discussing a plan."

Bess and William exchanged amused glances. He understood the fear that Murphy had. To lose your soul mate was like losing yourself.

"Tru's not going anywhere, Murphy."

Truro stiffened at Bess' words. "Not going anywhere." She was the woman who had spent her life picking up and moving on. Sure, Ludlum had been somewhat of a rest for a couple of years but Truro always knew she would move on. It was what she did. Putting down roots and being a part of something was foreign to her.

This is all to do with the love thing. Truro tried to listen to what William was saying but it was virtually impossible because her thoughts were about the man she loved at her side. Love. It still made Truro wonder what the hell had happened to her. One day

she was alone and the next she was part of a couple and people were talking soul mates and togetherness. *I'm not sure I'm ready for that.* Murphy was amazing. He was gorgeous. He was everything a woman could want in a partner. But Murphy was the forever kind. Truro was not sure she could match that. He answered to the call of the wild. She answered to the fear of staying still.

While she was falling out-of-control in love with Murphy, that was different from knowing whether she would stay or not. Love was a crazy passion that didn't always last and nothing was ever written in stone when it came to romance. It was about feeling and needing and living for the moment. There were no guarantees that moment would last. Long-term and commitment were not concepts that Truro was ready to contemplate just yet. Nothing in her life had ever been steady and reliable and being with a man, let alone one who was a werewolf, for life? *I cannot even begin to fathom that. So I won't. I'll avoid the subject altogether.* Already Truro began to feel the tension ease in her shoulders. Avoidance was excellent for relaxation. *Yes, that's it. Help out with the evil man versus that werewolf problem and then move on.* To where Truro wasn't sure. The pitfall of avoidance was refusing to plan or acknowledge the future, which meant she was flying blind. *But I am good at that.*

Truro gave herself a mental shake. She had to focus. These people—er, werewolves—needed help. Kick bad guy ass and then think about running. She looked at William. His piercing, intelligent gaze was focused on her. Truro felt like he knew what she was feeling.

"So we have to formulate a plan that allows us to destroy him before he destroys us," William said.

Truro had the strangest feeling that he was reiterating for her sake when she'd been spaced out thinking about Murphy. She cleared her throat. "Okay, well I have to say that's pretty obvious. Sorry but I thought being mystical werewolf types you'd come up with something a little more cunning than that." Truro wanted this all sorted out so she could concentrate on what she should do or not do about Murphy. Having strange men

like this Absolon running around threatening things was distracting. *Okay, I know it's not all about me but it sort of is.*

William smiled. "Rest assured, Truro, I have the safety of this clan uppermost in my mind. What I'm thinking is we let Absolon think he has turned Joan to his cause."

Okay. Truro knew this meant the dagger thing. Gil had told her what had happened. She wouldn't have minded seeing the highly contained Lara Croft go a little nutso after losing her knife. Truro looked at Murphy. He smiled and reached for her hand. *But then we all have our weaknesses. Can I walk away and leave him? Hurt him? Hurt myself?* Truro blew out a deep breath. *One problem at a time, woman.* Truro moved her gaze to Joan. "Are you okay with this?" It seemed to be asking a lot of her. After all, she had stumbled into this werewolf thing just like Truro had. Both of them were out of their depth.

Joan nodded. "I kinda feel like this is my fault."

"It's not." Gil was adamant on that score.

"Besides, the sooner I get it sorted the quicker I can go back to my real life," Joan told them, or more to the point, told William.

Truro looked from one to the other. *Oh yeah, this is going to be a messy courtship.* While Truro was confused, Joan was plain militant. *Good luck with that, Gil.*

Bess clapped her hands together. "Let's all focus shall we?"

"So you want to use Lara here as the bait." Truro smiled at the eyeroll from Joan. "How does she sucker the bad guy into believing that she wants to kill werewolves?" In Truro's experience, people who held grudges, especially fifty-year-old ones, were the sort who planned for any eventuality. "Do you take the knife from her and wait for her to go mad?"

"Yes." William's was simple and to the point.

Bess was a little more forthcoming with information. "What Joan has is like an addiction. She has to fight it to overcome what she feels. Joan could hand the dagger over to us for safekeeping. "

There were a lot of "coulds" and "shoulds" and "possibilities" in this evolving plan. "Uh-huh, and then she goes all postal when confronted by you guys? How do you know what she'll do?" Word was she had been pretty scary last time. "'What if someone gets hurt?"

"We won't." Gil sounded certain of this fact.

Joan was less so. "You may." She stroked the dagger at her side.

Truro wasn't sure it was a chance she would take. "So how does this thwart Absolon?"

"By making him think she is her ancestor incarnate so he will come to watch us be destroyed," William explained matter-of-factly.

Destroyed. The word sounded so final yet William made it sound like it was an everyday occurrence. *Paranormal beings – stoic or insane?* "Have I mentioned you're all very odd and this plan sucks?"

Murphy chuckled and pulled her close. "Can you come up with something better?"

"Well, no, but then I'm new to thwarting evil."

"If she has intense feelings against us, petal, then the more realistic she will be and the more likely we will be able to trip Absolon up."

Joan nodded. "That one time certainly made me want to hate you." She looked at Gil specifically.

Truro wanted to ask how they were going to "trip up" a madman but decided against it. Some things were better not known.

"Could you have been more obvious?" Murphy had virtually dragged her out of the room and outside into some bushes.

"I needed you."

Truro could see that intense longing in his eyes. She felt the same yet she needed to settle a few things between them. "We need to talk."

"Uh-huh," Murphy murmured as he pulled at the buttons of Truro's shirt.

She closed her eyes when his hands cupped her lace-covered breasts. *Concentrate.* "This whole soul mate deal."

Murphy leaned in, his mouth inches from hers. "Yes?"

His breath was hot on her neck and the urge to touch him was overwhelming. *Focus.* "Um, I'm not a forever kind of girl."

"Do you really believe that?" His hands were sliding on down to the waistband of her jeans.

Truro stilled their progress. "I'm pretty certain I'm not capable of staying in one place and settling down."

Murphy's eyes were on hers. "You've been in Ludlum two years, petal."

What was it with everyone pointing that out? That didn't make Truro feel settled. Settled was all about feeling a peace and relaxed with yourself and in your surroundings. Truro could honestly say right at this moment she had never felt less relaxed. "I'm not sure I could guarantee another two years or twenty in the one place with the one person." Love was all well and good but fear often trumped love.

"Just because you haven't done something doesn't mean you can't."

That was true. But it also wasn't the point. "But what if I—"

"Run? Hurt me?" Murphy supplied the words. "You know despite the fact you disavow its existence you do have a heart and I believe you love me." His lips descended on hers in a soft, sweet kiss. "And here's the thing, I love you. I'm bound to hurt you somehow. That's what people do even when they love each other. But you deal with it and you move on and get stronger because of it."

That sounded all very well and good in theory but theory was not practice. "I know that but what if I can't stay?"

"I'll come with you."

"What about your clan?"

"They are not as important as you."

It was sweet to say but she knew that wasn't true. Although Truro had never had it, she suspected kinship with those who believed and accepted you was everything.

"Wolf man—Murphy." Truro stroked his face. His eyes were full of love and any woman in their right mind would not want to walk away from a man like this. But she also knew this was an all-or-nothing kind of man. Murphy would want, and he deserved, someone who could give her all. "I want to promise you everything but that'd be wrong. So just for now, can we just be as we are? I want you to hold me and kiss me. I want to suck your cock until you come. I want you so high and hard inside me that I don't know where you stop and I begin. I just want us to be together without worrying about the future."

Murphy kissed her hand and enfolded in his. "This whole soul mates thing really worries you doesn't it?"

"Yes." Truro had to let it out. Holding it in would have made her want to run. While she was good at moving when life didn't suit her, this time Truro wanted to make herself stay.

"I'm glad you told me."

"Good. Now, I need your cock." The grin he gave her was so sweet and sexy, Truro felt her inner thighs sweat with need. "I meant what I said. I want to suck and fuck." Now maybe a lady may not have said that and maybe Truro needed to revisit the correct etiquette for offering sexual favors but she wasn't worried about correct terminology. This was all about pleasure and giving. "Drop 'em." She indicated his trousers as she descended to her knees. Anyone passing by and looking hard enough could have seen them. But Truro didn't care. *I just want to be with Murphy.* It was like

each time could be their last. Maybe it was pessimistic to think that way, but it was how Truro had survived as long as he she had. Expecting nothing lessened the chances of her getting hurt.

Murphy's hands went to his zipper. "You're going to drive me mad."

"That's the plan." His cock greeted her with an eagerness she was beginning to like a lot. "Now we also need a condom."

"Yes ma'am." Murphy searched his pockets. "The chemist in town must be making a fortune off me from condom sales."

"Hurry up." As the seconds passed, Truro was more and more anxious to be filled. Clearly Murphy wasn't the only one with obvious desires that needed swift attending to.

He held a small packet up in triumph. "Needy, petal?"

"As are you, wolf man." Truro smiled as Murphy covered his cock in record time. She decided this was an excellent habit for him to develop. Once covered, Truro leaned in and licked the tip of his latex covered cock. Murphy squirmed. "I love this power."

Murphy's hands raked through her hair. "Is that what this is?"

"Yes and the fact that it's fun." Truro sucked the head of his cock between her lips and cupped his ass as she sucked.

"You're a strange woman." Murphy chuckled at her words.

Truro let the cock pop out of her mouth, the rubber all wet and shiny. "But you love me."

"Yes I do."

She smiled at his words. "Lucky you said that or I would have stopped."

Murphy pushed her head back gently and dropped to the ground before her. "I need to be inside you now." He held out his arms to Truro.

She needed no further invitation. Truro quickly kicked off her boots and pulled down her jeans. Dressed only in her bra she climbed onto Murphy's lap and impaled

herself on his cock. Wolves suddenly howled. "Are we being watched by them?" That was weird yet strangely kinky, bordering on exciting.

"Probably. But don't worry, mating for wolves is natural." Murphy grabbed Truro's hips and directed her movements. "Just once we should try this slowly."

"I can hold on if you can." She was lying. Truro couldn't. When she was with Murphy she lost all control and stopping to think and slow down was not an option.

"I have no control with you." Murphy's mouth found Truro's and they kissed long and hard until she choked back a scream and he growled as their mutual orgasm shook them hard.

"Do you think we impressed the wolves?"

"Oh yeah."

* * * * *

William stared at the night sky. Soon it would be time to answer the call of the moon and rejoin his clan. Normally it was something that gave him great freedom and joy. "But we do not live in normal times," he murmured to himself.

"No, we don't." Bess came to stand beside her man. They linked hands and looked at the stars together.

"Keep an eye on Truro. She is our weakness." As much as he liked the woman she was someone who could inadvertently destroy the clan. Until they could find a way to thwart Absolon, any vulnerability in the clan could destroy them.

Bess turned to him in surprise. "She is a strong woman."

William added. "Yes but she is the soul mate of Murphy. What he does and feels will affect the clan. Absolon would be only too aware of that." It was exactly the same way fifty years ago when he and Bess came together as one. William lifted her hand and kissed it. "If Absolon had taken you it would have killed me."

"But he didn't." Bess leaned against him.

Her touch also made William stronger. It was like her energy flowed into him and renewed his spirit.

"Truro is a fighter. William. She is smart and knows what is at stake." Bess sighed. "The thing that worries me the most is she would rather walk away from the love of her life than endanger others."

"She is independent and headstrong." They were qualities William normally admired but now admiration would not keep them safe.

"Yes," Bess conceded that. "But she is also smart."

"I worry about her and everyone."

"I know. You're a good man." She gave him a gentle shove. "It's time for you to go to the clan." They had been hearing gunshots all day. Both of them were worried. "The hunters will have frightened them. The clan will need your reassurance or they will scatter into small packs to try to escape."

Divide and conquer. "And that will be our doom."

* * * * *

"The woman called Truro is our new target." Absolon sensed the shift in powerbase between the males. The Irishman would be the next leader. If they took his woman and used her as bait, it would make it easier to make the werewolves walk into a trap.

"What about the woman in black?" Tavernier was swathed in bandages and seemed to be in constant pain.

The hatred in the other man's eyes meant little to Absolon. Use and abuse was his motto, As long as he got what he wanted that was all that mattered. Absolon thought about Joan Scott. She was useful but a wild card who could not be relied upon whereas true love could be exploited for his own ends. That she was not the flaky woman he'd anticipated her to be annoyed him so his attention shifted to the other woman. "Scott is still useful but not as much as the Irishman's lover."

"How are we supposed to kill these werewolves? A silver bullet?"

Tavernier was as unimaginative as he was stupid. That he had to rely on this man angered Absolon. *I really should have killed this ugly little man.* "Only in the movies." He would keep Tavernier alive a little bit longer just in case something went wrong and he needed to throw someone – literally – to the wolves. "Besides each wolf clan is different. Some are more resilient to the old method of killing like sword blows. They have evolved to heal any wound incredibly quickly." William's clan was like that.

"But they're not immortals."

"No but they have a strength that is beyond any being known." That was what had thwarted Absolon the first time. He had misjudged William. *I will not do so again.* Absolon still had his sword. He had a plan to use it to force William to submit to his own doom. While werewolves were virtually invincible, humans weren't. The women of the clan were human and therefore a weakness to be exploited.

Tavernier looked confused. "So what do we do?"

"We take out their heart."

"I thought you just said cutting wouldn't help?"

Absolon scowled in anger. "Not their literal heart you fool." The sooner this idiot was gone the better. "The heart of what makes them strong. The nucleus of the clan. The old man. We take that which the wolves love and we destroy them."

"I see."

Absolon doubted Tavernier could see anything beyond his nose. "Yes but more importantly we destroy the successor, the Irishman."

"So you're trying to tell me his own woman will take him out? That's ridiculous."

No you are. "His woman is his soul mate. We kill her, we kill him. The clan will be weakened sufficiently for us to finish them off."

Chapter Ten

"Let me go, you bucket of pus!" Truro bit down hard on the fingers that were trying to cover her mouth as her legs kicked out aiming for unprotected groin.

"She bit me." Tavernier slapped Truro hard. This in turn made her struggle harder to free herself.

"Hold her still," Absolon snapped as led the way through to the small car park behind the caravan park.

"Easy for you to say old man. I'm still in pain from your knifing." Tavernier half carried, half dragged Truro, who fought all the way. "She's fucking insane." He slapped her again.

"She's only a woman."

"Who could kick your ass," Truro roared in anger. He hit her once more but she wasn't about to stop fighting to free herself.

"Shut up!" Absolon yelled at her.

"No you shut up, dickhead." Where the hell were they taking her? She and Murphy had come back from Bess'. As soon as the moon became full, Murphy had kissed her and promised he would be back soon. Truro had watched him walk off into the surrounding bush to join his clan. She had mused to herself how easily she had accepted loving a werewolf.

Maybe that's why Truro had not heard the two men come up behind her. One minute she had been walking to the communal trash cans, admiring the night sky and feeling pretty damn good after sex and the next she felt arms grab her around the waist and start dragging her. Wolves started howling and Truro had no idea who the gorilla was who held her but from what little she could see of his arms, they were bandaged. That gave him a weakness she could exploit. Only problem was his hands were okay

and they hit hard. And the barbeque boys had been no bloody help at all. She had yelled at them and waved her arms trying to get them to rush over and help. They in turn waved back drunkenly as if seeing a woman being dragged kicking and screaming was an everyday occurrence for them. *Absolute morons.*

Absolon opened the trunk of a nearby sedan. "Get her in the car before the wolves come." He then moved around to the front of the sedan.

As Tavernier lifted her up into trunk, Truro braced her feet on either side of the opening and refused to move. No matter how much she was pushed and slapped she kept her legs stiff and yelled her head off. Where was everyone? Murphy she knew had joined his clan but he promised he would be somewhere close by. Hadn't she made enough noise to wake the dead? And where the hell were the other tenants?

"We don't have time for this." Absolon's words were angry as he watched his henchman.

"Then let me go and you can bugger off and do what you want."

Absolon lifted his sword from inside the car and pointed it at her.

"What? Trying to scare me?" Despite her tough words Truro was terrified of the glimpse of cold, hard steel she saw. She knew the story behind that weapon. Bess had told her. "I heard you were crap using that against William and that he cut your balls off."

"Punch her," Absolon ordered.

"With pleasure." Tavernier slammed a fist into her jaw.

The sudden pain made Truro groan. She fell into the boot like a sack of potatoes.

"Why the hell would anyone want a woman like this? She's too much damn work." Tavernier slammed the trunk shut.

"The Irishman wants her. Being the loyal lover that he is, he will risk his life for hers."

When Truro awoke, she knew two things. Her face hurt like hell and she was stuffed in the trunk of a moving car. "And, I have something in my back." She struggled to move a wrench out from under her. Then Truro frantically searched for a way out of the trunk. Most new cars had an escape lever. This one didn't. "Crap. Fucking typical. Bad guys always have rubbish cars in the movies." Truro grabbed hold of the wrench. "At least I have a weapon." She knew it was Absolon who had taken her and it didn't require a genius intellect to work out why. Murphy was his target. From what she had learned about the clan, if one member was hurt the rest felt the pain. "Bloody soulful types and their inconvenient emotions."

The other thing Truro now knew was that Joan was clearly deemed of no use to Absolon. "Bummer, I would have liked to see her go ballistic." The car stopped suddenly. "Go along with them or kick ass?" Smart money was to play along. "Yeah, but that would be no fun." Truro wanted to dong the henchman in the head for punching her. "Fucking little prick," she muttered to herself as she heard footsteps crunch on what sounded like gravel outside.

The trunk lid lifted. Truro lashed out with the wrench and connected with solid flesh. The yell of pain made her smile. "Fuck with me? I think not."

"God, you're annoying." Absolon grabbed at the wrench and struggled with her.

For an older man he was surprisingly strong. Neither of them paid any attention to the man writhing in pain on the ground. Eventually Truro's hold slipped and the wrench was taken from her. "Bastard."

"Bitch." Absolon spat back, throwing the wrench to the ground. He removed his sword from the car.

"What's your point?" She focused on the sword. It had her complete attention. That he wanted to kill her was undoubted. Truro just had to work out how to stay alive. This was not just about her. This was about the survival of the man she loved and his clan.

"Get up, Tavernier."

His henchman staggered to his feet and jerked Truro up and out of the trunk.

Absolon looked at her in disgust. "Make any sudden moves and I will kill you. Either way it will kill your man and the clan. I did want to have some fun torturing you first but I'm just as happy to kill you now." Absolon twirled the sword lightly before her.

Truro decided, for the moment, she would be good. She looked around. They were at Bess' house. "What's the plan, hopalong?" A sound she once thought lonely caught in her ears. The wolves.

"You're obnoxious."

"And you're ugly. No wonder Bess threw you over for William." Truro knew the whole story now.

"Shut up and get inside."

Truro had no intention of entangling Bess into this. Absolon had struck just when he knew their men would not be around.

But Bess came into it on her own. "Come any farther and I will shoot what is left of your balls off, Absolon." Bess appeared, rifle cocked and aimed straight at Absolon. "Let her go."

Truro wanted to applaud but the sword-wielding man at her side made her think better of it.

Joan appeared at beside Bess, dagger in hand and anger in her eyes. "Did you know, Absolon, that my family anger is not only directed at werewolves but also at pricks who think they can ruin other people's lives?"

"Neither of you can succeed in killing me."

Bess never lowered the rifle. "How do you figure that?"

"Because I will kill your friend here and that will destroy your clan." Absolon nodded in arrogant glee. "Yes, I don't need you, Ms. Scott. I know that the power of the clan revolves around the strongest male. Weaken him and you destroy clan. Both are dependent on the other."

Bess and Joan exchanged looks. Truro could see that were worried. She wasn't about to let this creep cower them through fear. "This asshole won't kill me."

Absolon's laughter was harsh. "How do you figure that?" He pulled her tight against his side, his free hand claw-like around her wrist.

"Because the clan is not here to witness it. That means there's no fun for you in that." Truro knew she sounded more confident than she felt. But she also knew a skilful bluff was just as useful as muscle power. She could feel the wolves were nearby. They had thwarted this bastard before. Truro was sure they could do it again. How? She wasn't actually sure. *I just have to have faith.* "Don't you want revenge?" The sudden howling of wolves caught in the night air. *Murphy.* Truro smiled. *This faith thing could work out for me.*

Tavernier looked at the two women with the gun. "Let's just get out of here. This has been a nightmare from the start when we killed that man."

"You killed Rodney?" It wasn't so much she cared he was dead, it was more that these people thought so little of a human life that made her angry.

"Who's Rodney?" Joan asked in confusion.

"Dumb assed ex-boyfriend."

Joan nodded. "Ah, I see."

"Are you the other man who got attacked?" Truro could see fresh blood oozing on his bandages. "Did your mate here do that?" She tried to pull away from Absolon but he held fast to her arm.

The close howling of wolves made them all stop and listen.

Bess was the first to speak. "You killed and maimed just to create havoc with the wolves?"

"It worked." Absolon didn't look the slightest bit apologetic. "The townspeople were frightened and acted accordingly."

The wolves sounded closer than before. Truro felt relieved. *Yay! The cavalry. Who knew I would think that about wolves?*

Joan toyed with the dagger in her hand. "The wolves were not scared enough to scatter."

Bess nodded in agreement. "The wolves come for you now."

That was enough for Tavernier. "I'm getting the hell out of here." He ran blindly into the bush in a mad rush.

To Truro, it wasn't the smartest move to make running toward that which you feared. But hysterical people were rarely rational and she had other things to think about. *Like how the fuck am I going to get free without getting sliced and diced or anyone getting hurt?* Absolon had picked the best time to attack. Their men could not change back to human form until daylight. Could a wolf beat a man with a sword and a heart full of revenge?

"Coward!" Absolon roared after him.

"Tsk, tsk, good henchman are hard to find, hopalong. Maybe the slashing and hacking thing turned him off you somewhat." Truro smiled an overly sweet smile at her captor.

Absolon pointed the tip of the sword at her throat. "I swear if you do not shut up—" He halted as the call of wolves was closer than before.

Truro could hear what sounded like dozens of paws thrumming on the ground. "Scared?"

"Never." Absolon stood his ground. "They are just in time to see me kill you."

Bushes rustled and the first wolves appeared. "Wow." Truro had never seen a real life wolf. *They're beautiful. Hmmm, which one is Murphy?*

Joan handed her knife to Bess. "Let's end this now."

"Are you sure?" Bess' eyes were keen on Joan.

"Yes."

Truro wasn't. If Joan was indeed a destroyer of werewolves then attacking them now left fewer good guys on their side. "Lara —"

Bess cut off her words. "She knows what she's doing, Tru."

"Holy crap," Truro murmured in awe as more wolves appeared en masse as if to fight whatever battle they had to in order to keep their clan safe. Truro suddenly understood the connection they had to each other. They came when one of their own was in danger. *I am part of this clan. I get it now.* She looked at Joan. The dark woman was shaking with rage, fists bunched and eyes furious. The man at her side was not the scariest person at that moment. One of the wolves stepped forward. *Uh-oh, this is going to be bad. They should be fighting Absolon, not each other.*

Bess kept the gun trained on Absolon, who in turn looked pleased as the wolf bared its teeth and the woman came at it. They circled each other as other wolves looked on. "Excellent. This is even better than I planned. I'll watch this first then kill you."

This was going to work out in Absolon's favor and Truro could not have that, yet no matter how much Truro struggled she could not free herself. To be honest, she was not sure what she would do even if she did. Which one of these wolves was Murphy? What should she do? Before she had time to think Joan nodded at the wolf and ran at Absolon. The wolf followed. That was the last thing Truro expected.

"Bloody hell." Truro hit the ground hard in a flurry of fists and paws and bodies. Truro's arm was jerked from Absolon's hold and his sword went flying through the air. She tried to struggle out from underneath but it was hard going.

"Come to me, Truro," Bess urged her.

"I'm trying." Suddenly two wolves approached her. "I'm one of you. I come in peace. Please don't hurt me." Before Truro knew what was happening, the wolves pulled at her clothes and started dragging her out from the melee she was embroiled in. As she scrambled to her feet and ran to Bess, she watched the man, woman and wolf fighting. It was then Truro knew what she had to do. "Give me the dagger, Bess."

"Truro —"

"It's okay. I know what I'm doing—sorta." The cold steel of the hilt met her hand. Truro took a deep breath and raced back into the fight. It was hard to work out who was whom but eventually she sank the dagger into Absolon's shoulder. He screamed in pain and a strange angry red light shot out from the wound. What started as a simple puncture began to spread down his arm, flesh bulging grotesquely under his clothes as if poison was tearing through his veins.

"Wow, this dagger has serious bad ju-ju." Truro watched for a moment before pulling herself together and pressing the flat side of the knife against Joan's arm. The woman started shaking. Truro held the blade there until the shaking subsided and her hands let go of the wolf. It was then that she realized that neither Joan nor the wolf were seriously fighting each other. *Well, duh.*

Absolon continued screaming as the red wound spread and started to open up similar wounds all over his body. Truro pulled Joan up and away from him.

"Thank you." Joan accepted the dagger back.

"Oh, no, thank you. That's some power in that knife, Lara."

"I have never used it for anything but apples."

"Apples? Seriously?" Truro was intrigued. *I wonder what her cranky-assed ancestor would think about that?*

"Yeah, and occasionally to peel an orange." Joan looked down at Absolon in distaste.

Truro knew he was dying. No man could look so bloody, festering and torn and live. "I feel no remorse for stabbing him."

Bess came to them. "He is evil and has to die."

"Now you will all be free." Truro smiled at the thought

Bess nodded her head and dropped the rifle to the ground. "As will you." The wolves and the three woman watched as the man died. "It will be light soon and our men will be back."

Truro looked at the wolves. "Who is exactly whom here? You all look the same to me. Okay, that's rude – what I mean is –"

"It's okay to be confused." Bess laughed.

"Thank God." Truro had a feeling the werewolves of Ludlum were going to keep her guessing for years.

Chapter Eleven

"You were amazing, petal."

"Just now in the shower?" She lay naked in Murphy's arms, enjoying the warm, solid heat of his body.

"No – yes – but specifically with Absolon."

"He pissed me off." Truro had acted according to that.

Murphy laughed and hugged her closer. "Remind me never to do that." Hi kissed her nose. "I'm proud of you. I love you."

"Oh, wolf man." *How did I ever live without him?*

"What?" His lips moved down to nuzzle her neck.

"You make it so hard for me."

He rolled on top of Truro in response. "I thought you liked that."

She instinctively opened her legs and felt his semi-erect cock on her thigh. "Again?" *I could do it again.*

"Soon – any objections?"

"No." That was exactly what she wanted so how could Truro complain? *Life is good.* That was an ideology she never thought she would apply to herself. "So about Gil and Lara." Truro still couldn't see her as a "Joan". "Do you think they would have killed each other if the fight had lasted longer?"

"No, because soul mates cannot kill the other."

"About the soul mate thing –"

Murphy's eyes locked on her. "Yes?"

"I'm not saying I'm going to make this easy for you," Truro began, her hands on his chest, her fingers tracing the tattoo.

"I never expected you would."

"And I know I'm going to want to travel." Some habits were hard to break. Maybe, one day, Truro would settle down. *But not yet. Not until I'm ready.*

"I have a plan already worked out for that," Murphy said, reversing their positions so Truro was lying full length on him. "While sticking together in a clan is important, we can function without each other."

"Really?" *He would do that for her?*

"Yeah really. Now where would you like to go?"

Truro kissed him passionately. She was so overcome with her feelings for him. No one had given her as much freedom or love as Murphy had. Soul mates. *Hmmm, there may be something in that.* "I'd go anywhere with you, wolf man."

Murphy stroked her back. "'Still scared of the future, petal?"

"Honestly? Yes." What was the point of lying to the man she loved? "I don't want to mess up what we have together."

"You won't." Murphy held her close to his heat. "You'll be fantastic."

And there it was. Faith. That was what love was all about. "We'll be fantastic, wolf man."

"Yes, petal, we will."

About the Author

Amarinda Jones believes anything is possible and sometimes just asking for the impossible will surprise someone enough that they will give it to you. Writing is like that. Put it out there and wait for a response. There is always the possibility you may fall on your ass, but after all, that's what cellulite is for. Amarinda believes in taking chances, speaking her mind and aging disgracefully. Twenty years from now she plans on being the neighborhood witch who all the kids are scared of. But then, everyone has to have a hobby.

Amarinda welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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