



A Total-E-Bound Publishing Anthology

Over the Moon



Total-E-Bound

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Over the Moon

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Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

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Mark of Lycos

ENEMY RED

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Dedication

To Rena. Thanks for all our weekly get-togethers, and your name!

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Chapter One

The Great Forest, Alaska

The poor bastard.

Fenris considered his twin with pity and shook his head. No matter how many times he'd urged Anson to leave with him, his brother had sworn he'd convince their uncle—their alpha—to simply let them be. Fenris knew better. Michael Barton, alpha of the Silver Clan, had a stubborn streak a mile wide. Probably why he and Fenris too often butted heads. Still, Anson should have known better than to wait it out.

Come on, come on, he silently urged, hoping no one spotted him. He'd be damned if he'd agree to this mating nonsense. Finally, Anson turned and looked directly at him. Fenris motioned for his brother to join him until he saw the anger on Anson's face...directed at *him*.

"Hell, no. I'm not taking the blame for this. I warned you Uncle Mike wouldn't give in. You're on your own, bro." Fenris shot his brother a one-finger salute and ran like hell into the woods before his uncle set the wolves on him. He'd been planning this escape for days. Since Anson refused to listen to reason, he'd have to make his own way through that hellish ritual.

With a relieved sigh, Fenris released his hold on his human form and slid into the bones and sinew of a large wolf. Relishing this bid at freedom, he ran with the Wolf in the Forest--the great spirit that made life possible for his kind. Faster and lighter, he raced on all fours, scaring rabbits and squirrels from their cover amidst the thick evergreens in the forest.

Fenris ran across rich, black dirt, gnarled tree roots and the occasional poplar leaves drifting to the ground through the late summer air. Birds cawed and bees buzzed, warning him of trouble just ahead. Veering away from two bucks fighting for dominance, he settled into an easy pace to loosen his stress and simply enjoy being wolf.

In the distance, he heard booms and snarls, the sounds of sacrifice made and accepted, before the Wolf in the Forest replaced such noise with a swift and invigorating breeze. He thought of his brother with a wistful fondness. *Wishing you wind-speed, Anson. For when I see you again, I have a feeling we will both of us be changed.*

Caught in the gentle rhythms of the forest, Fenris continued to run. He put as much distance as possible between him and that farce behind him. He still didn't understand why his uncle thought it best to find him a mate, now.

Hell, Fenris had only just reached his twenty-fifth year. Most males didn't mate until well after their first or second century of living. And since once mated a wolf couldn't stray, most wolves did their level best to fuck anything that moved before being tied down to one partner. He wouldn't have minded some alone time with Sherri and Sophie again. The last time he'd played with the pair he'd come all night long. Sherri had oral skills that put most wolves to shame. She'd swallowed more than one load, while Sophie played with every part of him she could reach. The pretty little silver wolf liked it rough, and he'd been hard pressed to hold back. Thank the Wolf neither of them had been in heat. Oral, anal, they'd gone every which way and left him happy and exhausted. Problem was, his uncle wanted him to settle down. To have pups and ensure that his line continued well into future generations.

Shuddering at the thought of being bound to one wolf forever, Fenris increased his speed. He knew his uncle would be pissed as hell he'd escaped, but he'd deal with the fallout later. *After* the ceremony concluded, which would give him another ten years before he had to deal with this shit again.

Panting, Fenris slowed down and trotted past a cluster of butterflies dancing on the wind. He could feel the Wolf in the Forest very close and wondered at the spiritual purity in this part of the woods.

Glancing around, he noted a spring and wondered just where the hell he'd gone. He hadn't been running so long that he'd passed into unfamiliar territory. Yet, nothing around him looked familiar. *Odd.*

The Silver Clan's holdings extended for miles. They'd routed the cats and humans a thousand years ago. And since they'd defeated the bears, foxes and Red Clan during his uncle's time as alpha, only silver wolves populated the magical forest in which he'd been raised. The pesky humans continued to stay away, discouraged from entering thanks to a sorcerer's spell cast centuries ago, when wolves and magic-users had still been friends.

And thank the Wolf that had ended. Fenris stopped and drank at the spring, rumbling with pleasure as the cold, crisp water soothed his throat. Without thinking about it, he changed back into his other form. More cumbersome and not as tolerant of sharp teeth and

claws as his wolf form, a man's body nevertheless afforded some pleasures. Opposable thumbs were always a plus. And sex as a man trumped sex as a wolf any day of the week.

With a sad glance down at his cock, Fenris promised himself to find a female soon. It had been too long since his last tumble. And it would be just the thing to take his mind off his uncle's other recent demands. As if Fenris wanted to take charge as the new alpha *and* deal with the headache of a mate. *No, thank you.*

He walked down a small hill into the spring's runoff, a small waterfall that gave him just enough room, and cleaned himself, revitalised by the shock of cold water. When he stepped out he shook himself and felt twice as stupid when he only managed to fling a few droplets from his hair and slick body.

Wishing for a towel, he decided to let himself dry off naturally. As he stood in the calm and listened to the water flow, he noticed the sudden silence around him. *Too quiet. Not good.* As if thinking about trouble conjured it, Fenris suddenly found himself surrounded by unfamiliar wolves, a few foxes and one huge-ass grizzly bear.

"Shit." Several of the wolves had reddish fur. Red wolves encroaching on his clan's territory? "What the hell are you assholes doing on Silver land?"

He didn't expect them to answer, nor was he surprised when they suddenly attacked. Shifting into his wolf, he dodged one set of claws and rammed into another wolf, knocking it back. Teeth tore into his hind leg before he kicked himself free. Turning, he met another pair of attackers and narrowly avoided getting his throat ripped out. With a vicious bite, he ripped into the ear of one wolf and shoved a fox away by gouging down his belly.

Then a large, red wolf hit him in the side and knocked him down. He fought back for a split second before the strangest feeling settled over him. He took the wolf's scent deep into his lungs and smelled female...and something more.

Animalistic desire knifed through him. Between one heartbeat and the next, his anger turned to lust. He sprang to his feet and shoved the female down. When she rose, he mounted her, his instinct to mate overriding his senses. Fenris forgot everything but the need to release deeply inside the quivering wolf beneath him.

Just as he readied to thrust, something knocked him to the ground. A massive grizzly snarled and razed a blow to his head that stunned him. Other red wolves turned on him, biting and gouging, until he lay covered in blood. Still, the desire inside him throbbed,

growing with every painful breath he took of that beautiful, red wolf with the strange, yellow eyes.

She barked at the others. *Cease. Leave off. This one is mine.* Then she pounced and closed her jaws over his throat. Despite the danger of the situation, Fenris sighed with a strange contentment before blackness overtook him.

Rudra wanted badly to kill this wolf, to assure he would never take another breath. He'd had the nerve to mount her in front of her own pack! Worse, she'd frozen under him, some part of her recognizing his dominance. As if some lowly, enemy wolf could tame her, Rudra Pavtek, alpha of the Red Clan.

Yet as much as she wanted to, she couldn't cause him further harm.

Swearing under her breath, she let him go. She ignored the others around her and stared down at the golden wolf covered in blood. She hadn't seen a golden wolf in decades. Nor had she heard of any golden wolves still in existence. And what had he said, something about being on Silver land? The implication being that they didn't belong, but he did.

Why would he ally himself with her enemy-- what should have been *his* enemy?

The Silver Clan had pushed everyone out of their precious forest years ago. Because of them, the Red Clan had been forced to live close to the humans, sacrificing much to continue their existence. Hell, Rudra was living proof of how far the wolves had gone to remain a clan. The daughter of a wolf and human sorcerer, Rudra laid claim to two powerful backgrounds. Her mother still ran with the wolves when she wasn't teaching the pups at home. Her father protected the clan from less savoury humans, those who thought they could hunt in Red Clan woods.

But this...this interloper. Who the hell was he to do what no male had done before? To attempt to mate with her? More puzzling, why had she let him?

Rudra, you want me to gut him or what? Jericho asked, the large bear probably more than ready to go home and find something to eat.

Beckett Nash woofed. *I don't know. I say we let Rurik heal him so we can watch the gold one mount her again. That was hot.* Beckett grinned, only to cast his eyes down at the fierce glare she sent him.

He's golden, bro. Can you imagine what their young would look like? His brother Brody teased. *Man, they'd be orange.*

Annoyed, Rudra quickly shifted into human form to conjure a stretcher, then shifted back into her wolf. She ordered the brothers to carry the intruder home, where they would take him to her father in hopes Rurik could heal him. Then she'd decide if she should kill him or use him in her upcoming battle against the Silver Clan.

Her efficient group made the trek home in under an hour. In a small village on the outskirts of Bethel, Alaska, they had created a haven for their clan. Rudra accepted bears, foxes and wolves of any colour, so long as they considered the Silver Clan their enemy.

And speaking of the enemy... She glanced at the limp wolf dragged behind the Nashes. That golden colour, much as she wanted to deny it, appealed to her. Handsome, strong and powerful, he hadn't been afraid of her. What manner of wolf didn't fear an alpha in her prime?

Another alpha.

Terrific. She'd almost been topped by an alpha encroaching on her own damn territory. As if the silver wolves weren't bad enough.

In a thoroughly bad mood, Rudra picked up their pace, ignoring the whining of her pack. As soon as she crossed the spell safeguarding their village, she relaxed.

Jericho, take the golden wolf to Rurik. The last time Brody and Beckett talked to my father, he nearly fried them. The rest of you, go find your clothes before heading back into town. People think we're strange enough without strutting around bare-assed naked. We definitely don't need the attention.

Since most of the pack detested clothing, they grumbled as they reached the hideaway where they changed before hunting. Jericho took charge of their prisoner. He continued through the woods towards her father's place. Rarely in a man's form, he liked to stay as a bear unless rutting between a woman's thighs. She thought it a wonder he didn't already have a dozen or more cubs running around.

With a sigh, Rudra joined the others, shifted into a woman's form and donned undergarments, a pair of jeans, shoes and a T-shirt. After taking a pass through the village, she answered a few questions, settled two disputes and went in search of her mother. She found her in the schoolhouse instructing several six-year olds on the merits of hunting in pairs.

Rudra studied her mother, caught again by her timeless beauty. Long, red hair, sparkling green eyes and light skin that rarely saw the sun when not covered by fur had

snared her father tighter than any spell. Rena Pavtek could have had any wolf she wanted. Instead, she'd chosen a human lover as consort. And not just any human, but a dark sorcerer with an axe to grind.

As much as Rudra loved her father, Rurik Pavtek scared the crap out of her when in one of his moods. She didn't fear he'd hurt her, but his temper often got the best of him, leaving the pack to deal with the repercussions. It helped that Rurik always cleaned up his messes, but she could have done without the constant threat of sorcerer wars. Still, when the pack needed help beyond that of the Wolf in the Forest, Rurik could always be counted on to assist.

Her mother glanced up from her lesson and smiled when she spied Rudra. "Okay, pups. That's all for today. Tomorrow we'll identify tracks by sight, not just smell. And don't forget your red fox reports."

A chorus of 'yes, ma'am' sounded before the children rushed by Rudra with well-mannered nods.

Her mother teased, "Well, well. The alpha in my humble little schoolhouse. To what do I owe the honour?"

Rudra accepted her mother's hug. But before she could say a thing, her mother shoved her back, stared deeply into her eyes and drew a long, deep breath.

"*Finally.*" Rena beamed. "I've been waiting forever for you to find a worthy male. What's his name?"

"His name? Mom, what are you talking about?"

"Please. Rudra, I can smell him on you. And he smells exotic." Rena wiggled her eyebrows suggestively.

"Let's start again. Hi, Mom. No, no problems in the woods today. There was one small matter we had to take care of. A golden wolf appeared from out of nowhere at the sacred spring. Oh, and he happens to have ties to the Silver Clan. So, how was your day?"

"At the sacred spring, you say?" Rena smiled so wide, Rudra thought her mother's face would split in two.

"Mom? Are you okay?"

"Okay?" Her mother sniffed. "I'm so damn happy. You've always been a puzzle, as much as I love you. The first female alpha we've ever seen, and one that's not even pure wolf. Honestly, honey, how many wolves do you know that can perform spells? None of that

would matter except it's made you so choosy. Two hundred and forty-six years and you still haven't taken a mate. I despaired of ever watching you grow round with young. And yet, here you are."

"I don't know what you're talking about. We found an intruder in the woods. Nothing more." Rudra blushed despite trying to keep a calm front, unable to forget about the male nearly screwing her in front of her pack.

"Mm-hmm. That's why your face is bright red. Look, if you don't want to tell me, don't. But I think your father is going to want to get a good look at your young man."

"He's already seeing to the *intruder*," Rudra snapped. "Jericho took him over to the hut so Dad can heal him. We attacked a trespasser on our lands. Nothing more."

"When can I meet him?" her mother asked, not at all fazed by Rudra's growing temper.

Rudra swore under her breath and strove for calm. "There. Is. No. Mate. I can see coming in here was a huge mistake. I'd better find Dad before he turns my prisoner into a toad."

"Bye, dear. And tell your father not to be late for supper. We have reason to celebrate your new —"

Rudra purposefully slammed out of the schoolhouse. Trust her mother to make a perfectly bad mood even worse.

Mate. Ha. The chances of Rudra finding a worthy male in this world were as good as running into a werewolf. *Never gonna happen.* The Wolf in the Forest blessed her kind with a dual nature, as either man or beast, but not both. Never both.

Hell, it was bad enough Rudra had both human and beast within *her*. Though most in her clan respected her strength, she knew many talked about her under their breath, too scared to say the truth to her face—that they considered her as much an abomination as her sorcerer father.

In Rudra's mind, better an abomination than a dying species. The time for wolf segregation had ended years ago. When Michael Barton chose his clan over all the wolves and other species enjoying the Great Forest, he set into motion events that would forever change the Red Clan. Forced to flee their beloved home, the red wolves had migrated to the only area they could, one populated by humans and magic-users. With little recourse but to blend in, some of the wolves had taken humans and other species of shifters as mates. And now a female half-breed led them. So much for pure bloodlines.

Rudra mentally told all the naysayers to go to hell as she trekked back through the woods towards her father. The old leader had been loathe to accept Rurik at first. But her father's healing skills and power came in handy when the wolves were forced to fight outside their realm. Humans and sorcerers warred with guns and spells that fangs and claws couldn't beat. Denied their true home, the wolves, foxes and bears had banded together to oppose a common enemy. Not just the humans but that greedy Silver Clan.

Angered at the thought of all they'd lost, Rudra stomped into her father's laboratory without knocking. And came face to face with a naked stranger a head taller than her own formidable height. He had muscles on top of muscles, a handsome face and a full head of golden blond hair. He smelled wild and male, and though she tried to fight it, Rudra tingled with desire.

"Hel-lo Red. Very nice." He quirked full lips and stared at her from head to toe, lingering on various spots in between. "You look positively tasty. What's your name, honey?" He leaned closer and took a deep breath. And froze. "You."

"Fenris, how do you--" Her father's voice preceded his entrance. He took one look at them and stopped. "Rudra? Is there a problem here?"

"This woman attacked me in the woods. Her and that damn pack of rabid animals."

Rudra forced herself not to look any lower than Fenris' eyes. Though nudity was an accepted practice among shifters, she couldn't look at this man and not feel desire. She didn't dare glance at any other part of him than his face, especially not with her father in the room.

Hoping she didn't appear as red as she felt, she attacked Fenris. "You encroached on *our* territory. You drank from the Wolf's own spring."

"Bullshit. The only ceremonial waters belonging to the Wolf in the Forest are in our village."

Our village--at the heart of the Great Forest. He was Silver Clan, of that she had no doubt. Rudra's eyes narrowed, and she stepped closer, prepared to go for the male's throat.

The scent of sulphur filled the air. *Son of a bitch*. Her father had warned her to expect an attack, but she hadn't wanted to believe him. Better to focus on her fights with a rival wolf clan than lethal sorcerers with an axe to grind.

"Die, Rurik. You and your bitch of a wife," echoed through a cloud of grey mist. A large monster stepped from it. Shaped like a man but with serpentine parts, the creature opened its snake-like mouth and advanced on Rudra.

She froze in fear. The thing looked like something from out of her nightmares and smelled even worse. Mixing with the sulphur came the stench of evil, a taint much worse than death. As it slithered toward her, its scales contracted and expanded with a slight hissing sound, and a blackish ooze trickled from its eyes, nostrils and mouth. She'd never seen anything so unnatural in all her life.

Rudra tried to gather her thoughts for a spell, wondering which one might stop this thing. But panic made it hard to concentrate. The creature advanced. One more glide and it would be within striking distance.

Before she could defend herself, Fenris stepped in front of her and suddenly turned into something she'd never imagined could be real.

A golden beast took shape where he'd been standing. No longer man or wolf but *both*—a werewolf. Now two heads taller and more muscular than his already impressive frame, Fenris stopped the monster with his huge hands. They pushed back and forth, claws and fangs glinting with menace as each tried to dominate the other. Each time the snake creature grabbed at Fenris, he gouged between its scales, slicing into vulnerable spots with a keen attention to what would do it the most damage.

More black ooze seeped from the creature, its decay lending to its own defeat. The battle grew more intense. Yet through it, Fenris nimbly dodged the creature's strikes while giving plenty of his own. When the monster tried to reach around him for Rudra, Fenris let out a spine-tingling roar and overpowered it, as if he'd been toying with it before. In a lightning fast move, he ripped the monster's head from its neck and flung it to the side.

As he did so, Rudra noticed a large, star-shaped mark on Fenris' forearm that seethed with energy. To her astonishment, it looked made of fire, as if the star burned in his arm. She couldn't look away, and all else faded from her mind.

Captivated, she had the oddest notion she should reach out and touch it. She lifted a hand, but Fenris stepped back and shoved the monster's scaly torso away from her.

Panting loudly in the stillness of the room, Fenris glanced back at her, his green eyes glowing, and swore. In seconds he'd shifted back into a man, looking distinctly uneasy.

"I, ah, I'm sorry. But that thing was going to--"

Rurik walked forward with purpose in his step. Not sure how her father would react to such wild magic, Rudra moved closer to Fenris and grabbed him. To protect him or hold him back, she wasn't sure.

Her father raised a hand, but Fenris stood his ground. Rudra had to admire his courage. The golden wolf rumbled from the back of his throat, a warning for her father to keep his distance.

"You wouldn't attack the very man that restored you to health, would you, Fenris?" her father asked.

"Attack, no. Defend myself against, hell yes."

Rurik's grin eased the tension in the room. "No need for defence, my boy. I've been waiting centuries for a werewolf. You're the answer to my prayers!"

Fenris gasped under the huge hug her father gave him. He looked over his shoulder at Rudra, obviously as confused as she was.

"Ah, Rurik? You're cutting off my circulation," Fenris said cautiously.

Her father stepped back, the normally unruffled sorcerer practically gleeful with joy.

"Dad?"

Fenris blinked at her. "Dad?" He looked at Rurik then took a step back from her in horror. "But you're wolf."

Trust even a werewolf to have prejudices. "I'm part wolf and part *him*," she said, nodding at her father. "And you're not exactly natural, so please don't even try pretending like *I* revolt *you*."

"Oh? So it should be the other way around, is that it?" Anger and something else glittered in his green gaze.

Unable to stop herself, Rudra glanced down and noticed his huge erection.

Her mouth watered. She had an overwhelming desire to go down on her knees and take him in her mouth. Supplicant, obeying her new alpha...

"Shit." She leaped back as if scalded and bumped into *her father*. Could this day possibly get any worse?

"Now, this is one scenario I'd never envisioned." Rurik chuckled and handed Fenris a blanket to wrap around himself. "The answer to my problem is putting my daughter in heat. A bit uncomfortable for all of us, don't you think?"

Chapter Two

Fenris stared in confusion at Rudra, trying to superimpose a wolf's face over this gorgeous woman's features, while he gripped the blanket around his waist. She had alabaster skin, bright, golden eyes and thick, dark red hair so lustrous it couldn't possibly be real.

Caught by a wave of lust so extreme he could barely stand, Fenris wavered on his feet.

"I have just the thing for you," the sorcerer said and took a step away. "Rudra, you stay here. It's going to take me some time to find it, but I have just what Fenris needs back at the house."

"No, Dad, wait," she yelled, but Rurik vanished, leaving her standing there, all alone. With Fenris.

He licked his lips and caught the scent of her on his tongue. He inhaled, seeking more, and tasted desire in the air when she rubbed her thighs together.

"Ah, hold on." Rudra stared at the growing bulge beneath his blanket and swallowed loudly.

Fenris groaned. He dropped the cover and let her look her fill. At the moment, it didn't matter that she had human blood, that she was clearly not of his clan or that she'd tried to kill him earlier. His body demanded he possess her, and he was lost to nature's call.

Between one breath and the next, he darted forward and shoved her back against the wall. He could feel her strength. His wolf liked the aggressive female. She matched his strong will, and he had a feeling her appetite would equal his.

"Hey. Let me go." She tried to pull away from him.

The damn female was strong, really strong. Pack alpha within her own right, he thought with satisfaction. Hell, if he were any other wolf, she might have succeeded. But the power that made him a feared oddity in his pack's eyes gave him the strength to take this woman. With a grin, he tightened his grip on her.

"You're amazing. So strong, so female." He inhaled her scent again and wanted to howl with pleasure. Shifting one hand into a set of claws, he made quick work of her clothing. In

moments she stood naked against him. Her fleshy curves rubbed against his tense flesh and blazed a trail of fire straight through his cock.

Fuck me, she's perfect. He watched her lips part and immediately imagined them around his shaft, then begging for mercy while he commanded her obedience. Because deep down, he knew this alpha bowed to no one, and his werewolf's need to possess finally felt right.

"What are you doing to me? I want to fuck so badly, I can't breathe," she moaned, writhing against him.

Spreading her scent and a throbbing ache everywhere they touched, Rudra captivated him like no other.

Fenris lifted her ass in his palms and aligned her pussy where it would do the most good. He pushed his hips forward and, feeling the wet heat there, thrust hard. He seated himself balls deep and nearly came.

"Shit," he panted, losing himself in her tight body. He pulled back and rammed in even harder, the rhythm one he couldn't stop.

"Yes. Oh yes," she whispered, so tight around him he thought he'd explode.

Fenris wanted to kiss her, to taste her everywhere. Her mouth, her neck, her breasts. That sweet pussy that gloved him, urging him to release. But he couldn't stop himself. Too intent on filling her, he continued to pound into her, through her orgasm and harder.

His balls tightened and his shaft tingled from base to tip.

"Gonna come," he muttered and bit down hard on her neck. He jetted into her with an intensity that consumed him. Fenris grasped her ass and lifted her higher, controlling her perfect hips so she milked all of him.

The scent of his seed on her sated his overwhelming lust, enough to allow him a breath and a moment before starting again.

"Wait," she gasped, shoving at his shoulders. "You—I—we can't do this."

"We just did," he murmured and leaned down to kiss her. "Fuck, I want you again. I have to have you. Such a sweet little pussy, Red. You're so good," he said on a breath as fiery desire consumed him—and her--once more.

He took her twice again before he withdrew, content for the time being. He'd never before come so hard or responded so quickly to a female, but with Red, he couldn't help himself. Aware of his cum sliding down her thighs, he ignored her protests and lifted her in

his arms, carrying her into the small bathroom off the main room. He propped her up on the sink.

Finding a clean cloth, Fenris wet it with warm water and cleaned her up, foregoing the soap. He didn't want his scent over her diluted by lavender and lye. Red had yet to blink as she stared at him. He wondered what she saw, hoping she liked him enough to agree to another romp, preferably in a bed this time.

At the thought, he hardened again.

When her eyes widened, fixed on his erection, he flushed. "I can't help it. You are so damn pretty."

She blushed, and he wanted to see her turn that pretty pink all over.

Fenris dropped to his knees and spread her thighs wide. "I can't stop thinking about filling you up. I love my seed all over you, inside you." He ran the rag between her legs, rubbing that tiny nub he could feel growing hard. She smelled clean, and she smelled like him. "You were so tight, so perfect." *So mine.*

He felt too possessive but quickly dismissed the warnings brewing in his mind. He'd worry about the strength of this attraction later. Right now, he wanted to taste her. He tossed the rag aside and put his mouth over the flesh of her sex and sucked hard.

Rudra moaned and bit her lip, the sight of her white teeth over her lower lip arousing in the extreme. To his surprise, she didn't fight him at all. Instead, she clutched the bath counter and arched her hips closer to his mouth. He bit gently down on her clit and licked the cream gathering just for him.

She cried out and came, the sight of her in bliss one that imprinted on his mind. With her head thrown back, her breasts jutting out and her taut belly clenching, Red looked like his every wet dream come to life.

A shimmering *click* sounded deep within, and a slight breeze that smelled of Wolf and magic settled over him like a blanket.

"By the Wolf," Rudra rasped and ran her hands through his hair. "We shouldn't have done this. But it's just..."

The touch of her fingers over his scalp soothed the beast inside him that wanted her affection. The aggressive female desired him. She wore his scent, his marker. His seed.

Shit. He knew now why he found her so irresistible. And he wished he felt a helluva lot more bothered that he might have fucked the future mother of his pups. Instead, he sighed and licked her again before pulling away from her swollen sex.

"Just what? That you're in heat?" he reminded her and rose. He kissed one taut nipple then moved to the other, unable to resist the heady offering.

"Yes, in heat." Rudra arched into his touch. "No. I was...trying to say..." She paused to catch her breath. She scooted off the sink and shoved him back, as far back as the small space would allow, and glared. "Stop it!"

"Sorry." He looked down at his cock that wouldn't seem to quit.

"I can't think when you touch me," she admitted with a growl.

He found it enthralling. The power in this red wolf seethed, as if begging to be set free. He could feel it, and the werewolf dwelling inside him snarled, demanding to be set free as well. The mark on his arm burned. The blood of Lycos demanding satisfaction.

"Look, Fenris." She fidgeted as if uncomfortable.

He realized that in the short but memorable time they'd been together, this was the first time she'd said his name.

"I'm the alpha, here. I can't do this."

"Honey, we just did." He felt a little bit sorry for her. Rudra, or Red, as he'd decided to call her, looked flushed, replete and slightly dazed.

"That's not the point," she snapped and stepped forward, trapping him between the wall and her rage.

He shouldn't have been turned on by her anger, but he was.

"I'm alpha of the Red Clan."

"Red Clan? But you guys are all the way--" How the hell had he travelled a hundred miles in two hours? That would put him near the human settlements. A glance at her showed her slight resemblance to Rurik, a *human* sorcerer.

Her father.

"Yeah, all the way out here in bumfuck because your alpha got greedy." She poked him in the chest, her finger hard. "Well, guess what, Goldie? You're going to help us take back the land Michael Barton stole from us. From the bears, the foxes and the other wolves. We're going home. And you're going to lead the way."

Fenris didn't know what to think. "You're going to lead an attack on the Silver Clan?"

"You're damn straight. I'm tired of living among the humans. And not one crack about my father," she fumed, her gaze as golden as the sun. Sorcerer eyes that held untold power and obvious danger.

"Wouldn't think of it. He's been the most considerate of your clan—well, with the exception of you. I can't thank you enough for taking the edge off." He sneered, wondering how the hell he'd entered a situation so bizarre.

She gripped him by the throat before he could blink. To his astonishment, she lifted him off the ground, rising with him so they both hovered off the floor.

"Don't insult me on my own land. And don't think I won't take you apart if you endanger my clan, no matter how good that cock of yours felt."

Impressed, he nodded and gasped when she dropped him.

Rudra floated back to the floor as if nothing had happened. "I lead this clan. It's my job to look out for all of us. My father is a part of Red Clan, as are the grizzly, the foxes and a few other wolves. All of us are outcasts thanks to your alpha. We're tired of living as second class citizens. The Wolf in the Forest belongs to every shifter. How the hell can you stand living with Barton, that son of a bitch?"

"Why would I want to leave? So I could live out here next to humanity?" But hadn't he fantasized about leaving the clan for the last few years? Hadn't he been trying to convince Anson to find a new home where they'd better fit in?

Rudra regarded him with suspicion. "The Silver Clan decimated all the other clans centuries ago. How is it you live among your enemy? You're Golden Clan. Not one of them."

Fenris blinked. "What?"

She shook her head. "Don't play with me. I don't have the patience for this."

"I'm not playing. The Silver Clan didn't destroy the Golden Clan. The humans did a thousand years ago." Leaving one lone golden wolf to repopulate his kind.

She snorted. "Right. And that's why we're out here living among *the humans*. Because they're so much more dangerous than Barton. He's the one that ruined your line."

Puzzled, Fenris sensed she was telling the truth. Before he could ask her more, he heard a noise outside.

"Hell, it's my father," she muttered.

"I'll—"

"You'll do nothing. You'll wait right here. Not a word about what happened between us, you understand?" She looked fierce.

He nodded, wondering when she'd realise he didn't need to say anything. In addition to her shredded clothing in the living room, any shifter within reach would smell him on her when the wind changed. But she ruled here. He didn't agree with her crazy decision to start a clan war, but he respected her claim on this place the Red Clan had forged for themselves. It couldn't be easy living so near the humans.

He flinched at the thought, recalling Red was, in fact, part human. Why bother running from Silver Clan females if he planned on screwing humans? Wasn't one group as bad as the other? Yet he couldn't deny he wanted her again, right now. Crazy thoughts.

Perhaps he was still out there in the forest dreaming an erotic nightmare. Visions of the future had plagued him for years. Still, his time with Red felt too real to dismiss as a fantasy.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" She snarled and shoved him back again.

Startled, he didn't remember taking the steps to close the distance between them.

"Take your hard-on somewhere else, buddy. My father is out there."

"So?" He zeroed in on the mark he'd left on her neck and grinned with satisfaction.

Red covered the spot with her hands and swore. She snapped her fingers and suddenly wore what she'd been wearing earlier, except she'd thrown on a turtleneck instead of the T-shirt. She snapped again and he wore jeans, a black Grateful Dead shirt and sneakers.

"Handy." And scary. The wolf inside him didn't like her magic. He had to force himself not to back away when she leaned closer to whisper.

"Don't screw with my dad. He looks nice enough, and he seems kind of frail in comparison to wolves, but he's really, really powerful."

"I scented it on him when I woke earlier. Trust me, I'm not planning to screw with your father." Wanting to take her down a peg, he added, "Now you, on the other hand..."

She glared at him, turned and left the bathroom.

He gave her a minute, trying like hell to put his body back under control. Just the scent of her spiked his lust, and Fenris had no intention of doing anything more than fucking the she-wolf until he sated them both. Then he planned to return home and weasel some answers out of his *silver* uncle.

He didn't understand. Though he'd been young when he'd lost his parents, he remembered them clearly. His father had been golden, his mother silver. In the tomes

dedicated to his lineage, after Lycos defeated the humans, only males could become golden, and they always mated females of another colour. So why would Red mention a *clan* of golden wolves? Who'd told her such a thing? She obviously believed what she said to be true. But that couldn't be. Could it?

Wanting to know more, he decided to take the next few days, or even weeks, before returning home. Perhaps he could find the answers he sought among Red's clan. And it would give him time to fuck her out of his system.

A glance at his front assured him he wouldn't strut a boner in front of Red's 'really, really powerful' father. From what little Fenris had gathered, Rurik Pavtek seemed a decent enough fellow – for a human. He'd healed Fenris without fuss and treated him kindly. But he still smelled like human and magic, and the wolf within trembled and whined, wanting to leave.

The werewolf, however, wanted more. The beast loved Red's power and craved the taste of her on its tongue. Something Fenris had no intention of allowing. Due to his nature, his wolf, the man, and his werewolf all needed to bond to a female Fenris found acceptable. Scary as she was, Red complemented all of him, and he knew it. The man had fucked her, and Fenris intended on keeping their sexual relationship in that one small corner of his world.

Thoughts of a mate took care of his flagging erection. Calmer, he left the bathroom and followed Red and her father out the front door.

When it appeared Red had no intention of telling him anything, he asked Rurik, "Where are we going?"

"To see my wife," Rurik answered with a large grin.

Red mumbled under her breath.

"What?"

"Oh, don't mind her." Rurik shook his head. "She's in a snit because--"

"Because she's the alpha, not a small child, and she doesn't have snits." Red glared at her father, then Fenris, and stomped away. In a snit.

"She's always been an unruly child. So strong in both power and temperament."

"It's the red hair." Fenris chuckled. "My uncle used to tell me stories about the red wolves." The same uncle who'd forced them to leave. His smile faded.

"I know what you mean, son. My wife is a red wolf. Has the prettiest damn pelt you've ever seen, besides Rudra's. And she can throw a temper."

They walked in silence before Rurik spoke again. "We're going to my home, in case you were wondering. I'm sure you're hungry, since it's past the dinner hour."

"Ah, thanks." Fenris asked what had been bothering him for some time. "So what the hell tried to attack you and your daughter back there?"

Rurik sighed. "The result of an old family feud that won't go away. You'll have to forgive my earlier exuberance. For years, I've been looking for a way to end the curse put on my family centuries ago. The monster that attacked us is a variation on the many creatures I've dealt with since my cousin Mikhail killed my older brother. When Mikhail stole control of the family holdings, he accidentally unleashed a curse that turned him into a raving murderer. He killed my brother, his family and most of my remaining kin."

"Yet you're still here."

"Far away from my relatives. Living among the clan has given me some relief from the Pavtek Curse. The Wolf in the Forest is very protective of its kind."

"Yes, it is," Fenris muttered, not pleased at thoughts of danger to the female he considered his. His for the moment, he reminded himself and cleared his throat. "You seem to be a man with power. You can't break this thing or at least kill your cousin to end it?"

"I wish. It doesn't work that way. The curse follows the blood. Those Pavteks with sorcery in their veins are at risk. Which is why my earlier relationships were with humans. Rena was an accident. I fell in love with her at first sight." He smiled.

"If she's as pretty as your daughter, I can see why," Fenris said, dwelling on Rudra. He couldn't read the look Rurik sent him but cautioned his idiot inner voice to shut the hell up and think before speaking.

"Mm-hmm. So you see why your arrival is so important to me. I need a drop of werewolf's blood, collected under the peak of the full moon, to complete a spell that will nullify the curse."

Fenris frowned. "But the full moon's not for another three and a half weeks."

"I know. I'm sorry, son. But I need you to stay until I can collect it. You don't understand. I've lost two wives and four sons because of this curse. I'm afraid if I don't find something to take it away, it'll infect Rudra."

Alarmed at his sudden need to protect the surly female, Fenris forced himself to remain calm. "I don't understand."

"When my brother Petr was alive, he'd been protecting an urn that contained the curse. He tried to warn Mikhail to beware his actions, but Mikhail was like a man possessed."

"A victim of the curse?"

"Perhaps." Rurik motioned for him to turn onto a path between two giant firs, away from the village. "I never did like Mikhail. A bit of a hothead, really. When he killed Petr, it seemed par for the course he, too, would suffer a similar fate. I've done my best to remain distant, trying to keep the curse at bay so it wouldn't affect my family."

"My first wife was a sorceress, as were my children. I had hoped the curse would not affect them and kept us away from Mikhail and the other Pavteks. But they all died violently. Tragically," he murmured, as if caught in the past. "When I remarried many years later, I sought a human bride, one without magic. We lived far from my relatives, but Mikhail found us and destroyed our peace. For years I travelled, trying to destroy Mikhail, to destroy the curse. And then I found Rena. I hadn't thought to marry a wolf, because wolves and sorcerers don't mix. But Rena is special. And my daughter is the best of both our worlds. Not someone to be shunned," he reprimanded, reminding Fenris of the way he'd acted towards Rudra a few hours ago.

Fenris flushed. "It's just that we don't have a fond history with humans. Your kind--"

"I'm sorcerer, not human. There's a fine but distinct difference, but it's there all the same. Humans don't live for hundreds of years."

"*My point* is that there hasn't been a lot of trust between wolves and humans. Forgive me if I sounded biased, but there's a reason we don't interbreed." Except in Red he couldn't find fault. She was beautiful, arrogant and sexy as hell. If he hadn't known Rurik was her father, he would have thought her the perfect alpha. Unlike his uncle, she seemed to care more about her clan and their needs than making herself look important.

"Whatever your history with humans, you must understand why I need you, Fenris. It's only a matter of time before Mikhail learns I have a daughter. As it is, he thinks Rudra is Rena, since they're both tall redheads. Today was the first time he's breached my home. And I'm afraid he'll soon start killing members of the pack. You can't allow that to happen. Regardless of what you think of me and my kind, would you really allow a sorcerer to harm innocent wolves?"

"Or course not."

"I didn't think so. You have a pure heart. It's said most werewolves do, which is probably why you've been gifted with that precious mark." Rurik nodded at his forearm. "I'm in your debt, Fenris. But I can't allow you to leave."

Leave and risk ruining a spell that would protect Red? *Protect kindred wolves*, he hastily corrected himself. No way in hell. "I won't."

"Won't what?"

"Won't leave until you've collected what you need from me." Fenris shook his head, confused, annoyed and worried. The sexual attraction to Red he understood. But the growing affection? The need to protect her from all harm? The urge to plant young within her belly, to watch her grow round and love her until they both joined the Wolf in the afterlife?

Holy shit, he felt warped inside. Unlike himself, apart from *her*. Fenris rubbed his chest, half wishing he'd stayed in the damn woods at home. At least there Fenris had some control over his emotions. He hated the thought of mating with a silver wolf, but at least he knew what to expect. With Red, he felt in constant limbo.

They stepped onto a wide porch, and the object of his desire opened the door.

She scowled at him. "Well? Are you coming in or not?"

His heart pounded, twisted and fell at her feet.

I am so screwed.

Chapter Three

Rudra couldn't put her finger on it, but Fenris seemed bothered. The blond giant regarded her with caution in between verbal sallies with her mother, who couldn't seem to stop talking all through dinner.

"I hope you don't mind me saying so, Fenris, but your colouring is very attractive. It's been years since I've seen a golden wolf. Where have you been keeping yourself?"

He shot Rudra another one of those shuttered gazes and answered her mother. "I'm a Silver Wolf, Rena. From what I understand, there hasn't been a Golden Clan in ages. I'm one of your daughter's dread enemies."

Rena waved a hand, dismissing his words. "Bah. Rudra wouldn't know a good wolf if he up and bit her."

"Mom." Rudra wished she hadn't agreed to this stupid dinner. Then again, she hadn't. Wouldn't a true alpha do what she wanted, regardless of her parents' wishes? *Maybe a true alpha would, but you're not a real wolf.* Her conscience never gave her a break.

"I don't know. I think Red might recognize a good wolf if he bit her. 'Course, it would depend on where he bit her, wouldn't it?" Fenris asked with a sly grin.

Even as he said it, the bite on the slope of her neck tingled. Since their joining earlier, she couldn't stop thinking about what he'd felt like inside her. For years she'd gone without sex. Hell, her last time had been so uninteresting she could barely remember it. Roddy MacDugal two years ago? Or was it three? Yet a few times with Fenris and she wanted to shove him down on the table and have her way with him.

I wonder if he'd go for that. Taking orders from me... He'd been nothing but polite during their dinner, and he hadn't once tried to take over the conversation or the lead when her father served. Most alphas demanded their food first, to be waited on hand and foot by the others. She never acted with such arrogance, but then, her human side had a distinct effect on the way she led.

Her mother's nose twitched, and Rudra lowered her attention to her plate. But she saw the half-hidden smile. So smug, so pleased. A glance at Fenris showed him focussed on his

food as well, and he seemed to be trying very hard not to look at her. *Shit. I hope I'm not broadcasting my arousal at the freakin' dinner table. Talk about embarrassing.*

She hadn't been so out of control since her last heat almost, well, since MacDugal. For a while she'd thought something was wrong with her, but her father had explained that so much magic in her system just made her different, not wrong. Unlike the other Shifters that went into heat every month, she was simply more selective. Or so she told herself.

"You cook a mean steak, Rena," Fenris said after a short silence.

Her mother beamed. "Thank you. I try to make an effort now and then, since not all of us can hunt for our dinner."

Rurik chuckled, and Rudra realized she hadn't seen her parents this happy in a long, long time.

"Funny wolf. I can hunt just fine." He held up a hand. Blue sparks arced between his fingers. "But my kills tend to be well-done, not raw."

Fenris grunted. "Sorcery must have its upside. Just a short while ago, your daughter held me against the wall by my throat. All that power at her disposal. Probably makes her an outstanding alpha. Well, that and her natural aggression."

Rudra blinked, not sure she'd heard him correctly. "Did you just compliment me for being human?"

"No, for being a sorcerer. Your father tells me there's a fine line between the two."

Rurik glowed. "Bright boy. So wise despite your seeming youth. How old are you, Fenris? Three hundred? Four?"

Fenris seemed discomfited by the question.

Rudra took note. "Yeah, Goldie, how old *are* you?"

He scowled at her. "A century, give or take."

She laughed. No way a wolf with his power had lived anything less than three hundred years. The older a wolf, the more power and standing he had. "Right. Come on, how old are you?"

"Twenty-five," he muttered and rammed another piece of red meat into his mouth.

She stared in shock. "A hundred and twenty-five?"

"No, twenty-five years, period."

Rena gaped. "But you vibrate with power. You're obviously going to be an alpha if you aren't one already. You must have lived several centuries to accumulate so much energy."

"My line is a bit different from other wolves." Fenris glanced at Rudra.

She swore she saw a hint of vulnerability there. Perhaps his life in the Silver Clan hadn't been as rosy as she'd imagined.

"The Mark of Lycos gives us an edge over others," he went on.

Rudra studied the muted star on his forearm, once again taken with the sense of magic there. "Can I touch it?"

He shrugged and held out his arm. She saw his obvious strength in the defined muscle of the man and sensed the wildness of his wolf. But the mark intrigued her to sense that something she couldn't quite name.

The moment her fingers made contact with it, desire arced through her body. A connection snapped between them. She felt a need to take him deep, to work hard to procreate his heritage. A faint growl rumbled through her, a warning to anyone near to back off, that this male belonged to her.

"Goodness, Rudra. I hadn't realized you two had formally mated already." Her mother stared, surprised but pleased. "Perhaps we could still have a small ceremony, anyway."

Fenris captured her hand under his, gently pushing her palm away from his arm. "Oh no, Rena. We're not mated. Just some intense chemistry, that's all."

"Oh." Her mother looked disappointed, but the glance she shared with Rudra's father said otherwise. She didn't believe Fenris' denial.

"Rena, about that dessert you mentioned?" Fenris hinted, and Rudra could have kissed him for changing the subject. "Apple pie is my absolute favourite."

"Rudra's too. I'll get it."

Her father spoke as her mother left the room. "Rudra, we need to talk about Fenris."

Please don't let him lecture me on safe sex – which I so didn't have earlier. The thought she might even now be carrying Fenris' young stunned and pleased her, which was confusing in itself.

"You're going to have to keep him safe for the next month."

Fenris grinned and sat back. He locked his hands behind his head and whistled. "I like this. No arguments from me. Alpha's father has spoken. Protect me, Red."

"What?"

Rurik explained. "He's vital to the spell that will solve our safety issues. No more attacks, no more magic wars, no more Mikhail. Then I can concentrate on the pack and your mother."

"Dad, I protect everyone in the clan. He's no different."

"Hey," Fenris argued. "I'm golden, I'm a werewolf, and I'm one hot lov--" he broke off and took a long drink of water. "One hot catch," he added lamely.

Her mother chose that moment to reappear. "That's what I've been telling Rudra. You're handsome and virile. Time she started thinking about settling down."

Her parents nodded. Her mother handed out slices of pie, but Rudra had lost her appetite. Her gaze caught Fenris', and the heat in his green eyes took her breath away.

He nodded. "Yes. She's old enough to start thinking about a mate. Now, I'm just a babe compared to Red, but even I can tell she's got plenty to offer some male."

Rudra stiffened at his age reference. "Oh? And what would that be?"

"You're a take charge kind of woman. You're more mature and look great for your age."

"*Great for my age?*" Her voice rose.

Fenris shrugged. "Of course, I could be wrong. I'm just barely a member of my pack, recently reached my majority. But most of the older females I've seen aren't nearly as attractive as you are. Hell, look at your mother. You've got good genes, I'll give you that."

She caught the smirk he tried to hide. The wolf thought to rile her temper, and he'd almost succeeded. *'I'm just a babe', my ass.* Twenty-five or not, Fenris commanded attention. And though she didn't want to admit it aloud, she wanted to see him in that other form again. The werewolf wasn't the beast she'd expected. Or maybe that was because it came from Fenris, a golden Adonis in wolf's clothing.

Her mother gushed over Fenris' flattery. Her father rolled his eyes and changed the subject. They talked about her father's enemies, namely her Uncle Mikhail, while they finished dessert. She understood the importance of ridding the curse from her family. Rudra tried to decide if she felt relief or annoyance that she'd be stuck with Fenris for another few weeks. More time for sex, which her libido clearly welcomed. But she sensed danger in the male. She didn't understand him, and she didn't know why she wanted to know him.

Thoughts about using him to infiltrate the Silver Clan confused her. Rudra had always been one to exploit an opportunity to bring her clan back into the Great Forest. But using

Fenris felt oddly wrong. As if he mattered more than the clan. And look at her parents, hanging on his every word. They saw him as some kind of saviour. To her father, Fenris would stop an ancient wrong. To her mother, Fenris became the son she'd never had and the father of her future grandchildren.

Rudra's womb clenched, wanting to make those grandchildren right now. *Shit.*

Calling on her discipline, she willed her arousal, if not away, at least to the back of her mind.

Rurik stood and shook his hand. "Well, then, Fenris. We'll see you tomorrow. I can't tell you how much your help means. I know I acted like I'm not giving you much of a choice, but..." His voice trailed off as he stared at her mother then Rudra.

"I understand." Fenris nodded. "Actually, I'm in no rush to return home. I don't mind staying."

Home. The Great Forest, where the Silver Clan gathered. The familiar rage flamed to life once more. As they left the cottage, Rudra tempered the need to keep him safe with her desire to make things right for her clan. Not only would Fenris help her father, she'd make sure he helped the wolves his kind had been only too happy to push away. An ironic justice, if she thought about it. If she could think about anything. Her body didn't much care who the hell Fenris was at the moment, hungry for the golden wolf that she couldn't stop wanting.

Fenris inhaled and stopped in his tracks. "By the Wolf, you're dangerous." He backed her against a tree and leaned close to kiss her.

She stopped him with a hand to his chest, pleased to feel his heart beating like crazy. "Not here. You'll come home with me. Then *I'll* do whatever I feel like doing to you."

Rudra tested him and herself. Did he have the ability to take orders? Did she have the wherewithal to resist him for the short trip to her home? He smelled so damn good.

"You're in charge," he rasped, his canines glinting in the moonlight.

Just what she wanted to hear. Before she could move, he stopped her.

"Wait." He turned suddenly and tensed, keeping her pinned to the tree behind his broad back.

She smelled Jericho before she saw him. He ambled out of the woods, looking bored. "Alpha. Wolf." He nodded to each of them. "Everything okay with the folks, Rudra?"

Her beta had no problem letting them know he'd followed them, taking care of her the way he normally did. Fenris didn't seem to like it. Though smaller than Jericho in his human form, he bristled with rage and took a step in the lumbering bear's direction.

"She's fine. She's with me."

"I see that." Jericho leaned back against a tree and rubbed his back, sighing with pleasure. "You have a good night. I'll be close by, in case you need me."

"She doesn't need--"

"Thanks, Jer. See you tomorrow." Rudra tugged Fenris after her, not sure how she felt about Jericho's approval. She loved the big bear like a brother. They'd grown up together, and in all the time she'd known him, he'd never given an interested male his support. Then along came a golden wolf with Silver Clan ties. And Jericho might as well have handed him the keys to the castle by stepping back without interfering.

For his part, Fenris had twice now followed her orders, giving no one any reason to believe he might be stronger than her and doubt her leadership. Which, in her status as alpha, meant everything.

Though she could do much with sorcery, she could only use it as a human, not as a wolf. Fenris, in werewolf form, could resist her magic and tear her body—human or wolf—in two, and he had to know it. Yet he'd deferred to her in front of her parents and now Jericho. Thoughts of using him to further the clan's agenda faded from her mind as they neared her front door.

She pushed past it and dragged Fenris inside, excited at what she had planned.

"Take off your clothes," she ordered. The door banged shut behind them.

In the dark, his eyes glowed. As her sight adapted to the lack of light around her, she absorbed his masculine strength, thinking she'd never seen a man so well put together. She hurriedly stripped and stepped back from him, thrilled at the large erection waiting for her.

"Now what?" he asked, breathless, like her.

Rudra shoved him hard into the wall behind him. He narrowed his eyes, but before he could protest, she waved a hand, paralyzing him with her magic. "Now, you listen to me. I'm the alpha here. You do what I tell you to."

"Look, honey, I'm eager to please, but let's face it. You just think you're in charge—" He stopped when she dropped to her knees in front of him. His whole body tensed, and his cock bobbed, the head slick with moisture.

She licked his shaft, and he growled her name. Rudra took him into her mouth and played with his balls. Running her hands along the hard globes, she squeezed and teased as she laved his cock with her tongue and nipped with her teeth. Fenris moaned and tried to move, but helpless under her spell, he could only stand there and endure.

She tasted his need, his cock wet with her saliva and his arousal. And his excitement increased her own.

"Oh, fuck. Give it to me." His low growl sounded desperate.

She sucked hard, and he shuddered. His shaft as hard as iron, his balls tight against his body, Fenris teetered on the edge. She scraped his thighs with her nails, and he swore.

"Who's in charge?" she whispered and cradled his balls in her palm.

"Shit. You are. Please, Red. Suck it. Make me come."

She trembled, incredibly aroused by the taste of him, but more, by his capitulation. She put her mouth around him again and sucked, gratified by his howl and the rush of seed that filled her mouth.

After swallowing his offering, she slowly stood, kissing her way up his body. With a wave of her hand, she released the spell holding him still. Expecting him to slide into her arms, she cried out in surprise when he reversed their position, pinning her against the wall.

"You little witch," he panted and nuzzled her neck. "And I mean that in the nicest way. You have a mouth made for sucking cock, Red. By the Wolf, you're perfect. And wet," he added, shoving his knee between her legs. "Hmm, ride my leg, baby. Let me smell your cream. So sweet."

He kissed her, wrapping his hand around her neck to hold her still. Having just dominated him, she wouldn't have thought she'd enjoy being handled this way. Yet Fenris' touch felt right. His large palm spanned her throat as his fingers wrapped around the slim column. The hunger in his kiss and brush of an erection against her belly stunned her.

"I know," he groaned. "This isn't normal for me. It's you. I need to come again. But not standing up. I want a bed, dammit."

He pulled her with him in search of her bedroom and stopped at the spare room. "Good enough," he growled and tossed her onto the mattress. He followed her down and spread her legs wide. In seconds, he feasted on her, licking and sucking her clit until she couldn't think. While he teased her with his mouth, his fingers pinched and tugged her nipples,

shooting sparks of pleasure throughout her body. He played her like an instrument, until she hummed with mind-blowing desire.

He groaned and flicked his tongue deeper into her channel. The pressure over her nipples increased, becoming almost painful. A rush of feeling swam through her body. Heated pleasure, a steady build towards promised bliss. When he touched her, Fenris made her feel a part of something else. A part of him. Except as her orgasm crashed over her, it echoed, strangely empty. And she knew it wasn't enough.

"I need you inside me," she said when she could catch her breath. "Come in me, Fenris."

He growled something she couldn't understand. He slid off her and rolled her onto her belly. After he propped her up on her hands and knees, he slammed inside her.

"Fuck, yes," he hissed as he took her hard. His fingers dug into her hips as he thrust in and out. Sharp nails tore her flesh, and he bit her over the spot he'd already left. When he leaned up from her, he felt even thicker inside her, pushing her into another realm of bliss.

She shuddered and clenched him tight.

"Oh, yeah, that's it," he crooned and tightened his grip. "I'm coming *now*." He tensed and yelled out. He remained inside her for several moments before he withdrew and *continued* to spend all over her back.

His explosive climax gave her a sense of wonder, that she'd made him lose all control.

When he finished, he rubbed his cum into her skin.

She arched beneath him like a damn cat. "That's it. Rub it all over me."

"Mine. My marker," he growled and yanked her head back by her hair. "You're mine. Say it."

By the Wolf, he's strong. "I'm yours." The words automatically poured from her. A sense of peace, acceptance so close... Until the import of her words registered.

Rudra blinked, startled out of the sensual lull she'd been riding. She couldn't have said why, but admitting to his claim seemed a bit too real, too much. This was just sex. Nothing more. Not with a wolf who was the enemy, a werewolf and a fucking future *alpha*.

He flopped down on the bed beside her and pulled her on top of him. Her tension dissipated like mist.

"Such a sexy alpha," he murmured, his gaze half closed, drugged with satisfaction. "My sexy alpha."

"I bet Mike Barton would disagree with you there." She rested her cheek down on his chest and exhaled softly.

"Mike Barton can kiss my ass. No, make that, *you* should kiss my ass. Who knows, I might like it." Fenris rubbed her back, his touch both possessive and tender. "You feel like silk. As cool as the Wolf's own spring and as soothing as the sun's warmth over winter fur."

She smiled, amused at this poetic side of her lover. *God, I have a lover.* "You're cute when you're satisfied. So lyrical."

He chuckled, and his heart began to slow under her ear. "You're a mate worth keeping. A bossy female with a great ass." He cupped her butt in his hands and slid a finger around the rim of her anus then pulled back. "Wait until I take you here. When my second wolf claims you for his own."

Second wolf – werewolf. *Mate?* "Fenris?"

She wanted to ask about the werewolf, about his casual disdain for his alpha, about anything that made sense concerning this strange lust that continued to morph into something more. But her lover had fallen asleep. For once willing to follow someone else, she closed her eyes, inhaled his scent, and joined him for a nap. Just a little one, until she found the energy to join the clan again.

Chapter Four

"So tell me again about this living box thing?" Jericho asked two weeks later.

The bear sat up to his hairy chest in a spacious hot spring deep in the forest. Fenris, Brett and Brody Nash—the annoying red wolf brothers—and Gibson, a brown fox, basked in the soothing water after a day spent hunting.

To his surprise, Fenris actually liked the group. He'd spent his first week under Red's watchful eye, not surprised when she sent him to Jericho. Though the sex between Fenris and the alpha grew more and more explosive each night, the days were filled with tension. Red didn't trust him, that he knew. She also expected him to turn on his clan, which he'd never do. He didn't agree with Uncle Mike on most clan matters, but he'd never go against his own. Not when Red had every intention of ripping out the Silver alpha's throat.

"Spill it, Goldie. What's the deal with a mating ceremony? Anything we should know, if and when Rudra's mom tries that on us?" Brody asked. "I wouldn't put it past her. Woman's always trying to match lone wolves."

Fenris sighed. "It's Fenris, not Goldie. I think your alpha's a bad influence."

"Damn straight." Brett laughed. "But she can kick our collective asses, and she's pretty pleasant when she's not dealing with the Silver Clan. So we do what she says—"

"—when she says it," Brody finished for him. "Now, this box?"

Fenris explained why he'd been running in the forest the day they'd found him. "My uncle had this notion that my brother and I need to mate. By the Wolf, we're—" No need to tell them he was still considered a pup by many. Jericho and the others treated him like an equal, and he had no intention of changing their minds. "It's too soon for us to be tied down to one lone female. And the Silver Clan females are too bitchy for my peace of mind. Not one of them has ever held my attention for more than a night." *Not like Red.*

"But how do you know the ceremony actually works? Just more priest bullshit," Jericho offered. "In my old clan, they tried that same crap with us. But my old man told the priest to go to hell." He frowned. "'Course, not more than a few days later we were thrown out of the Great Forest. Maybe it wasn't all bullshit."

Fenris inwardly flinched. These males he'd come to think of as friends had been ousted from their rightful home by his own uncle. Bad enough he came from the Silver Clan. He knew they gave him slack because Red had ordered it, and because they thought of him as another victim of the Silver Clan. A misguided golden wolf who still refused to accept the truth about the decimation of his clan.

The more time he spent with them, the more he worried about eventually learning the 'truth'. Had there once been clans of golden wolves? And if so, did his uncle have anything to do with their passing?

Fenris shook off his doubts. "Yeah, well, you wanted to know about the celebration. Every ten years, the Silver Clan gathers together to join mates, unwilling or not, in tribute to the Wolf in the Forest. The males are forced to take a lock of hair, bind it in the sacred petals and toss it into the green stalk of Living Wood, which is actually a plant with a hard, bowl-shaped flower given to us a long time ago by the Dark Elves. Personally, seems like the Dark Elves cursed us. Not much of a gift if you ask wolf males."

"Hell, yeah. One woman? Forever?" Jericho shuddered.

"Come on. To find that special female?" the brown fox interrupted. "I'd love to find a female, have kits and settle down. But in the Great Forest. Not here," Gibson added.

Fenris sighed. "I can't blame you. I mean, your land is still forest and woods, but the humans are so close."

"Don't let Rudra hear you say that," Brody said in a low voice and moved in the water. "She's a bit sensitive about mention of anything human."

"I don't see why." Fenris raised his arms above his head and stretched. Damn, the hot spring felt good in the encroaching chill of autumn air. "Her father's a sorcerer. He's not human. A like species, maybe, but he's different. I can smell it on him."

Brett blinked. "Really? Because they all smell alike to me."

"What does your alpha smell like, then? Because she's part sorceress." Fenris wanted to know. His emotions were in a constant tangle over the sexy, stubborn female. He couldn't even think of her as human, anymore. Just one more objection he no longer had to put between them. He'd had sex with her as man, and despite his intention not to, they'd had sex while in wolf form, which put him one step closer to mating with her. Two weeks with her wasn't enough. He wanted to lose himself in her body, in her heart and mind.

"Rudra's big for a female, but she'd fit me just right. She smells sweet. Like magic and wolf and sex, all rolled up into a delightful—" Brett clutched at Fenris's hand wrapped around his throat.

Everyone stilled.

"Ah, go easy, Fenris." Jericho chuckled. "Brett likes to fantasise, but Rudra would eat him for breakfast. And not in a good way."

Alarmed at his loss of control, Fenris tried to play it off. "Sorry. I swear she's put some kind of spell on me so I won't leave. Makes me antsy anytime I feel like anyone's talking bad about her."

Gibson nodded. "That's our alpha. Strong, sly and a devious heartbreaker. If she weren't so out of my league, I'd try for her myself."

"How come you haven't, Jericho?" Brody asked. "You've known her forever."

Jericho looked ill. "She's like a sister, you ass. Honestly. Are you sure you're not part cat? You think with your dick more than your brain."

Fenris couldn't help laughing with the others.

Jericho continued. "She accepted me without question. Just cubs together, and we hit it off. I'd kill anyone who screwed with her," he said, glancing at Fenris in no uncertain terms. "But I also know what she needs better than she does."

"Great. Here we go again." Brody groaned.

"What?" Fenris asked.

"Jericho thinks he's a shaman. Has dreams and shit. Really annoying," Brett said.

Fenris admired Jericho. Strong, solitary yet protective of his clan, the bear never made excuses for others' failures or his own. And he was a helluva shifter to have in a fight. They'd crossed a large group of rebellious cats the other day, spoiling for trouble. Fenris had considered the need to shift into his werewolf form, but then Jericho had stepped in. After one swipe of his paw, the cats had hissed and run fast and far away.

"What kind of dreams do you have?" he asked Jericho.

"Oh, funny ones. Dreams about living again in the Great Forest. About running with a golden wolf, a future alpha of the Silver Clan." Jericho's dark brown eyes drilled holes into him. "About Dark Elves and sorcerers and the Wolf in the Forest. And about the spirit's long lost brother, the Bear in the Cave."

"Interesting." Fenris' heart raced. How much did Jericho really know?

Jericho studied his fingernails. "Yeah. Seems Uncle Mike is right now scouring the Great Forest looking for his missing *golden* nephews. Red orbs of danger, a missing twin and demons. Ring a bell?"

"Demons? Anson's gone?" Panicked, Fenris was halfway out of the pool when Jericho yanked him back in.

Jericho grinned, his large teeth glinting in the sun. "You, my friend, are going to get us back into the Great Forest. I've been waiting on your sorry ass for years."

Brett and Brody exchanged a look.

Gibson stared in shock and what looked like hurt. "You're Mike Barton's nephew? The next in line to take over as Silver Clan alpha. How...nice." His yellow eyes glowed with anger.

Jericho shook his head. "Back off, Gib. He's Rudra's. And just wait until she learns what he's been hiding." He turned to Fenris. "You should have told her the truth from the beginning. Our alpha doesn't much like surprises. She's going to slice your balls off, Goldie. Bad news."

"Fuck off, Jericho. Red's not going to hurt me. I'm nothing like my uncle, and I'm not a future alpha."

"Please. Even I can see the power all over you, and I'm not even wolf," Gibson huffed.

"It has nothing to do with being alpha, it's—" Fenris stopped, scenting an evil in the air. That same smell of sulphur that had occurred in Rurik's laboratory had returned. "We have to get back, right now."

"Hell, no. You're not going anywhere," Brody said as he and Brett grabbed his arms.

"You don't understand." Fenris tried to jerk free while looking all around him. It had been ingrained in him since birth to keep his werewolf heritage a secret, and he had a hard time allowing it to rise. With Rudra, he hadn't thought, he'd reacted. Now, he had a feeling only his powerful beast would be able to combat this new threat.

The mark on his forearm began to glow.

Jericho stared at him and frowned. "Get out of the water, guys," he said slowly. "Something bad's coming."

Before any of them could move, the water turned from hot to ice, freezing them in place.

Fenris worked his arms free from the Nash brothers and called on his inherent werewolf. He felt the change and broke through the ice just as three serpentine monsters appeared from out of nowhere and converged on the pool.

With a roar, Fenris punched the last of the ice holding him in place and freed the others. "Get back to warn Rurik and Rudra," he growled into stunned faces. All but Jericho seemed surprised by his form. "Go."

Jericho shook his head. "You three hurry back. I'll stay here and back up Goldie."

Fenris took the nearest monster by surprise and sliced through its neck. He felt claws score his side, leaving a deep furrow of pain. Blood matted his fur, and he snarled a warning as the other two converged on him and Jericho.

"My cousin will not find the protection he seeks in you," one of the snakemen hissed. "He and his bitch belong to me."

Fenris received a blow to his midsection and dodged a near decapitation from the pair of monsters flanking him. *Shit*. One had been bad enough to fight. But three would be a real pain in the ass. Taking advantage of the weakest of them, he tore into its neck wound and pulled until he heard a pop. Unfortunately, he couldn't avoid the two-pronged attack to his back and side.

Behind him, Jericho growled, now a bear.

"Stay back," Fenris warned. "They're magic. Leave this to me." Pleased at the battlelust that began to take the place of the pain, he allowed his rage free reign.

Jericho ignored him. But the bear's attack gave Fenris the advantage he needed. As the remaining monsters converged on Jericho, Fenris took one of them down by grabbing and ripping out his spinal column from neck to tail.

The other beast shrieked and grew in size. Jericho roared and fell back under its onslaught. Fenris tried to help by grabbing its attention, but he had a hard time getting his claws into the creature. It slithered out of his hands by turning into mist for a moment before coalescing once again into solid flesh.

Worried when it turned for Jericho once more, he forced it to face him and held on, allowing it to dig its talons into his toughened skin.

"Shit, that hurt," he growled as he clutched at the area where he imagined the heart to be.

The monster screeched in pain and, in a frenzy, dug its fangs into his shoulder, injecting Fenris with a burning toxin.

It let go when Jericho clamped his mouth around the thing's tail, but Fenris' respite was short lived. While it ground its claws into him, it flung Jericho into a large tree. Jericho shifted back into a man's form and lay still, unmoving. Knowing how much Red loved the large bear, Fenris threw himself into a berserker's rage.

Oblivious to the wounds he took, he used every bit of his strength and tore through his opponent, delivering a warning to the puppet master behind the monster. "Next time, come in person so I can rip you apart face to face, human scum."

The sorcerer screamed his denial through the creature before it ceased to exist.

Dropping its slimy remains to the ground, Fenris made his way to Jericho. The bear didn't stir. Hefting him over his shoulder took some work, even for a werewolf. Jericho weighed a ton, and Fenris' wounds began to take their toll. Trudging through the forest and praying the attack in the woods was the only one the sorcerer had perpetrated, he forced himself to keep moving until he found Rurik.

Deciding to try the man at home, Fenris stumbled in that direction, away from the sorcerer's lab. Before he reached the porch, Rena opened the door and gasped at him. She shifted into a wolf's form and took off.

"Great. Now I've scared Red's mother." Wondering if he ought to leave Jericho on the steps and go find Red, he set the bear down gently and nearly fell. Clutching his aching ribs, he felt moisture dripping down his torso and realized he was covered in blood.

Not wanting everyone to know about his werewolf form if the Nash brothers hadn't already told them, he shifted back into a man's form and passed out.

* * * *

Groggy, Fenris came to, sprawled beside Jericho, who stared at him with concern.

"You okay?" Jericho rose unsteadily on his feet, blood trickling from his ears.

"Fine." A lie, but Fenris needed to find Red. "Have you seen Rudra?"

"Not yet. Just woke up." Jericho looked around him with shock on his face. "How the hell did we get here?"

"I carried your sorry ass. Might want to think about a diet. You're no lightweight."

"Yeah, neither are you, Fenris *Barton*." Jericho's expression blanked.

Not wanting to hash out his relation to Uncle Mike just then, Fenris somehow stood on shaky legs, needing to find Red. Anxiety filled him that she might be hurt, needing him while he chatted with her friend.

He took two steps and would have fallen if Jericho hadn't wriggled under his arm. The movement sent shafts of pain down his side, and he gasped.

"Stay here. Rurik will be back soon. He always knows when we're in need," Jericho grumbled.

"No. Have to find...Red. Make sure...she's...okay."

"That's what you want?" Jericho sounded odd.

"Find her," he growled, his werewolf wanting the woman right the fuck now. He had to see her safe.

"Whatever. Come on, furball." Jericho helped him take several steps on the path towards Rudra's house.

A flurry of people raced from that very direction. Rudra among them.

Fenris pushed away from Jericho and almost fell into her arms. He steadied himself and looked her over. Still golden-eyed, red-haired and annoyed with him.

"I leave you alone for a few hours and this is what happens?" she asked, glancing away from him to scowl at Jericho.

"You okay?" Fenris gripped her chin in his hands and turned her face to clearly see her. "No attacks?" He hissed when she hugged him to keep him from falling.

"*Damn it*. You're bleeding everywhere."

"Most amazing damn thing I've ever seen," Brody mumbled in the background.

"Saved our asses, big time," Gibson added, angling to get closer.

"What happened?" Rudra asked.

Her father and mother suddenly appeared in front of them, the way the smoke creatures had. Fenris wasn't at the top of his game and took a swing, not expecting anything but trouble.

Thankfully, Rena ducked to avoid a slash across her throat.

"Shit," he mumbled, having a hard time focusing. "Sorry, Rena. Thought you were someone else."

"Bring him inside," he thought he heard Rurik say.

Then someone pressed down hard on his ribs, and he passed out again.

Rudra stared in horror at Fenris, wondering if he'd make it. He looked terrible. Covered in blood, his face pale and waxy, his body burning up.

Yet he wanted to see how *she* fared.

Was it any wonder she couldn't think around him? She hurried after Jericho and the others carrying Fenris into the house. Before she entered, she spun to stop the crowd gathered behind them.

"Is it true Fenris is a werewolf?" Nine-year-old George Hankler asked with wide eyes. "Becky said she heard Gibson tell Netta that —"

"Okay. Everyone, disperse. Brody, Beckett? Put everyone on alert. We have sorcerer troubles again."

The brothers groaned.

"Gibson? Fill the council in on whatever's happened. I want them to instil a curfew until we figure this out. Everyone to the village centre. Now."

The crowd scattered, and she hurried inside. Her father had Fenris on the dining table and was working spells over him. Her mother spoke quietly with Jericho and a few red wolves. Spotting Rudra, she left them and pulled her close.

"Jericho was telling me what happened. I knew Fenris was a werewolf, but seeing him up close... By the Wolf, he's impressive. And he saved your beta, did you know that? Tell her." She shoved Rudra at the bear before moving to help her husband.

"Well? Spill it before I hurt you," Rudra snarled.

Jericho recounted everything. About Fenris' relationship to Mike Barton, about his transformation and how he'd saved the small group. And about how he'd looked like death and could barely stand but wouldn't stop until he'd seen for himself that Rudra was safe.

"I liked him before, but I can't say enough about him, now. He's yours, Rudra. And you know it," Jericho growled. "So stop being such a dipshit and take him to mate. Sometimes I wonder how you manage to be alpha, as slow as you are."

She blinked in shock, not used to Jericho's criticism.

"Well, you know it's true," he muttered. "I love you. I respect you. But I know you. He scares you. He won't bow down to you and do whatever you tell him to. And that's exactly what you need. I like him." He crossed his arms over his chest.

"Yeah, because he saved your life."

"No. Well, okay, yeah, because of that. And because he's strong enough to put you first. I saw him in all his werewolf glory. He's alpha through and through, but he's never done anything to impede your rule, and you know it. Goldie can handle you, sister wolf. Don't fuck it up."

He kissed her on the forehead and left. Jericho and his blunt two cents.

But he had a point.

She watched her father take enspelled poison out of Fenris and thought about all she knew of the male. Aside from the perfection of his body and the amazing sex they continued to have each night, Fenris would make a remarkable mate. Intelligent and thoughtful, he listened without giving her constant advice. Despite her insistence that he answer her questions about his clan, he refused. His loyalty made him that much more attractive.

And what about his decision to help her family stop their curse, a curse that had twice now affected him? Fenris had no reason to help her father, yet, according to Rurik, he'd volunteered to help end the curse because of her, not the clan.

What should she make of him? And why did her heart race only in his presence? Going into heat should have put her in immediate sexual desire for any male within reach. She only burned for Fenris. She liked his wolf, the man, and that giant werewolf that had once again saved the day. She wanted to carry his young and watch a strong male, just like him, grow and develop into a responsible wolf.

Rudra thought about him day and night. She smelled him on her, and she liked it. Loved it. Wanted more.

"Red?" he groaned, reaching out.

Quickly taking his hand in hers, she gripped it tight. "I'm right here, you stubborn werewolf."

"You okay?" he asked, still more concerned with Rudra's welfare.

Her mother sighed and murmured, "He's a keeper."

"I'm fine, Fenris. I think you're the one with the problems."

"No." His voice grew stronger and his wounds faded under her father's healing touch. "I just lost a lot of blood."

"And dealt with ghoulish toxin. I'm so sorry about this," her father apologised. "In just one more week, the full moon will appear. I've tripled my spells around the village, but I hadn't thought to cover the communal areas in the forest, as well."

"It's okay, Rurik. With any luck, Mikhail will be there waiting when the moon's at its peak. I can't wait to get my claws into the bastard." Fenris' eyes gleamed with anger, and he tightened his hold on Rudra without being too harsh. "I won't let him touch you, Red."

She cleared her throat, annoyed to feel on the verge of tears. "You helped my clan today. You saved Jericho."

"I know how much you love him."

But what about how much she loved Fenris? Did the idiot wolf not comprehend his importance to her? *But why should he, when you go out of your way to remain distant?* She sighed.

"He'll be okay." He tried to reassure her.

"It's you I'm worried about," she snapped. "Now shut up and let my father finish."

Fenris shot her a doopy grin and closed his eyes. "So damn bossy."

When her father finished, Fenris lay asleep.

"Can you take us back to my place?" she asked.

"Yes. But before I do, I'd like to know your intentions."

"Dad?"

"I like Fenris. He has no one here willing to speak for him. Though maybe Jericho would, now that he's seen what I've known about this pup from the first moment I laid eyes on him."

She groaned. "Don't call him a pup. That makes me feel like a cradle robber."

"You're still a pup in my eyes." Rurik smiled. "Now, tell me. What are you going to do with him? Use him for your own gain, or set him free like the true alpha of her clan would?"

"But I want him to help our clan, not just me."

"Honey," her mother said softly. "We are who we are because we're different than the others. Wouldn't using Fenris to further our agenda, against his own kind, be just as wrong as the Silver Clan and their actions against us?"

Rudra rubbed her eyes, tired. "Yes. No. I don't know."

"You do," her father argued. "But now isn't the time. Grab my hand."

She did, and he grabbed Fenris' hand. In the blink of an eye, all three of them were in her bedroom in her house. Fenris lay on the bed. Her father and she stood on either side of it.

"Make sure he takes this twice before tomorrow." Rurik handed her a bag of herbs. "It will calm his pain and his troubled dreams. The ghoul toxin has a nasty after-effect."

"I will. Thanks, Dad."

"No, thank Fenris. This isn't his fault, but he's been thrust in the middle of it. Do the right thing, honey. Not for us or even for him, but for you." He disappeared.

Exhausted and knowing she had much more to do before she could rest, Rudra reluctantly left Fenris' side and sought the council. She would have time enough to make the decisions she knew she needed to make. She only hoped she'd have the strength to make the right ones, no matter how much it hurt.

Chapter Five

Fenris was damn tired of Rudra avoiding him. It felt as if the rest of the clan had come by in the past three days while he recovered from that nasty altercation in the woods. Yet the alpha couldn't give him the time of day.

His side itched, but when he moved to scratch it, Jericho caught his hand.

"Shit."

"Easy, Goldie. You open that wound, and Rurik will have my head."

"Lucky you, babysitting duty." Fenris glared.

Jericho shrugged. "Someone had to do it. Unless you'd rather I let the Nash brothers back. Or how about Janice? She seems to like you, and she's in heat." He grinned, his amusement turning his face from sombre and scary to almost handsome. No wonder the ladies in the village liked the guy. Couldn't be his sterling personality.

"Janice?"

"You know, the redhead with a bad dye job? The one trying to pass herself off as a blonde? I think she's got it bad for the clan's favourite golden boy."

Fenris cringed at thoughts of the touchy-feely red wolf. She smelled all wrong and seemed to have nothing on her mind but sex, which he used to find attractive in a woman. How times had changed. "No, thanks. She turns me cold."

Jericho smiled.

"Why the hell are you so pleasant lately? It's scaring me."

Jericho laughed. "No way a wolf can turn Janice down when she's in heat. Except for you. Must be because you're mated to the alpha. Man. How the hell did I not see this? I only thought you'd bring us back to the Great Forest. I had no idea you'd get Rudra's panties in a bunch. The woman is so frustrated in love with you, it's not funny."

Fenris paused. "She is?" Warmth unfurled at the thought. She'd been acting so cold lately, so distant that it hurt.

"She's hot for you, bro. But she doesn't want you to pull anything. You took a pretty bad beating from those things in the woods."

Uncomfortable with all the praise he'd been receiving, Fenris shrugged. "I needed the challenge. And lucky me, they provided it. But you know, I'm needing something else really bad." He squirmed, his dick in constant pain whenever he thought about Red.

"Whoa, buddy. Sorry, can't help you there."

"Asshole." Fenris glared. "Red's avoiding me. And I can't get the bull-headed woman to stay put long enough to fix whatever's wrong."

Jericho had the nerve to look relieved. "I can help with that. Wait here." He left the room.

Fenris rolled his eyes. Where else would he go? Rudra had appointed a bevy of guards to make sure he didn't leave her house until she gave the okay. The confinement should have bothered him more, but here, in her bedroom surrounded by her scent, he felt a measure of peace. Now, if only he could make her stay put and explain why she'd been avoiding him. He had a bad feeling it had to do with his relation to Uncle Mike. And he didn't know what to do about it.

As he paced the room, trying to figure a way out of this mess, he wondered what to do about his feelings for Red. He knew he loved her. He didn't want to live without her, but he couldn't turn against his family. She hadn't given him much more than her body, but he knew, if he had the chance and time, he could make her fall in love with him. He hoped.

The door banged open. Jericho manhandled Rudra into the room. "There. Now work it out, alpha, and don't leave the house until you do," Jericho growled and slammed the door behind him when he left.

Fenris stared hungrily at the woman he could no longer deny as his mate. Her hair curled around her face and trailed over her heaving breasts. The scent of feminine need and fear filled the air, simultaneously teasing and unnerving him. Red, afraid?

"Red."

"Fenris."

They spoke at the same time.

He paused. "You first."

She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. Her nipples pebbled under the long-sleeved pullover she wore. When she opened her eyes, they gleamed like topaz. "You're free to go."

He took a step towards her and stopped. "What?"

"I said, you're free to go. You're not a prisoner here. You have our thanks," she said stiffly.

The glassy sheen gathering in her eyes alarmed him.

"Are you okay, Red?"

She coughed. "Just go, okay? Go back to the Great Forest and your Silver Clan. Jericho will guide you safely through the woods. Know that we owe you a great debt—"

"Bullshit. What's wrong with you?" He grabbed her by the arms and yanked her close. "This is because of my uncle, isn't it? Well, I can't help it. I am who I am."

"What do you want from me?" she yelled, startling him with the depth of her anger. "I'm letting you go, giving you exactly what you want. Do you want an apology in blood, is that it?"

"What I want is you naked and in the middle of that bed," he snarled and shifted into his werewolf, slicing through his clothes as he transformed. "I want to make the final claim on you I should have made days ago. And then I want to fuck you until you can't walk. Until our pup grows in your belly. I want to stand by you and protect you for the rest of your life."

She stared at him in awe and blinked away the tears streaming down her face. The scent of her fear receded, replaced by a mouth-watering arousal. "You do?"

He ran a claw over her cheek, mesmerized by her scent and by the glow of love in her gaze. "I love you, Red. But I can't lie. I can't go against my clan for you. I'll do anything else you want. But I can't turn against the family who raised me."

"I should never have asked you to." She sighed and nuzzled her cheek across his chest, mixing their scents. "You're strong and big and mine. And though we've been dancing around it, you know you claimed me weeks ago. I haven't forgotten waking up to find a wolf behind me, either."

"Hmm. Yes, I remember that." He ground against her belly, digging his cock into the hard plane of her abdomen. "Still, you're not fully mine, yet."

"But I want to be," she said softly and took his furry face in her hands. "I love you, Fenris."

"By the Wolf, it's about time." He nuzzled her cheek and stood back, letting her look her fill. "I'm so hard, it's not going to take long to do this. And I promise, I'll do my best not to hurt you."

She didn't flinch, his perfect mate. Red walked toward him and cupped his thick erection. Her touch made him groan.

"I happened to find an unguent in my father's stash. It should help me take this monster up my ass." She rubbed her hand over the head of his shaft, taking the milky evidence of his excitement and spreading it over him.

"Strip and get on the bed," he growled, beside himself. Finally. The female would belong to him, and everyone would know it.

She took her sweet time shedding her clothing. Then she grabbed a small jar off her dresser and took it with her to the bed. Bent over, she dipped her finger in the container and proceeded to slick it between her ass cheeks.

So hard he could split wood, Fenris hurried to her and spread her wide. "Do it again," he said hoarsely, fighting the urge to push deep inside her. He watched her work her slender finger around and inside her tight hole. "Good?"

"Not yet, but it will be. When are you going to stick it inside me?" she challenged and glanced over her shoulder at him.

He did what he'd been dying to do. He pushed her hand aside and mounted her. Shoving his large cock inside her pussy, he worked her, coating himself with her body's natural lube. He rammed her so hard he thought she'd cry out for him to stop, but his mate only begged for more.

She screamed his name and clenched so hard around him, he almost spewed. But knowing this to be the moment, he pulled out and pushed into her tight ass. Working slowly but steadily, he finally breached her anus and sphincter and continued. Deeper and deeper, he slid into a frenzy, not helped by her continued moans.

With one hand, she reached down between her legs and cupped his balls. Unable to stop himself, he surged inside her.

"Fuck," he roared and began taking her like the beast he was. The need to coat her and keep her ate at him until his need burst. Coming hard, he jetted inside her ass and continued to come. Like before, he pulled out and covered her back in semen. A large mess thanks to his werewolf genes, the fluid seeped into her skin and turned his pretty wolf into a warrior's mate.

She screamed as she came again, the sensation of his magic merging with hers a pleasure he didn't want to waste. Still hard, he surged back into her ass and began pumping. But not wanting to fill her there again, he withdrew.

"I need a spell to clean us up," he rasped. When she didn't do more than shudder, he tugged her hair to get her attention. "Dammit, Red. Clean my dick so I can stick it in your pussy, where it belongs."

She waved a hand and cleaned him, then he was there. Heaven. Thrusting in and out of her wet channel, stretching her and filling her. She spasmed, sending shockwaves of desire through him.

On a groan, he swore and came one more time. Bending low, he gently nipped the mark he'd left the first time they'd joined, conscious of his sharp teeth, and continued to shoot, loving their mingled scent. No longer two wolves, but one heart. And one soul, he thought lazily as he shifted into a man's form while inside her.

"Oh! Do that again."

"Not yet, love. First, I need a moment to-- Fuck, Red," he groaned as she made him come again. He tensed and cried out as she took everything he had left. Magical or not, only Red's touch aroused him to such a pitch.

"Oh, no, Goldie. We're just getting started," she promised.

* * * *

Hours later, when Fenris had enough energy to rise, he made use of the facilities and returned to find his mate staring at him with a pleased expression on her face.

"Uh oh. What are you up to now?" he asked.

"Just loving the way you're made. Who knew I had a thing for blonds?"

He chuckled and lay down on top of her, not surprised to find himself finally too tired to fuck her. "So, you taking it up the ass. I liked that."

She snorted and toyed with his hair. "You would."

"I think we should try it again later, maybe when I'm not so big. You know, in this form." He leaned down to plant a kiss on her lips, not expecting to grow aroused from it. He groaned. "Have mercy, witch. You're killing me."

"Fenris," she protested. "I'm too worn out. By the Wolf, you're horny."

"It's not me, it's you." Settling between her firm thighs, he kept his hard dick right there. "You know, we have a lot to talk about, still."

"But not yet. Not now." Rudra brought his head down to hers and gave him a kiss that took his breath away. "For now, you're mine."

"You mean, you're mine."

"Who's alpha here, pup?" she muttered and grinned when he frowned. "Now, why don't you tell me about this Living Box I've been hearing about. Because it's funny, but I woke up on the morning you arrived missing a hank of hair."

He stared wide-eyed. "Are you serious?"

"Yeah. And my mother just happened to be strolling by the house when I felt it missing."

"Your mother... I thought the sacrifice only worked on males." Fenris grinned, feeling his heart lift. *Thank you, Wolf in the Forest. For all my blessings.* "Have I told you about my twin, Anson? I left him with my uncle at the ceremony. For all I know, he's mated now as well. You have to meet him. You'll love him."

"Not as much as I love you."

"I should hope not."

* * * *

Two weeks later, Fenris walked into the middle of the Silver Clan's village in the Great Forest, surrounded by friends and family. With his tense mate by his side and several of his new clan behind him, he knew much rested on this careful introduction. He was placing a large amount of faith in his uncle, despite all that Red thought about him. But an interesting conversation with Rena and Rurik had convinced him to take the first step.

Now that the curse had been lifted from the Pavtek family with a simple spell, Red wanted to embrace their future. And what better way than bringing the Red Clan back where they belonged? To the Great Forest of their birth.

"Fenris." Uncle Mike stood with his arms crossed over his broach chest in the centre of the courtyard. Aunt Emily and Fenris' three other uncles and cousins stood behind him. All around them, Silver Clan wolves gathered to stare at history in the making.

Red clasped his hand tighter, and he squeezed it to let her know not to panic – not that his alpha ever would. “Uncle Mike. I’d like you to meet my mate and new alpha, Rudra Pavtek.”

The silver wolves rumbled with surprise and shock. A female alpha? One that commanded one of their own? Then, too, Rurik’s presence had been detected, as had the bears and foxes with them. That they’d been allowed entry into the Great Forest at all spoke of the wonder of this day.

Michael Barton stepped away from his wife and family until he stood directly in front of Fenris. Those closest to them looked away, but not Red, and not Fenris. Alphas didn’t bow to other alphas, nor did they feel the fear an alpha commanded over those he led.

“Hmm, she’s pretty enough.”

Fenris rolled his eyes when Red bared her teeth. His uncle bit his lip as if to cover a smile.

“As pretty as her mother, another great pain in my ass,” Mike said in a gruff voice. He nodded at Rena over Fenris’ shoulder. “Nice to see you again, Rena. And Rurik. Looking spry as always. For a human.”

Rurik told him to go to hell, and Mike grinned. Then he looked back at Fenris and frowned. “Still turning your back on your heritage, pup?”

The rumbling of the Red Clan behind him grew louder.

“He’s not a pup,” Red growled. “He’s my mate and the rightful alpha of this damn clan.”

“Actually, he’s not.” Mike handed them two locks of hair. One was hers, the other blond. “Your father showed up and gave me this a few weeks ago, about the same time I snuck a few strands from my hot-headed nephew. The Wolf in the Forest hasn’t been happy with me for a while now,” he said gruffly. “I did what I thought was right at the time. My golden brother barely survived his birthing, and we hit hard times. But Fenris, your father loved your mother, and he made me promise to find the same for you and your idiot twin the year you turned twenty-five. Don’t ask me how he knew, but he did.”

“So he was never a part of the Golden Clan?” Fenris had to ask.

“Hell, no. We put that rumour out there to protect the strength and memory of the great golden wolves. But after Lycos defeated the humans, he was the last. One or two are born every generation, and they’re male. Your father was golden, as are you and your brother.

And if we're so blessed, you'll make more golden wolves with this one, here," Mike said with a nod at Rudra.

He continued. "I put yours and Anson's offerings, and Rudra's, into the Living Box. And I prayed. And now here you are, the answer to my prayers." Uncle Mike had tears in his eyes.

"Uncle Mike?" Fenris asked, worried.

His uncle turned and walked back to his family then addressed the gathering. "One and all, take note of this historic occasion. Blessed by the Wolf in the Forest, we rejoin clans and families long denied. As it was shown to me by the Great Wolf, we will know a time of peace ruled by a pair of alphas stronger than any we've ever seen. The heir of Lycos himself, Fenris Barton, and his mate, Rudra Pavtek, will rule jointly over our clan. No longer Red or Silver, we will henceforth be the Great Wolf Clan of the Great Forest. And those who were once banished may return, wolf, bear, fox and more."

"Except the cats," someone called out from the crowd, causing a roar of laughter.

"Unfortunately, even them," Uncle Mike grudgingly admitted. "From this day until the Wolf in the Forest declares otherwise." He knelt and bowed his head to Fenris and Red.

A sudden stillness came over the air, and then the musical notes of wolf song filled the forest. The whisper of power sent a rainbow of light over the gathering, a single golden beam lighting Fenris and his mate, a sure blessing from the Wolf.

The congregation joined in song, and a terrific love flowed through the crowd.

"My mate, my heart," Fenris whispered. "My enemy, no longer."

"As if you ever were," Red whispered back and kissed his cheek. "We love you, Fenris. Both of us." She put his hand over her belly and smiled.

Fenris had finally come home.

About the Author

Marie Harte is an avid reader who loves all things paranormal and futuristic. Reading romances since she was twelve, she fell in love with the warmth of first passion and knew writing was her calling.

Twenty-four years later, the Marine Corps, a foray through Information Technology, a husband and four kids, and her dream has finally come true. Marie lives in Georgia with her family and loves hearing from readers.

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The Perfect Creation
Creating Chemistry
Creation's Control
Caging the Beast

TRAPPED

Jude Mason and Jenna Byrnes

Dedication

To all those wolves out there...you know who you are.

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Ford: Ford Motor Company

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Chapter One

"Sienna, quit it." Gareth shifted around, trying to dislodge his lady's fingers from under his arms. He was incredibly ticklish, and she loved to torment him, especially when he was trying to watch a movie she didn't particularly want to see. She liked her romance, he preferred action.

Tendrils of long, dark auburn hair slapped his face as Sienna straddled his thighs. "Make me!" She dug her fingers in deep, sending him into new fits of laughter.

"Damn, woman, stop it before I have to paddle your ass." He grabbed her by the forearms and held her hands down. It took him a moment to catch his breath, and when he did, he leaned forward and ran his stubbly chin across her chest. The pale orange tank top didn't do a thing to protect her from his day's growth of beard, and she yelped her surprise.

"Ouch, Gareth, jeeze!" She twisted, trying to break his hold on her and failed.

"You're not going to let me watch my movie, are you?" He nipped at her breast through the thin cotton. The soft mound pressed against his face, his nose flattened, and he inhaled deeply, taking as much of her scent as he could. She smelled amazing. Woman and animal, lust and the unmistakable aroma of desire filled his nostrils.

He suddenly wanted her. Fingers tight around her arms, he pulled them high overhead, delighting in the curve of her body. He nuzzled harder against her breast, his teeth sinking into the taut nipple. Her moan urged him to the other side where he bit and chewed on its twin.

"Movie? What movie?" she moaned in a husky whisper.

She arched her back and shoved her hips forward, grinding into him. The sweet, musky scent of her cunt rose, and in moments, his temperature soared. His cock throbbed to life, pressing against her barely covered sex, the baggy cotton shorts giving him glimpses of the curly, dark pubic hair he knew adorned her plump folds.

"No movie. Hold on." Gareth slipped his free arm around her body and got to his feet. He released her arms, and they instantly went around his neck, her legs around his waist, gripping him. Holding her ass tight, he staggered towards their bedroom, ignoring the blare

of the TV behind him. They passed a large window, and when he glanced outside, he saw the sky darkening.

Soon, the moon would rise.

His heartbeat raced even faster. His skin itched.

Sienna dragged her fingers across his back, sending a new shiver of excitement straight to his cock. It pulsed against his jeans.

Gareth kicked the door open and took a couple of staggering steps into the room, stopping when he felt the bed bump his shins. He lowered Sienna onto the soft covers and stepped back. He turned and walked to the nearby window and pushed open the curtains. Trees lined their small backyard. There was plenty of light left to illuminate their room, and he was smiling when he turned to face Sienna.

"Come here, sexy brute," she murmured, reaching out for him. She lay on her back, her legs bent at the knees, her feet flat on the bed. Her nipples were erect, the tight nubbins like tiny buttons pressed against the cotton and pointing directly at him.

He strode to her, stopping at the foot of the bed. "Yes, ma'am. You wanted something?" Gareth swayed his hips side to side then thrust himself forward.

"Yeah, you." Sienna lifted a foot and placed it over the bulge at his crotch. "And this." She manoeuvred her foot around, stroking him through his jeans.

He glanced through the window, and the anticipation of the night to come sent an added shiver down his spine. He grabbed hold of her foot and lifted it to his lips. When he pressed a kiss to her instep, her shudder made him smile.

His lust rising, he let her foot go and reached for his clothes. Shirt first, the buttons fought his attempt to unfasten them. Finally, the garment came free and slipped to the floor. He unsnapped his jeans and pushed them down then sat beside her to push them over his lower legs and feet. When he stood up again, he was clad only in a pair of tight, white underpants that had no hope of containing his erection. The tip poked over the top, the band acting like some misplaced cock ring with a stranglehold on his piece.

Sienna looked up at him with her smoky, dark eyes and murmured, "Come on, stud. I'm hot and horny, and I want you now." She raised herself up and skimmed out of her shorts in a flash, leaving herself dressed in just the tank top. Eyes still fixed on his, she pulled that off and tossed it onto the floor beside him.

"Turn over, show me that fine ass of yours." Gareth waited the few seconds it took her to roll onto her belly and hoist her shapely bottom into the air before thrusting the last remaining scrap of cloth down his legs. Bent over, his face came within inches of her succulent grove, and a groan escaped before he knew it was there. When he straightened, he grabbed hold of his shaft and gave it a couple of good tugs before focusing his attention on her fully.

"Like this?" she asked in that sexy tone she had.

Hips, round and smooth, greeted his gaze. The deep cleft separating her buttocks held his gaze like a magnet. The soft pouch of her sex peaked from beneath, and he longed to taste her, to fuck her. No matter how many times they made love, he always wanted her.

She looked at him over her shoulder and smiled. "You want me to spread my legs wide? I could spread them so wide you'll be able to see right inside me."

Saliva filled his mouth, and he swallowed. "Yeah, I'd like that."

Good as her word, she eased her knees apart, displaying herself for him. He knelt behind her and placed a hand on her flank. The soft flesh was warm against his palm, the muscles bunched then relaxed. He slid his hand across, delving into the wet centre of her, then travelling on to the other buttock. His finger slick with her juices, his mouth watered again.

"Fuck me, Gareth. You know you want to."

Her words fired him, and he eased himself closer between her thighs. The tip of his cock touched her, nestled itself between the silken petals of her cunt. The wet lips glided along the head, clutching at him deliciously as he pushed forward. He nudged at her hole but refused to enter her until she reached back and grabbed his hip, pulling him closer.

"Damn you, I need it." She pushed herself back onto him, the slick entrance of her pussy swallowing him. "Fuck me hard."

Gareth relented and thrust himself in deep. The head of his cock touched her cervix and sent a stab of pain along his shaft. He cringed, but the sensation turned to agonizing pleasure when Sienna worked her hips in a slow circle. He quickly found himself echoing her movements, rotating his lower body along with hers. His cock shaft slid along her sweltering, slick inner walls, and his balls soon churned with the need to come.

Near the point of no return, Gareth leaned forward and slipped his hands beneath her belly, lifting her just enough to make her stop her infuriating gyration. Holding her tight against his stomach, he held his breath for a long, agonizing moment, determined to slow the pounding of his heart and the pell-mell rush towards climax.

“Gareth!”

He opened his eyes and smiled at her tight-lipped grimace. He knew she wanted a hard fucking, and so did he. When he was sure he’d be able to provide it, he loosened his hold on her but didn’t completely let her go. Fingers gripping her hips, he eased himself out of her silken hold until just his cock head remained encased. He held himself there, taking one deep breath then another before plunging back in. His belly hit her ass, and the sound of damp flesh against damp flesh echoed through the room. He didn’t wait, simply withdrew and slammed forward again and again, finding a rhythm he thought he could maintain for at least long enough to bring her off.

“Yes, fuck me, hard. Like that. Just like that, oh yeah, like that.” Sienna reached under herself, and a moment later, her fingers cupped his ball sac.

“Yeah, oh yeah, babe, pull on them.” Gareth moaned at the sweet sensation.

When she tugged on his balls, he gasped with pleasure. Refusing to let his own excitement take over, he continued the see-saw motion of his hips. Her fingers held him, her pussy grasped at his shaft on each lunge forward. He was soon close and, from the fluttering clutch on his balls and her gasping, he knew Sienna was, too.

“Come with me. I’m so fucking close, now. Come with me, babe.” He slammed into her once, twice, three times more then exploded inside her. Nothing mattered but the exquisite feeling of her cunt gripping him then relaxing. Her spasms clutched at him, drawing each shuddering stream of cum into her body. He groaned and thrust in deep, holding her tight to his belly.

“Yeah, babe, yeah,” she whispered in a tight voice. Her grip on his testicles relaxed, and she collapsed forward onto the bed.

He went with her, his body covering hers. Lips, pressed to her shoulder, tasted her salty sweat. The scent of their sex thrilled him and kept him from losing his erection. He kissed her and stroked her long, damp hair, while murmuring, “Love you, sexy. Love you more than you know.”

Sienna turned her head and caught his cheek with her lips. Then, in a breathy whisper, said, "I love you, too, babe." Then in a steadier voice added, "The moon, it's going to be out soon."

"Yeah, I know. It's been driving me crazy for an hour." Gareth rose up so he was kneeling behind her, just his hands remained on her haunches. Gazing through the window, he smiled. "Run with me, tonight. Let me chase you, my sexy bitch."

Sienna chuckled and wormed out from beneath him. She spun around, and her dark eyes locked with his. "There's no way on Earth you could stop me." She launched herself at him, bowling him over and dragging her fingers along his ribs.

Coming close to falling off the bed, Gareth was too busy trying not to hit the floor to stop her for a moment. His laughter filled the room. When he was sure he wouldn't fall on his ass, he swept her into his arms, trapping her hands again at her sides, and kissed her. "Damn, you're fast. Give me a minute to get my breath, for crissakes."

Squirming, she managed to pull one arm free, and instead of going for his ribs as he thought she would, she reach down and cupped his balls. "Yeah, fast and good. Don't you agree?"

Caught off guard, he quickly gathered his thoughts and replied, "You bet. Very good. And I love you, even when you're driving me crazy."

"Good."

"Let's go outside. I'm beginning to feel itchy." Gareth released her and squirmed. His flesh felt as if it crawled with insects. He glanced through the window and saw the night sky had darkened.

"Me, too. It's going to happen soon."

Together, they clambered off the bed. Gareth followed Sienna from the room and across to the front door. Living on the outskirts of a small town allowed them a great deal of privacy, thank whatever gods there might be. When she opened the door, the edge of the woods was less than a hundred paces away.

Gareth slapped her bottom playfully, pushing her out of the way. He needed to get outside, to feel the grass and dirt on his feet. The air felt strange against his skin, cooler, every tiny gust a new sensation. He inhaled, smelling the distinct aroma of rabbit, its rich pungency a mouth watering treat.

He reached out and grabbed Sienna's hand, drawing her after him. Together, they went to stand in the centre of the lawn where the moon could touch them on its slow rise in the sky. He pulled her into his arms, his entire length plastered to hers. Burying his face in her hair, he inhaled the smell of shampoo and woman and smiled.

"I'm still hard for you."

"No shit. I never noticed." Sienna shifted her thighs, trapping his stiff shaft between them. "You're going to find it pretty difficult to chase me with a hard-on."

"Don't bet on it." He looked over the top of her head and saw the first brightness on the horizon. "It's here."

Sienna stepped away and dropped to the grass. On hands and knees, she arched her back and groaned.

Gareth joined her, his side brushing hers. Fur bristled and grew, his face suddenly hurt. His arms thickened, his thighs burned.

Moments of pain turned into brilliant shards of pleasure as his body changed. His groan turned to a soft growl. He stretched his arms out, extending his fingers, and saw the claws of a wolf where his fingernails had been only seconds ago. Black fur covered him from stem to stern.

Beside him, Sienna grunted then fled into the nearby trees, her lovely, shapely wolven form vanishing into the darkness.

Cool night air, filled with the smells of succulent animal flesh, was not what drew Gareth onward in his headlong rush through the forest. It was the bitch scent of her luring him deeper into the evergreens.

A noise to the right caught his attention, and he veered that way, belly low to the ground, haunches taut with readiness. He lifted his nose, inhaling deeply, straining to catch the freshest trail. There. He leaned towards it and raced on. Powerful legs drove him forward. Rivulets of saliva trailed along his sides as he charged ahead.

His flesh felt hot beneath the thick coat of black fur. His breath came in harsh gasps of lust. Red tinged his vision—the red of desire, of need for her.

Another movement to the side drew him in an arc, his claws digging into the spongy loam of the forest floor. Needles dug into the soft skin between the pads, urging him to an even greater speed. His paws barely touched the ground as he sped from the shrub-lined

fringe of the woods into the stark emptiness of the old growth. The lush canopy shielded the lower reaches, making it nearly impossible for new plants to flourish. Logs crisscrossed where wind or age had taken their toll, dampness created a rich, moist soil where mushroom and lichen pushed up in tiny buttons or wide-rimmed mounds.

There. He spotted her dappled brown and red body leaping over a stump twice as tall as she was. Her ass presented, she cleared the butt end of the sawed off tree and landed nimbly on its other side.

Gareth was after her in a flash, his tiny stub of a tail acting as a rudder in his haste to turn her way. Dirt flew from beneath his clawed feet.

I've got you now, my lovely, sleek Sienna!

She darted behind a lone bush, her ass still high, and turned to peer over her shoulder at him. If a wolf could smile, he'd have sworn she did so at that moment. Bared fangs and a bright red tongue flashing across her snout urged him closer. Then she vanished behind the leaves and branches, her foot falls faded to nothing.

He leapt after her, skittered around the bush, expecting her to be right there. She was gone into the night, leaving only the musky scent of their earlier sexual encounter. He sniffed the air, searching for her trail and found it low to the ground leading ever deeper into the gloom.

"Bitch." His voice came out in a crusty growl, as only the voice of a were could. Yet, his lust climbed a notch and his love for the woman soared to the sky. She knew him, better, sometimes, than he knew himself. Knew he adored the chase, the tormenting tease she so often supplied.

Again, he followed. Claws dug into the dirt, driving his body ahead. He put his nose to the ground, knowing she'd elude him if she could. Praying he'd find her soon, he tried to shut out the other scents and sounds of the deep woods.

A rock bluff rose beside him, and he peered upward, searching for any sign of her. Nothing. Her scent faded, and for a moment, he panicked, sure he'd missed her trail. Swinging his head, he inhaled, exhaled, found it and was off again.

Heart beating wildly, he rounded a corner and stumbled over the loose rocks. Shocked, terrified, he leapt behind a nearby boulder.

Ahead, men. Three of them lifted a large wooden crate. Inside, to his utter horror, Sienna cowered and snarled her anger. Her head darted from side to side, obviously trying to find him.

The men swore foully. One, a big, dark-haired giant of a man, slammed his hand against the side of the cage and yelled, "Fuckin' bitch. You bite me, and I'll beat you 'til you can't move."

Another man, smaller, blond and, from the smell of him, scared, looked around nervously as he strained to lift his end of the cage high enough to get it into the back of an old, white Ford truck. "Let's just get her out of sight, for Christ sakes."

The final man, older, bent and grey-haired, hobbled to the driver's door and climbed in. Turning towards his two cohorts, he yelled, "Both of you, just shut the fuck up and let's go."

Gareth watched as the nervous, smaller man slid into the passenger's seat. The larger fellow slammed the tailgate of the truck closed, and shoved his way into the cab. Before Gareth could move and somehow indicate to Sienna he was there, the truck roared to life and headed down the dusty, back road.

Chapter Two

Gareth had one small advantage. He knew the terrain they travelled like the back of his hand, or paw, as the case might be. With one keen eye on the old truck rumbling down the road, he kept out of sight and raced through the woods, following as closely as he dared.

At the edge of the forest, the truck, then he, crested a hill. He spotted a small hunting cabin a hundred paces away in a rough clearing. To the best of his knowledge, the place had been vacant for years. He hadn't given it much thought until he saw the truck pull in there. Gareth searched his memory for anything he knew about the rustic little dwelling. *Not much.*

The truck turned around and backed into the deeply rutted drive, past the cabin, up to the doors of a ramshackle barn. Under cover of the abundant brush in the clearing, Gareth watched the vehicle stop and the three men get out. The older man wrestled the double-wide barn doors open and motioned to his cohorts. The other two hefted Sienna's cage from the bed of the truck and carried it inside.

Gareth heard her deep growls and snarls of frustration. She put on a fierce show, but he knew, deep inside, she had to be terrified. His mate was strong, but he wasn't sure she'd be a match against three men who were most likely armed. He hadn't seen any firearms but was certain they'd have them, even if for nothing more than backup.

He glanced up at the moon already well past its zenith. He couldn't tell exactly how much time had passed, but he knew it wouldn't be long before the small, fiercely white sphere would sink below the horizon. Usually, he and Sienna happily lost track of the hours. After a lengthy, erotic chase which left them both panting and breathless, she'd allow him to catch her. He'd nuzzle her then mount her, ravaging her like the feral beasts they became at the fullness of the moon's cycle. Two or three rounds of pure, animalistic rutting later, they'd collapse, sated, to the dewy grass.

Before the night ended, they'd track some small game, rabbits or gophers, and quench their innate urges to kill and feed. By the time the moon descended, they'd have made their way home where, happy and exhausted, they'd sleep for hours.

Gareth growled deep in his throat. He and Sienna took pride in their ability to focus on the sensual side of their Lycanthropy and lived a quiet, simple life in the small town they'd

settled in. They killed only for food, and even that rarely, preferring to revel in the non-human innocence of their nature.

And look where it's gotten us. He snarled and burrowed his snout between his paws then looked up as the three men exited the barn. The dark-haired one looped a chain through the handles and slipped a lock through the links, securing the doors. They left the truck where it was and strolled towards the cabin, elbowing each other and chuckling at something one of them said.

Gareth watched them enter. For a moment, he considered attacking all three of them. There were times when ripping a man's throat out with his powerful jaws seemed like a fine idea. But there were still three against one. His odds weren't great. He'd be better off freeing Sienna stealthily and helping her make an escape. Throat-ripping would be his last resort.

Belly low to the ground, he darted to the barn and hid in the shadows until he was certain the men would remain inside the cabin. Gareth circled the barn and spotted a back door with no visible lock. He tried to nudge it open but couldn't.

He looked higher and found several open windows. Jumping in blindly wasn't his first choice, but he didn't see many alternatives. He'd just have to hope there was no one but Sienna inside. Crouched low in front of the first window, his haunches bunched, the power built in the muscles, until he leapt through the wooden frame.

Inside the barn it was dark, illuminated in just a few spots by the moon filtering through the gaping holes that passed for windows. Gareth landed on a pile of rotting boards, and he crouched there, peering around, his senses on high alert. He slunk away from where he'd landed, quickly checking his surroundings for danger. The scent of humans was weak while the various animal odours were strong and potent even to his were-diluted sense of smell. There were more creatures than his beloved in the barn, and they weren't happy. Gareth sensed their fear and anger.

His eyes grew accustomed to the dimness, and he moved to the opposite side of the barn where a dozen cages lined the wall. Half of them were full. Two-year-old black bears, brothers by the way they reacted to each other, watched him from the first couple of smaller pens. He moved past them slowly, carefully, not wanting to frighten them any further. The next two cages held a pair of angry wolverines pacing back and forth, spitting and hissing at him and the world in general. Never agreeable, trapped and held captive, these two would

be more dangerous pound for pound than any other animal he saw caged—and more valuable.

Poachers. That was the only explanation that fit.

Sienna was the last in the row. Her reddish-brown snout pressed up against the heavy gauge wire prison, her body shaking with excitement at his entrance. Before he got to her, a grey wolf confined in the space between the wolverines and Sienna caught his attention. Gareth paused and studied the beast for a moment.

He had dark, sorrowful eyes and a dusky, dirty pelt. Gareth sniffed, but the smell of fear coming from the animals, as well as the stench of older captures lingering in the shed, made it impossible to tell if the animal were a true wolf or perhaps more. He stretched his neck to see, but the beast's cage had been pushed back, deeper into the shadows. Gareth was about to move on when he spotted the injury, a burn, perhaps, on the creature's right hind leg and backside. There was no tail, nor was there any fur. *Impossible to know if he's one of us.*

"Gareth!" Sienna growled in the deep, rumbling Lycanthrope voice that was all either of them could manage. The facial structure was wrong for human speech. "I've been praying you'd find me."

He moved to the cage holding his lover and crouched, his muzzle inches from hers. "I never let you out of my sight." He pressed his snout against the wire and nuzzled what he could reach of her face and neck.

"How are you going to get me out?" She eyed the padlocked hasp.

Gareth studied the lock then the cage in general. "These bastards are big on security. The front door has a chain through it and a padlock."

"Poachers," she told him. "I heard them talking. They have a contract with someone from somewhere in the Middle East who's looking for a certain group of animals for his private collection. They'd prefer to keep us alive, but they did say something about having time before some deadline if they need to kill any of us."

"Bastards," Gareth repeated, pacing in front of the cage. He paused and again looked at the grey wolf. "What's his story? Has he spoken?"

"No," she replied. "But I didn't try. Wasn't sure if I should."

Gareth faced the stranger. "Can you speak, friend?"

The wolf tucked into the far corner, licking his wounds. His wary eyes never left Gareth's.

Gareth turned back to Sienna. "He must not be a were. Okay, problem number one, getting you free. Wait here. Let me search the barn for something to pry this lock off."

She blinked at him. "I'm not going anywhere."

Feeling a trifle foolish for his blunder, he went to the far end of the barn and began searching for anything that might be of use. A long, rusty crowbar leaned against some old crates. He clutched it between his teeth, the rough metal grating and adding to the horrendous taste of rotten iron. He dragged it back to Sienna.

"That'll work!" She shifted her paws, going from one to the other in her excitement.

He dropped it to the ground so he could speak. "Possibly. It's big and cumbersome."

"You can do it," she encouraged. "You're the most amazing wolf I know." She raised her snout and inhaled.

He'd seen her make the gesture hundreds of times. His super-human strength in werewolf form aroused her intensely and made for great sex when they were out in the wild. But he'd never found himself in a situation like this, before. Prying off the lock with a crowbar would be easy for a man, not so easy for a four-footed beast, even a strong one. "I'll try."

He picked up the crowbar with his teeth again and, with great difficulty, forced it into the lock. He needed to twist the bar, which would in turn cause the lock to pop off. But the bar was too long, and he couldn't get the proper grasp on it.

"Come on, Gareth!" she growled, her voice teeming with a combination of nervous energy and encouragement. "You must do more than try. You have to do this!"

Her words pushed him on. He twisted the crowbar until he couldn't budge it and had to release the thing. It clanked when it hit her cage and fell to the ground.

They both froze, glancing towards the door. The captors must not have heard. Gareth gazed at her, guilt welling in his gut. "Sorry."

"It's all right. Try again." Love and adoration sparkled in her eyes.

I can't let her down. He'd find a way to release her or die trying.

* * * *

Several hours later, Gareth kicked her cage with his hind leg out of frustration. He'd had no luck in any of his endeavours, and time was drawing short.

Sienna curled up in her cage, two front paws tucked under her chin. "The moon will set, soon."

"I know. Blast it!" Exhausted and annoyed beyond belief, nearly mad with rage, Gareth paced in front of her.

"If I morph back, and those poachers come out here and find me..."

Gareth growled. She didn't have to finish her thought. The future of the were race would be in jeopardy if the poachers found a woman where they'd locked up a wolf. Even more troubling was what would become of Sienna. A beautiful woman and a sought-after wolf with a desirable pelt, all rolled into one. She'd be branded a freak and be put on display in some sideshow or worse, so fast, he might never have the chance to get her back.

"The poachers won't find you. I'll kill them before I'd let that happen."

She raised her head. "Kill them? But that will bring the law —"

"We do what we have to!" he snarled. "I don't see any other way. I'm going outside. I want to be the first one touched when the moon falls behind the hills. As soon as I've shifted, I'll come in and break the lock to set you free. Hopefully, those poachers aren't early risers, and we'll be out of here before they're out of bed."

She got to her feet. The cage was so small she couldn't lift her head, but she somehow managed to appear regal even in the dingy surroundings of the rundown barn. "Are you sure?"

"I'll be back, Sienna. I need to make myself more accessible to the effects of the moon."

"But, Gareth...the sunlight."

She didn't need to say more. The sun weakened werewolves. He was a shell of himself when they first transformed. After a good day's rest and some nourishment, he'd be all right. But today, they wouldn't have that luxury.

"I'll be fine. This is our only option."

He cast a glance at the grey wolf who lay, unmoving, in his cage. He felt the animal's gaze following him across the barn.

"I'll be back as soon as I can," Gareth promised his lover and leapt through the window.

The last glimmer of the moon's rays faded as it fell beyond the horizon. As if on cue, the sun broke over the mountaintop, and Gareth felt its warmth on his pelt almost instantly. His spine shifted, bones aligning as he grew taller into an upright being. Sleek fur transformed into smooth, tanned flesh. His cock slipped out of its pouch and lengthened, extended between his legs, his heavy balls behind.

Gareth stretched and writhed as he changed. He wanted to howl, longed to cry out and groan when the metamorphosis took place. Sharp, stabbing pain quickly changed to pleasure and made it easier to control himself. He couldn't give in to the natural inclinations of howling his re-emergence as human. Making any sound could be deadly for his love, his life, Sienna.

He rose from hands and knees and stood upright, transformation complete. Weak and naked, Gareth knew neither mattered. He had a job to do, and he intended to see it done soon. If the poachers returned, he vowed, his nakedness would be the last thing they'd ever see. He crept to the edge of the barn, his weakness making him stagger. He peered around the corner.

Smoke from the cabin chimney told him at least one of the men was awake and could appear at any time. *Damn it!*

More carefully this time, with dangly bits exposed and his bare flesh scraped by the splintered wood, Gareth climbed back in the window. Streams of sunlight were just hitting the floor of the barn.

"Gareth!" Sienna called to him. Even though her cage sat away from the window, her shift had begun. Her lovely, sleek body writhed in agony and ecstasy.

He rushed to her cage, the rough flooring tearing at his naked feet, and grabbed the crowbar. Prying it into the lock with the agility he'd lacked as a wolf, Gareth turned the bar, and the lock bent.

His muscles burned. He sorely missed the strength he'd had such a short time ago, when he'd lacked the capacity to use it. But nothing, *nothing*, would keep him from freeing his one true love. With a burst of heart and muscle, he shoved with the last remnants of his human strength until the lock broke off and dropped to the ground. "Yes!"

Her change completed, Sienna crawled from the cage on trembling hands and knees. "Oh, Gareth! You did it!"

Tossing the bar aside, he pulled her up and into his arms. "There was no other way," he murmured into her ear. "I can't live without you. Wouldn't want to."

Sienna wrapped her arms around his neck. "You'll never have to, my love. We're meant to be together."

Gareth inhaled the pungent scent of her hair and closed his eyes, holding her tight.

A noise from outside startled him and brought him back to reality. "Let's get the hell out of here. Those poachers could return at any minute."

"Yeah, I'm with you on that one," she agreed and wiped a tear from her dirt-streaked cheek.

With his arm around her, Gareth led her towards the window. The deep, fearful eyes of the other animals beckoned him, and he paused. "Damn! I can't leave them here. Sienna, run to the front window and let me know if you see the poachers."

She glanced at him nervously but did as he asked. "There's one outside, but he's not coming this way. Looks like he's just standing there."

Gareth ran back and grabbed the crowbar. He stepped away from the cage Sienna had been held in and broke the lock on the grey wolf's. He opened the door. "Come on, fella."

The wolf hung back. He shivered but didn't emerge.

"Suit yourself." Gareth left the door open and moved to the next.

"There's another one!" Sienna called in a forced whisper. "They're talking."

Gareth broke two more locks, and the wolverines burst forth. They seemed to understand the need for stealth and quickly bounded onto the pile of boards and leapt out the window before he'd even reached the last two cages. His arms quivered with fatigue and his muscles twitched as if from a weight-lifting workout overdone, but Gareth pressed on. He broke the final locks and, as he opened the doors, heard Sienna groan.

"They're coming! Hurry, Gareth! Two of them are coming this way!"

The young bears darted out and raced for the window Gareth had used. Clumsily, they clambered up onto the pile of rubbish and boxes beneath it then scrambled through.

He grabbed Sienna and pushed her towards the opening. "Hurry. It'll be a hard landing, but you have to be quiet. I'm right behind you."

She streaked through the window, and he followed, wincing when he landed on the hard-packed dirt. *Some things are much easier as a wolf.* He recalled the terrifying night spent trying to break the locks and smiled. *Some things are not.* "Let's go, babe."

"What about the grey wolf?" She glanced over her shoulder.

He shook his head. "He's injured. I'm sorry if he can't make it out. We've done all we can for him."

Nodding, Sienna clasped his hand and ran. They doubled back around and headed for town and home.

In the distance, Gareth heard the angry shouts of the poachers who'd likely just discovered the empty barn. The cries urged him onward faster, but he wasn't too concerned. He and Sienna had the cover of the woods this time and enough light to see where they were going. Before long, they'd be home, and the horrible night would be over.

He glanced sideways at his lover and squeezed her hand.

Chapter Three

Gareth pushed the door closed with his foot and helped Sienna to the sofa. Covered in scratches and scrapes, they both groaned as he eased her down onto the soft cushion and collapsed next to her. Foot sore and body aching from the events of the night, he was surprised when his lover slipped her arms around his neck in a very seductive embrace.

"I love you, Gareth," she murmured into his ear. "I want you."

Covered in sweat and grime, Gareth wasn't sure if he were horny or not. One look into her eyes, though, and his cock pulsed into the beginnings of an erection. "I love you, too, my sweet. But, we both need a shower. I know I smell horrible." Pressing his nose into her hair, he inhaled and grinned at the animal scent of her. "And, I hate to say this, but you smell a little ripe yourself, my love."

She leaned back and looked up at him. Her eyes were wide, her lips pressed tightly together, but he saw her merriment so knew he wasn't in trouble. *At least not too much.*

"Cheeky devil, aren't you?" she teased and wriggled closer to him. "Come on, then. I'll wash your back if you wash mine." She lurched to her feet and cringed. "I think every muscle I have is sore."

"A shower will ease that." He rose and slipped an arm around her. "I wonder if the injured wolf got out."

"Don't know, babe. I hope so. Those burns on his back end seemed pretty fresh."

Inside the bathroom, Sienna opened the glass door of the shower stall, leaned inside and turned the water on, then tested it for the temperature. Her ass pushed back, and the deep cleft drew him close.

When she straightened, his attention returned to her face, and the smile she gave him made his breath catch. "You're beautiful," he whispered in a husky voice.

"And you're crazy." She took him by the hand and pulled him into the large shower enclosure after her. Once the door closed, she reached for the soap and lathered up her hands. "Crazy and wonderful. I'll never be able to thank you enough for getting me out of that damn cage. I don't think I've ever been that afraid before."

Gareth took the soap from her hands and worked up a good lather in his own. Satisfied, he put the bar in its holder and slid his palms over Sienna's smooth, round shoulders and across her back. "Crazy in love with you."

Sienna chuckled and reached around him, her hands sliding easily along his ribs then down to his ass. She cupped the muscular globes and pulled him to her. Her breasts flattened against his chest, and the length of his cock slithered upwards over her belly until it lay trapped between them.

"Mmm, I like to feel your cock like that, pulsing against me."

"I like it, too," he agreed and worked the muscles, making it lurch. "I like to slide it into you more, though."

"Wash first, fuck soon." She worked her hands over his ass, delving between the taut cheeks and down the back of his thighs. He shuddered when her finger tips brushed across his anus. His cock leaped and made her chuckle again.

Gareth leaned forward, pressing his lips to the nape of her neck while he ran his soap-slick hands over her back and the curve of her hips, her ass. Her nipples were like red hot coals digging into his chest, and he'd have given much if he could take them in his mouth.

As the hot water sluiced over his side and shoulder, he continued washing her as she did him. More soap added as needed, each of them was soon clean, yet there seemed no rush to get out. He slipped a finger into her warm, moist cunt and stirred her into a lusty, quivering, panting woman. The muscles clenched inside her and, to his great pleasure, trapped his fingers in the succulent sea of her sex.

The water grew cool, and he growled with annoyance. "We'd better rinse off and get out of here before we freeze."

Sienna snuggled in and squirmed her ample curves against his slick skin. "I'll keep you warm, babe."

Gareth shifted, presenting more of his lovely lady's body to the cooling flow of water, and laughed when she yipped as the soap washed away. Clean and rinsed, he again shielded her from the worst of the chill, but only until he was sure his own body was free of lather.

"'Fraid I'm outa here, sweetness. Things tend to shrivel and shrink when I get too cold."

She looked up at him and grinned. "Shrink and shrivel, huh?"

"Yeah, it's a terrible sight, if you can actually see anything."

Still smiling, Sienna took firm hold of his erection and said, "Doesn't feel shrunk or shrivelled at all. You sure you know what you're talking about, mister?"

"Yeah, but I'd rather not prove it to you, if that's all right."

She slowly stroked up and down his shaft, gently squeezing when she reached the base then sliding her fingers back to the tip.

"Keep that up and I'll be shrivelled up for an entirely different reason." His heart raced, and he fought the urge to thrust himself into her hand. His toes curled, and he couldn't stop the shudder of pleasure when she ran her thumb over the head of his cock.

The water suddenly went icy cold, and Gareth yelped and pushed open the glass door. He leaped out, his cock still in her grasp, literally dragging her along by his shaft.

She released him and, after turning off the faucet, clambered out of the shower on his heels. "Damn, water's freakin' cold."

He looked at her, at her damp hair hanging in a stringy mass of waves along her cheeks, shoulders and back. Her nipples stood tall, and goose bumps raced along her arms. Shivering, she grinned up at him.

Gareth grabbed one of the oversized bath towels from the nearby rack and swung it around her. Dragging her close, he wrapped them both in its softness and began to scrub at her shoulders and arms, hoping to get some heat back into her. "No kidding. Not like I mentioned it, though. I mean—"

Sienna grabbed his still very erect shaft and squeezed hard, stopping his remark dead. "Gareth, my love, you're a dork. Now dry me and quit bellyaching about the chill."

"Yes, my love. Anything you say." He rubbed the towel roughly over her back and bottom.

"Hey, easy," she cried when his exuberant scrubbing moved to her front, her tits, between her thighs.

He eased back, carefully, and grinned. "Yes, my love. Anything else?" He knew he was pushing his luck. He also knew this kind of play was something they both needed after the earlier events.

"Yes, dork, I want you to take me to bed and fuck me." Her smile lit up her face.

"Now, that's the best idea you've had in...minutes, my —"

She punched him in the arm and growled. "You're such an ass, sometimes, you know that?"

"Yes, you married an ass. A dork, too, if you meant what you said before."

Taking the towel from his hands, she ran it quickly over his chest. Walking around him, she dried his sides and back then moved back to stand in front of him. Naked, face flushed and goose bumps still prominent on her upper arms, she placed her hands on her hips. "And you're asking for an ass warming, mister."

"Yes, please. Oh yes, please. I'd love my bottom whopped. It'd make it all hot and sexy. And —"

"Gareth!" She cut him off with that single word, yelled.

"Uh, getting a tad too carried away, aren't I?" he offered and lowered his eyes. He found himself looking directly at her nipples — dark brown nubbins he loved to feast on.

"Yes, way too carried away." She stroked his face and pressed the tips of her fingers against his lips. "Why don't you carry me to bed? That'd be a much better idea than paddling your ass, don't you think?"

He kissed her finger tips and sucked them into his mouth for a quick nibble. Releasing them, he leaned forward and did the same for each of her saucy nipples. When he straightened up a moment later, he replied, "A much better idea," then slipped his arm behind her knees and lifted her into his arms.

"Mmm, you know how to get my motor running, brute."

"I should hope so. I've been perfecting the technique for a long time." He shoved the bedroom door open and strode in, kicking it closed behind them. The king-sized bed was less than a dozen paces away. When his knees contacted the foot of the bed, he lowered Sienna onto the soft comforter. The deep chocolate-coloured material made her skin seem paler, her rich auburn hair a deeper shade of red.

He went to his knees beside her and crawled up the bed. The soft moan from behind him caused him to turn and scurry back. He leaned down and pressed his lips to hers in an upside-down kiss. He darted out his tongue and slid it across her lips, tasting the sweetness of her breath. When she opened her mouth and sucked him in, he pushed it in even farther.

"Mmm." Sienna's deep groan came, followed by a gentle suction as she suckled his tongue as she had so often before. The kiss deepened, and he slowly lowered himself beside her. Her arms went around him.

When he had to take a breath, he pulled his lips from hers. "I want you on all fours. I want to fuck you, but first I want to taste you."

Smiling up at him, she nodded. "You got it, babe." She rolled over and pushed herself forward then onto her knees, keeping her upper body on the bed.

The bed shifted as Gareth slipped behind her, his knees going to the floor, his upper body lying on the bed. Saliva filled his mouth as he looked at her—the luscious round ass cheeks taut, the deep cleft splitting the two halves perfectly, beautifully.

He reached up, and his hands connected with the smooth skin of her outer thighs. His touch must have done something, because she moaned and spread her legs a little wider, allowing him to see the soft petals of her sex peaking from between the plump outer lips. He slipped one hand towards the musk-scented slit. His index finger connected first, and he carefully ran it up the molten seam until it vanished inside her cunt. He'd applied nearly no pressure, but she'd sucked him in, anyway.

"That's it, sexy, push your bum back. Open yourself for me." He raised his head, his lips, then stuck out his tongue. The tip came into contact with her flesh just inches from her sex. Her smell intoxicated him. Her nearness drove him wild with longing. Saliva dripped from his mouth and he sucked it back. Pushing himself forward, pressing his cock more firmly against the bed, he used his tongue to find her succulent pussy lips. He licked up and down then side to side, encouraged by the squirming reaction he got from his lovely lady. When a gush of her juices filled his mouth, he growled again with pleasure. The taste wasn't enough, he wanted more. Leaning forward to his fullest extent, he zeroed in on her clit. She shuddered the instant he touched the tight nubbin.

He pulled her closer and dined on her with gusto, bringing all his long-practiced skills of pleasuring to bear. Great, long licks turned to light flicks of his tongue, then back again when her moans turned to sobs. Her cunt clenched as if trying to trap an errant tormentor. The thought of her coming like this turned him on so much, he found himself humping the bed.

"Gareth, God, please, Gareth, fuck me. I need you inside me."

Her cries of desperation broke through his lust-filled fog, and he eased back. The centre of her core was slick and swollen. The delicate petals fluttered, and he ached to take them again into his mouth, suckling on the musky folds.

"Now, baby, fuck me before I scream. Gareth, please!"

He climbed onto the bed behind her and took his tool firmly in hand. The target winked at him, and he brushed its length with the tip of his shaft. The sensation was almost enough to take him over the edge, he was so turned on. Her clutching pussy seemed eager to grab at him, and he wasn't inclined to argue. With his cock head at her entrance and his hands on her hips, he eased ahead. Slowly, his teeth clenched and his buttocks tight, he split her with his rod. The silken walls gripped him, tightened and loosened with the beating of her heart.

When he was fully encased, only then did he dare take a deep breath. Holding still, he relished the snug glove around him. Sure he could control himself for at least a short while, he moved his hips, pulling out. The sucking was tremendous, and her cries of pleasure urged him on to even greater feats of lust. He slammed into her, each thrust met by her equally hard push back. Guttural sobs echoed through the room, from him or her, it didn't matter.

"Yes, fuck, yes."

Her cries of near release sent him hurtling towards Nirvana. Her voice echoed through him, and together they shook and shivered as they exploded in bliss. Gasping, grinding his hips against her ass, he shot load after load into her lovely, tight cunt. When he could stand it no longer, he collapsed across her back, gasping for breath.

"Oh my God, Gareth, that was amazing," Sienna panted beneath him. Her limbs trembled, and she fell flat on the bed, arms and legs askew.

Gareth kissed her shoulder and neck, so in love with her at that moment he could scarcely speak. "Love you, my sexy bitch," he managed.

She wriggled but didn't force him out. "Love you too, brute."

Moments later, he eased back and kissed along her backbone until he was again on his knees. He stroked her then slid his arm beneath her. "We both need some sleep."

She crawled up the bed and let him pull the covers over her. He joined her, then whispered, "We've got to tell someone about those damn poachers. Do something." He yawned and slipped his arm around her. "Later. We'll talk."

* * * *

After twelve hours rest, a hearty meal and another mind-blowing fuck, Gareth was energized and ready to move. In the living room, he paced in front of the sofa. "We must do this, Sienna. We have an obligation to our fellow four-footed friends."

Sienna sighed. "Yes, I know we have to do something. But, are you sure calling the local game department into it is the right thing?" Her voice held a note of fear. Anonymity was the were's greatest asset, and to take the chance of having them find out too much obviously terrified her.

Gareth completely understood, but he was adamant. "We need better directions to the cabin. I can find it again with my eyes closed, but we have to be able to guide the game wardens there."

She shivered. "I'd rather not get too familiar with them, if we don't have to."

He gazed at her intently, and they both spoke the words at the same time. "We have to."

She stood and went to the front door, slipping into her shoes and grabbing a sweater as she went. "Let's do this thing. There's a map in the Jeep. We'll follow it as long as we can then draw our own."

Gareth smiled. He clutched his keys in one hand and, with the other, opened the door for his lovely lady. *She's a good sport, and not one to back down from a battle.* He loved her sense of adventure, especially when it involved something carnal and deliciously wicked. This quest wasn't quite the same, but his heart pounded loudly in his chest just the same. Excitement surged through his veins. *We're doing something. Something that matters.*

With a hand on the small of her back, he guided Sienna to their ancient but dependable black Jeep. He opened her door and, once she'd settled inside, closed it again. Gareth climbed into the driver's seat and started the engine while she looked at the map.

"When they trapped me and threw me into the back of their damn truck, it was impossible to see where I was going." She traced the line marking a nearby road with her finger.

"Yes, I know it must have been horrible for you." He pointed to the map. "The cabin's here. On foot, it's so much easier. We'll take the old Highway Fifty-Eight. We might just have to explore and figure out exactly where to tell the game wardens to turn."

"Drive, and we'll see what looks familiar."

"You got it." He pointed the Jeep north towards the old, less-used highway. He and Sienna loved their secluded house in the country. The out-of-the-way setting and large chunk of acreage suited their needs perfectly. But once off their property, the twisted and tangled back roads could be confusing. Gareth had prowled the woods countless times in the moonlight but had never bothered to stop and read road signs or mile markers. Some of the smaller paths were little more than goat trails and weren't even marked.

"Try this one," Sienna suggested at the first crossroads.

He turned and followed for a few miles until he was certain it didn't lead to the cabin. Then he went back to the highway and started over again.

An hour had passed when suddenly things started looking very familiar.

"We're close." He drove on, turning onto what looked like an old railroad grade, and they bumped along it for another half hour.

She leaned forward excitedly, scouring the woods. "I think you're right. I remember this tree, see here? The one split by lightning."

"Yes." Gareth proceeded with confidence—and caution. "I wonder if our friends are still there?"

"There's the cabin!" She pointed at a blur of white through the trees.

Gareth pulled the Jeep to the side of the rutted road as far as he could. "That's it. Let's go check it out on foot, just in case."

"All right." She climbed out and followed him to the cover of brush. They trudged through it until they reached the top of the hill and looked down on the hunting cabin. The white truck was still parked next to the barn, but there were no signs of activity.

"Bingo." Gareth slid an arm around Sienna's waist and squeezed.

"We found them."

"For now, anyway. Let's just hope they stick around long enough for someone else to find them. Come on." He led her to the Jeep.

Gareth drove back the same way they'd come, and Sienna jotted down notes. Once they'd returned to the house, she rewrote the directions on a makeshift map, while he looked up the address for the local Fish and Game Department.

In their Jeep again, he was surprised to discover the office was a mere fifteen-minute drive away. He glanced at Sienna when they pulled into the car park. "Never knew this place was so damn close."

She nodded. "Makes me feel kind of weird. I mean, I know they're probably good people, but they're like the cops. The 'Establishment'."

He chuckled at her analogy but nodded his head. "They want what's best for the animal population, which puts us on the same team."

Sienna rolled her eyes as she exited the Jeep. "Aren't you Joe Citizen, all of a sudden? Sorry, but I lost a bit of my sunny outlook when I got locked in that cage. It's harder to see the good in people, now."

He pulled her close and kissed her temple. "Let's see what we can do about getting that cheery temperament back, shall we?"

She snorted.

Gareth laughed again and led her inside the small, brick building.

There were three desks in the bullpen-like office and two men working there. Both glanced up as they walked in. The younger man, sitting closest to the door, asked, "Help you?"

"We'd like to report some poachers." Gareth studied the man as he spoke. Thin with a hawk-like nose and harried expression, he wore a brown uniform shirt and khaki pants and a dark tie neatly knotted around his neck.

The man turned to his co-worker. "Sam, you want to take these people's statement?"

Gareth looked at the second man, sitting farther back. Older, hair greying, this fellow's tie was loosened, and he appeared a little more laid back. His eyes were friendly, but when his gaze met Gareth's, he quickly glanced away. "Sure," he said to the wall. "Come on back."

Gareth and Sienna followed the maze of desks and filing cabinets to reach him. The smell in the area reminded him of a doctor's office. Disinfectant – something – he wasn't sure what.

"They're overjoyed to see us," Sienna muttered quietly.

"It'll be fine," he whispered back, and they took seats in the two chairs by the older man's desk. "I'm Gareth Collier. This is my wife, Sienna."

"Sam Johnson." The man nodded, shuffling papers around. "You say you have knowledge of some poachers?"

"Yes." Gareth spoke calmly, though his pulse raced. "Last night, we were out...for a walk. We saw three men in an old, white, pickup truck. They had cages with what looked like both bears and wolves in them. We didn't want to get too close, but we knew whatever they were doing couldn't be legal."

Sam wiped some crumbs from the top of his desk onto the floor. He scratched a fingernail over a dried speck of food until it came off. "Hard to tell. Sometimes the department relocates animals from one area to another. It might be on the up and up."

Gareth rested his fist, clutching the makeshift map, on the desk in front of Sam. He shook it in hopes of getting the man to look at him.

The ploy worked. Sam raised his eyes, giving them his full attention.

Gareth stared back. "Does the Game Department usually work at midnight in an old, unmarked pickup truck?"

"No." Sam's shoulders sagged. "You're probably right. We'll check it out. I don't suppose you can tell me where you saw these people."

Gareth dropped the map on the desk. "We can tell you *exactly* where we saw them. My wife and I retraced our steps today. There's a cabin on Old Mill Road. She's drawn you a very specific diagram."

Sam looked at the paper, and a moment later, a low whistle came from his pursed lips. "Yes, you sure have. I tell you, we're understaffed right now. But I'll file a report on this, and we'll get on it as soon as possible."

"The truck was still at the cabin a couple of hours ago," Gareth told him. "Of course, we have no way to know how long it'll be there."

Sam placed the map on a stack of other papers and stood. He gazed at Gareth apologetically. "Honestly, I'm not putting you off Mr...."

"Collier," Gareth supplied.

"Mr. Collier. It's just like I told you, we're short-handed in the office right now, and we've got one hell of a backlog of calls to catch up on. One of our wardens is out on maternity leave. It might take a while before we can check this out, but we will get to it." He reached behind his chair for a crutch leaning against the wall.

Gareth hadn't spotted it before, but now he watched as Sam stuck the crutch under his arm and limped over to a table with a coffee pot, some mugs and condiments.

"We'll look into it, don't worry." Sam poured himself a cup and added a powdered creamer. He didn't return to his desk but stood looking down at them.

Gareth and Sienna exchanged glances, and he shrugged. He stood, and she followed his lead. Speaking to Sam across the room, he said, "My name and phone number are on the map. Do you think someone might call me after your investigation? I'd be interested to know what you discover."

"Sure, yeah. We can do that," Sam replied offhandedly. "Thanks for coming in, folks." He turned away and sipped his coffee.

"You bet." Disheartened, Gareth shook his head as he led Sienna out the door.

"Can you believe that?" she exclaimed once they were outside.

"I dunno. I certainly thought they'd be more concerned." Gareth helped her into the Jeep then went around to the driver's side and climbed in. He closed his door so he could speak privately. "He said they'd look into it. We have to assume they will. I just hope they do it before the next full moon."

Sienna nodded. "We've done our part by notifying them of the situation. If they refuse to act on it, I'm not sure there's anything more we can do. We're *not* going to make an issue of this and draw attention to ourselves."

He cupped her cheek. "I understand how you feel, but I'm not comfortable knowing the poachers are still out there. It's dangerous to both of us, but especially you, my beautiful beast."

"We'll just have to be more careful." She pressed her lips to his.

Gareth opened his mouth and drew in her tongue. She tasted musky and minty, all at the same time, and he could never get enough. But the situation continued to niggle at him. When they transformed into werewolves, another part of their minds took over. Wild and feral, they both wanted to run and romp and weren't used to watching out for traps. As long as the poachers were around, they weren't safe.

And that wasn't something he wanted to live with.

* * * *

Gareth studied the calendar and debated what to do. A week had passed since he and Sienna had visited the Fish and Game Department, and they hadn't heard anything. He'd been to the cabin every day. Sometimes the white truck was there, sometimes not. But he couldn't be sure the poachers were really gone without talking to one of the wardens. He dialled the phone number he'd memorised and willed his voice to remain calm.

"Fish and Game Department, Frank speaking."

Gareth recognised the voice as that of the younger man they'd seen in the office. He was looking for the one who had promised to look into their case. "Is Sam available, please?"

"He's out sick, today. Anything I can help you with?"

Sighing, Gareth decided to try his luck with Frank. "This is Gareth Collier. My wife and I were in last week and spoke to Sam about some poachers."

"Collier, ah, yes. I remember. Let me grab that file." He was gone for a moment then returned. "This was about that cabin out on Old Mill Road, right?"

"That's right." Gareth tried to quell his enthusiasm. *He has a file. That has to mean something.* "Were you able to check it out?"

"Actually, we did. Found the place easily with the help of your map, but it was deserted. No signs of life or poachers anywhere on the premises."

"Did you go inside the cabin?"

"Nope. The place was locked tighter than a drum, and with no evidence our hands are tied. We searched the barn, though. Didn't see anything."

Gareth's heart sank. "No cages? Nothing?"

"Sorry. And hey, I apologise for not getting back to you. Sam had your number on his desk, but he's been out sick for a few days. With Martina still gone, I'm going crazy trying to hold down the fort."

"I understand. Thanks for checking the place out."

"No problem."

Gareth disconnected the call. He turned to Sienna, who was watering house plants and looked like she was trying to stay busy to keep from worrying. "They didn't find anything, but they didn't go into the cabin because it was locked."

She frowned. "So we have no way of knowing if the poachers will be back."

He grabbed his keys and smiled. "I bet I can get inside that cabin."

Sienna raised her eyebrows but allowed him to lead her from the house. "Are you going to break in? That's illegal, you know."

He rolled his eyes. "So is locking you in a cage. I don't intend to let that happen again. Come on."

He'd driven to the cabin so many times in the past week, navigating the winding, dirt roads was automatic. This time, Gareth drove right up to the front and parked in the open. He climbed out of the Jeep, Sienna right behind him.

Both doors of the place were locked, as he'd been informed. Gareth rattled the knob, but the old wood and tarnished metal fixtures seemed secure.

Sienna peered through a dirty, filmy pane of glass. "Windows are locked, too."

Gareth examined the closest one then looked around on the ground. He picked up a rock and pulled a bandana from his pocket. He wrapped the cloth around his hand and used the stone to shatter the small, glass pane. He reached in and unfastened the hasp. "This one's not."

"You are so bad!" She patted his ass as he climbed through the window he'd just pried open.

"You know you love it." He nodded towards the door. "I'll let you in."

The cabin was surprising well furnished, he noted, as he crossed the room to open up for her. Three single beds, a small kitchenette and a table and chairs filled the room. "They've been here recently, and they're coming back." He studied the dishes lined up in the drainer by the sink.

"What makes you think so?"

"There's no dust on anything. And if they weren't coming back, why wash the dishes?"

She shrugged and nodded. "True. Wonder if they left anything else." She searched one side of the room while Gareth looked over the other.

Passing the bed on his section, he nearly overlooked the folded, white sheet of paper tucked between the red and white checked blanket and the wall. He opened it and couldn't believe his eyes. "Well, what do you know?"

"What?" She was behind him instantly, peering over his shoulder.

"Remember you saying they were supplying someone outside of the country? Well, here's a list of the animals the poachers have agreed to supply. Seems they have three weeks to fill the order if they're to meet the deadline."

"Oh, my God, Gareth. Look." She pointed to the bottom of the list.

Added in pencil, in a different writing style, he read, *One tailless, female, reddish-brown wolf*. "Son of a bitch," he muttered. "They must have contacted whoever they're working for and told them about you."

She gazed at him, her eyes wide. "Do you think this will be enough to bring the game wardens back out?"

"I hope so. I hate to take the paper, because the poachers might realise it's gone. But we've got no choice. It's the only proof we have."

She glanced back at the broken window. "They'll know someone was here, anyway. We should take this to the wardens."

Gareth did a quick search of the rest of the cabin. Satisfied there was nothing else, he locked the door and they left, hurrying back to the Jeep as if someone might appear at any moment.

On the way home, Sienna looked at him with a gleam in her eyes. "At least now we know they'll be back. And we know what they're after. *Me*."

He glanced at her sideways then turned his gaze back to the road. His fingers grew white as he gripped the steering wheel, grimly. "I'll kill before I let that happen."

"Forewarned is forearmed. I say we take the paper to the game department, but we don't rely on them. Maybe we turn the tables on these guys, set a little trap of our own." She smiled. "We've got the perfect bait."

He nodded. "You could have the right idea. But you're crazy if you think I'm going to use you as bait."

She chuckled. "I am crazy. You're crazy, too. That's why I think it just might work."

Chapter Four

Gareth slammed the receiver down. "Fuck!"

Sienna looked up from her pocketbook and waited. When it became clear he wasn't going to speak, she asked, "What did they say?"

"The Fish and Game Department doesn't have the manpower. They went out again but didn't see anything out of the ordinary. They can't fucking do anything without some kind of proof. The note we gave them could have been a joke or left by anyone." By the time he stopped talking he was yelling. His face was scorching hot with anger.

"You didn't mention the traps we laid, right?"

"Course not," he replied, bringing his voice under control. "The way this is going, we'd be charged with obstruction of justice or something."

"So, we're on our own." Sienna put her pocketbook down and got to her feet. Clad in a loose-fitting shift dress, she walked towards him. "We always work better together, just the two of us."

His anger faded but didn't completely vanish. He knew she was right. They'd done their part by reporting the poachers. He felt an odd kind of relief, knowing the ball was now in their court.

It was easy for him to see her curves as she approached him. He let the last of his rage go and reached for her. "Yes, on our own, as usual, and that's always been how we like it best." His hands went to her hips, his mouth to the base of her neck. The pulse of her blood against his lips sent a shudder through him. His senses heightened. The moon would be full, soon.

She wound her fingers into his hair and held his face at her neck. Her sigh of pleasure followed.

He kissed and licked at her, his body reacting to her warmth and scent. His cock, which had been slumbering, throbbed to erection. He ached to be free of the clothes strangling him. Releasing her hips, he tore at his clothing until he was naked, his cock aimed lewdly towards her. Her hands had dropped from his hair, as she, too, stripped.

"The moon will be full, tonight. The traps are ready, aren't they?" Sienna asked, reaching for him again.

Glancing through the window, Gareth noticed the sky was darkening. That was why he felt so anxious, so eager. "Yes, ready and waiting to be used," he said, absentmindedly.

Looking back at her, he smiled, and when her fingers tightened around his cock, he thrust into them. His heartbeat slammed into his chest, and he groaned. He wanted her, desperately. It was as if everything else vanished. All he could think about was her.

"You're as hard as steel, my love," she murmured, slowly working her fist down his shaft. When she reached the base, she tightened her grip, making him moan again.

"Yes, hard for you. I want you, my sexy bitch."

Using his cock as a handle, she turned and dragged him to their room, to their bed. He went willingly. Once there, he lowered himself onto the covers, her fingers still toying with him. She followed, straddling his hips. When she slid up his thigh, she left a slick trail of her juices. The smell made his head spin and his mouth water.

"Want me to climb on?" she teased, arching her back and grinding herself along his thigh.

He looked up at her. Her smouldering eyes gazed back at him. She licked her lower lip with the tip of her tongue. He wanted to pull her down and nip at it.

"Yeah, climb aboard and ride me." He held her hips and lifted her.

"Hey, put me down." Her grip on his shaft tightened. She wriggled, her thighs tightened around his, and her pussy dragged sexily along his thigh.

"Put me inside you," he countered, refusing to let her down.

She chuckled and stopped struggling, instead slathering his cock head with her juices.

He allowed it for as long as he could, teeth gritted, legs trembling, before he slowly eased her down onto his shaft. The tip split her, the shaft stretched her wide. Her guttural groans urged him on, and he was only too happy to oblige. When she settled on him, instead of releasing her hips, he held her tight to him while he ground against her. Her clit dragged against his pubic bone, making her shudder and heave with pleasure.

"Fuck me," she moaned, her hands moving to his chest. Laid flat, she tried to lift herself off him, but his grip held her where he wanted her. She fought him, clenching her fingers on the muscles of his chest. "Damn you – fuck me!" she growled.

He relented and lifted her, slamming his hips upward, driving his cock deep into her gushing sex. A wild furious ride followed. Her body slammed into his on each stroke. Her grip on his chest remained, and he knew he'd bear marks for days to come.

Arms tired, his breath coming in loud gasps of desperation, he thrust into her, again and again. His chest burned, the pain shooting straight down to his cock. It pulsed in response, and his balls churned. "Yeah, fuck you. Fuck you, babe. I need it. Come for me." His voice sounded strange, like someone else's, it was so deep and gruff.

The tickling feeling at the back of his balls gave him moments' warning, and he closed his eyes. Euphoria enveloped him as the first spasm struck.

"Yes, yes, now!" Sienna cried and ground herself against him. Her pussy clenched, milking him of each pulsing load. Sweat landed on his belly, tiny splats of wetness that he barely comprehended. Her milking grip pulled at him like the sucking of a voracious mouth.

He finished before her, but only by seconds. When he relaxed his grip on her hips, she collapsed forward, her fingers still clenched on his chest. She kissed his neck then his chin and finally his lips. Her breath came in soft gasps, and he inhaled the spent air, savouring her in as many ways as he could.

"Love you, babe," he gasped into her mouth.

Flipping her hair back, she whispered, "Love you, too."

He reached around her, cuddling her close. The plans for the night suddenly descended on him, and he was afraid for her. If anything went wrong, he could lose her. He held her closer, trying to shield her and knowing he couldn't.

She must have sensed his thoughts, for she eased up and smiled at him. "It's going to be fine. You'll see."

Putting on a brave face, he smiled, too. "Yes, I know." He grabbed her shoulders and rolled her over, going with her. He wound up on top, looking down at her. Her hair fanned out on the pillow like a soft, auburn halo. Gareth leaned forward and pressed his lips to hers, softly. "You must promise to listen to me. If I call you off or tell you to do something, do it—for me?"

A defiant gleam lit her eyes. He thought, for a moment, she was going to refuse.

Cocking her head, she winked. "Yes, I promise."

He kissed her again, tenderly, then more hungrily before getting to his feet. "Come on, then, let's see where the moon is. I feel that horrible itchiness."

"Yes, so do I. It's like a million bugs are racing around all over me." Sienna reached for his hand.

He took it and pulled her up. Together, his arm around her, they went to the picture window and peered out into the darkening woods. The soft glow of light on the horizon told him the moon rise was close.

"It's nearly time."

"Do you want to try the game guys one more time before we go out?" she asked. Her voice was rough, her change very near.

"No, we'll do this our way," Gareth replied and guided her towards the front door. Once outside, the cool air made him shudder. Pulling her close, he whispered, "Don't take any more chances than you have to."

She turned her face up to his and smiled. "I won't. And I'll listen for you. I promise." A stab of pain must have touched her because she suddenly winced and turned her head away.

Gareth released her and helped her to her hands and knees. He groaned when his own body cramped with the first touch of the moon's light. Dropping to all fours, he looked at Sienna's body as it writhed, the bones realigning.

It was all he could do to keep from crying out as his own spine altered. Pain, like no other, knifed through him, but as quickly turned to the most amazing pleasure. Fur sprouted where the itching had nearly driven him insane. His cock shifted, the pouch of the beast wrapping around it. His arms and legs morphed, his hands and feet changed into the pads and paws of a wolf. His facial bones elongated, his teeth moved, and his ears grew.

The moment he could move easily, he turned back to see that Sienna was all right. Of course she was, her beautiful red and brown coat shining in the moon light.

"Follow me," he said, in the guttural voice of the wolf. He turned and headed into the woods, then followed the trail he'd taken the previous moonrise. This time, however, there was no playful cavorting with his lover. His mind raced. *Will the poachers be there? Will they have trapped other animals? Had they discovered the list was missing? And, most nerve-wracking of all, could there possibly be more than three people waiting for them?* He'd set five traps, but that was more in hopes of covering all directions. He really didn't want to tangle with any more people than he had to.

A thousand paces from the old cabin, Gareth slowed his gait. He came to a stop at the top of the rise overlooking the ramshackle structure. He dropped to his belly and laid his head across his paws. Sienna joined him, and together they regained their breath while watching below. The truck wasn't visible, but Gareth was sure it could easily be behind the building.

"Let's check the barn first," he growled then licked her paws. "I want to see if they've managed to trap the other animals they need for that shipment."

Sienna bounded to her feet, obviously ready for anything. He led the way, but she was close on his heels. When they got to the barn, he listened at the door before moving on. Nothing, not a sound of any breathing that he could hear. When he stuck his nose close to the opening, he smelled bear and something else.

"Anything, my love?" Sienna probed. She moved in beside him, pushing her own nose into the small space. She sneezed.

He glared at her but didn't say anything. By the way she cowered, he knew she understood her mistake.

"Come on, we'll check the window. Maybe we can see something." He turned and loped to where he'd broken in the first time. The windows had been boarded up. The only ways in or out of the barn were the doors on either end, secured with chains and padlocks. "Not getting in here, tonight," he whispered.

"Voluntarily." She eyed him, speaking cautiously.

He caught the glint reflecting in her irises and swallowed. *We have to make this work.* Their very lives depended on it.

Gareth looked around. The old truck was gone. There was no activity in the cabin. *Now, we wait.*

The traps he'd set lay deep in the undergrowth not far from the shack. Somehow, when the time was right, he planned—*hoped*—to lure the poachers, one by one, into the snares. It was risky and dangerous, but Gareth didn't see they had any choice.

Nose to the ground, he led Sienna back into the woods. They had to remain more vigilant than ever and not get caught in their own, or other, traps.

Time passed interminably. Gareth gazed at the moon moving overhead, and anger stirred in his belly. This was their night to prowl. Some idiot with a fancy for wild animals

was robbing them of their time to run free. People could be so stupid sometimes and vain to think they were entitled to control every other species.

He glanced back at Sienna, who followed him closely, her ears pointed and alert. "You okay?"

"This is taking forever," she growled back at him. "Where are they?"

"Probably out looking for us." He debated venturing farther from the cabin but was hesitant to risk it.

"We should find them." She seemed to read his mind. "Let them get a peek at us then lead them back here."

Before he could rattle off his arguments about the danger, the familiar, white pickup rumbled up the road and parked near the barn.

Gareth perked up, his furry skin tingling. He watched the men pile out of the truck and recognized the same three he'd seen the last time. The big, dark-haired brute and the smaller, blond man went to the back of the truck, while the older fellow unlocked the barn. As they'd done previously, the younger two unloaded cages from the truck while the third man watched.

"Now's our chance!" Gareth nodded towards the semi-clearing where a big, old oak sat off by itself. "Run around that tree. Let him see you. Hightail it back in this direction and hide in the brush. I'll make sure he picks up my trail."

She caught his eye and, without a word, did as instructed. She raced in a circle around the huge oak as if she were after a hare or rodent, knowing the man couldn't miss her.

"Hey!" he shouted. "There's that red wolf!"

Gareth watched him lean over the bed of the truck and rise up with what he hoped was a tranquilizer gun. "Hide," he barked at Sienna. One shot from that weapon and she'd be out like a light, and there wouldn't be a damn thing he could do about it.

He didn't have to tell her again. As the shadowy figure moved towards them, she scuttled under the brush and disappeared.

Gareth rustled the bushes so the man would see him. He moved in the direction of the closest trap and held his breath that it worked the way he'd planned, days ago. He spotted a gleam of metal and veered off the rabbit trail at the last minute.

The man behind him moved forward on the trail at a slow jog and swore as the trap snapped around his ankle.

Gareth heard the sickening crunch of bone. He'd adjusted the tension setting of the brand new bear trap but hadn't counted on the older man's weakened bone density. As the man writhed in pain, the engagement of the spring set off the second part of Gareth's trap. A bag of sand on a rope swung forward and knocked the man down. The gun flew off to the side into the bushes.

Deep in his throat, Gareth growled and sprang to the trapper's side, teeth bared. He relaxed when he saw the man was out cold. *Exactly as I hoped.* Neat, clean, quiet. He found the rifle and, using his muzzle, pushed it under a pile of rotten leaves.

Two poachers remained.

He backtracked and rejoined Sienna. "One down."

"Good going!" She nuzzled her snout at the nape of his neck.

Gareth inhaled her scent, revelling in her nearness for one precious moment. He closed his eyes. They popped open when he heard someone shout.

"Roscoe!" a man's voice came from the direction of the cabin. "Where the hell are you?"

Gareth and Sienna made eye contact for a brief second, and he nosed forward to see which person was coming next.

The smaller, light-haired man, carrying a rifle in his hands, paced back and forth in front of the truck. "Roscoe!" he called again. "You takin' a piss?"

The taller man stuck his head out of the barn. "Where did that old fool go?"

"I dunno. Probably off in the bushes for a minute. You know old, weak kidneys."

The bigger man scowled. "Find him, Jerry. I'm going to go check these animals and make sure they're all in decent shape."

"Okay, Mike."

Jerry walked slowly, hesitantly, towards the edge of the woods. "Roscoe?" he said, quieter this time.

Gareth bared his teeth. *This one's going to be a piece of cake.* He made his presence known by rustling the brush and nearly startled Jerry off his feet.

"Hey!" The man jumped back but didn't follow Gareth into the woods. "Mike! There's a wolf over here!"

Come on, you dumb son of a bitch. Gareth stuck his nose out of the bushes and allowed Jerry another peek at him.

Jerry raised his gun across his chest. "It's a fucking big, brown wolf," he called back, keeping his eyes on the shrubbery. "Go on, get outta here, you stupid wolf, afore I shoot you."

Damn it! This Jerry was obviously not the bravest knight in King Arthur's Court.

Sienna darted out from behind him and flashed her pelt at the poacher. She turned just as quickly and retreated into the trees.

"Hey!" Jerry's voice squeaked as he yelled. "It's that red-brown wolf! I found her."

Mike lumbered from the barn, gun in hand. "Follow her," he urged Jerry. "We've been looking for that bitch for days. Don't let her out of your sight."

With what looked like great reluctance, Jerry stepped into the woods and tiptoed down the same little rabbit trail the old man had gone down.

Gareth caught Sienna's gaze and motioned for her to head north. They needed to get Jerry going on another path before he discovered Roscoe, and their plan was ruined.

She caught his meaning and ran in a different direction, breaking twigs and branches as she went. Jerry stumbled after her, and Gareth slunk along behind.

Just ahead, to the right, my love. He hoped Sienna remembered the exact location of the trap. He was sure she did, but prayed she didn't make any mistakes in the critical heat of the chase.

The trap went off before Gareth got to the spot. He heard what sounded like the crying and whimpering of a girl. *Jerry?* Gareth's heart leaped into his throat as he scrambled into the small clearing. A quick look around and he sighed with relief. Muffled groans filled the air as the sandbag knocked the man out.

Sienna appeared next to Gareth. "What a wimp. This is easier than I expected."

"Don't get overconfident, my love." Gareth licked her muzzle. "That last guy, Mike, could be our toughest challenge, yet."

She glanced into the sky where the moon had begun to set. "Not much time left."

"Hopefully, just enough. Let's see if we can lure him to the trap over there." He nodded to the side.

They turned and had just begun to slink back through the brush when Gareth heard the unmistakable sound of the action of a rifle being worked.

"Hold it right there, fella." Mike peered through the trees less than a hundred feet away. His rifle was pointed at Gareth. Another rifle, a smaller model and obviously the tranq gun, leaned up against a tree by his side. "You been protecting her? Well, I'm sorry, we need her. But we don't need you."

Gareth inhaled. *One man, two guns.* How quickly would he be able to fire? He obviously intended to kill Gareth and tranquilise Sienna. "You've got to get out of here," he instructed the beauty behind him, not daring to move and give the poacher a clear shot. "I'll distract him while you take off. Run as fast as you can."

"He'll shoot you!"

"It's our only choice. I won't go down without a fight. Hopefully, I can take him with me when I go. Then you'll be safe."

Her gruff voice cracked. "No. He's after me. He won't shoot me."

He turned slowly to gaze into her bright eyes. "I intend to come back to you, my sweet."

"Gareth, no!" Gravely speech became a sob.

"Both of you, so close." Mike spoke evenly. "Maybe I'd better do it this way, just to be safe." He lowered the rifle and reached for the tranq gun.

In that split-second, his lover darted around him and raced towards the woods.

A shot rang out, but she kept running deep into the undergrowth.

Gareth thought he saw her flinch, but couldn't take the time to go after her. He knew he had only seconds before the rifle would be trained on him. A dozen paces brought him within striking distance. He crouched, his thighs tensed, and he sprang.

Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw a flash of grey. Distracted, he nearly missed his mark. *What was it? Who else was close by?*

Mike's body folded under the weight of his own. Gareth sank his teeth into the man's shoulder, very close to his throat, and gave a mighty shake. Both of them rolled in the dirt, Gareth clinging to the man, growling as blood filled his mouth.

Wild screams of pain and fear came from the poacher held in his jaws. The firearm lay a dozen paces away. Heart racing, Gareth fought the urge to end it, to kill the man who'd nearly taken his lady from him.

"Gareth," her guttural call came from the edge of the brush. "Gareth, enough. He's down."

Mike's cries stopped, and the man lay silently beneath him. Gareth released him and snarled, his paws still on the man's chest. The fellow gasped and fainted.

Gareth looked around, knowing he'd seen something—or someone—else. Near Sienna, he spotted a large, grey wolf, its hind end scarred and hairless. Cocking its head, the brute slowly approached Gareth.

Sienna came out from the underbrush and was soon beside Gareth. Her muzzle brushed his.

"The grey wolf," Sienna murmured. "From the first night here, remember? Look, you can still see the injury on his backside and leg."

"Yes." Gareth moved forward slowly. "Sam, if I'm not mistaken."

The wolf looked at them, his eyes glinting, and finally spoke. "That was quite a deduction. And here I thought I'd been so careful. How did you figure me out?"

Sienna cocked her head. "Sam? From the game warden's office?" She looked at Gareth. "How did you know?"

Gareth studied the other male with interest. "I didn't, not for sure until tonight. Your scent, it was masked with medication or something."

Sam nodded. "I had salve on this wound. Reeked to high heaven, but it worked. Hey, I'm really sorry it seemed I didn't want to help you. I knew what you told me was true, but I have to be cautious. I can do a lot of good for our species in my position, but if I was ever found out, all hell would break loose. It'd be disastrous—not just for me but for the whole were population."

"That's why you wouldn't speak to us." She put the pieces together.

Sam showed his teeth in a wolven grin. "I was scared as hell that night. I guess I never did thank you for saving my ass. So, thanks."

Gareth looked at the man lying on the ground. "I think you've returned the favour. If you hadn't confused this guy, he might have had time to get off another shot. I couldn't live with myself, knowing these men were after Sienna. I had to do something."

"You did great." Sam looked behind him. "I saw the guy you caught back there in a trap."

"The third man is that way." Gareth nodded in the opposite direction. "And there are a bunch of animals caged in the barn."

Sam gazed up to the sky. "Yes, I saw them on my way in. It's almost moonset. My truck's parked just over yonder. I've got a uniform in there. Once my change is complete, I'll radio for backup and get this mess cleaned up. Some of those animals are endangered species. I'm sure we can hit the poachers with quite a number of charges. You shouldn't have to worry about them anymore."

Gareth breathed a sigh of relief but couldn't squelch his need to know. "I'd rest a lot easier if you'd keep me apprised of the case."

"Can do." Sam nodded. "But for now, you two need to get out of here. Once the sun comes up, this place will be a madhouse."

"That, *we* can do." A thought struck Gareth, and he said, "We set a couple more traps. We'll go spring them before we head home."

"Much appreciated." Sam glanced into the woods. "I wouldn't want to mess with one of your traps." He gazed at them sincerely. "I'll be in touch."

Gareth bowed his head respectfully then turned and headed off, Sienna at his heels. He had the strong feeling they'd made a new ally in Sam and was totally at ease leaving the poachers in their new friend's hands. After quickly disengaging the last two traps, they raced for home.

Adrenaline coursed through him as they tore through the trees. Their frightening ordeal was over. Their lives could get back to normal. His cock pulsed, and he looked at the beautiful she-wolf running alongside him. If it weren't so dangerous, he'd take her right there.

"I want you," she growled at him, voice husky.

"Reading my mind again." He nudged her shoulder as they ran.

She jostled him back. "One of my favourite things to do."

Gareth's heart nearly burst, so full of love and lust. "What am I thinking, now?"

Sienna growled in that deep, sexy way she had. "Whatever it is, I like it. Let's hurry home."

About the Authors

Jude's imagination frequently leads her astray, and she eagerly follows while trying to keep out of trouble, or at least, not get caught. For those of you who know her, you'll know that's not always easy. A picture, a smell, an unexpected glimpse of flesh, or a load of soil in the back of a pick-up, are all fodder for her writing. Her male characters run the gamut from the dominant male ruling his women with an iron fist, to a simpering purple-clad boy-toy whose only desire is to please. As diverse and as richly depicted, her women find themselves in a myriad of exotic and erotic situations.

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Jenna Byrnes could use more cabinet space and more hours in a day. She'd fill the kitchen with gadgets her husband purchases off TV and let him cook for her to his heart's content. She'd breeze through the days adding hours of sleep, and more time for writing the hot, erotic romance she loves to read.

Jenna thinks everyone deserves a happy ending, and loves to provide as many of those as possible to her gay, lesbian and hetero characters. Her favourite quote, from a pro-gay billboard, is "Be careful who you hate. It may be someone you love."

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Also by Jude Mason and Jenna Byrnes

Untamed Hearts: Feral Heat
Untamed Hearts: Bear Combustion
Untamed Hearts: Wolfen Choice
Kindred Spirits: Ethan's Choice
Kindred Spirits: Hunter's Light
Friction: Maximum Exposure

Also by Jude Mason

Ghost of a Chance
Night Games
Naughty Nooners: Lunch Is Served
Pleasure Bound: Selene's Awakening
Jacob's Pony
Knight or Daye

Also by Jenna Byrnes

Unexpected Love: Nothing to Lose

Unexpected Love: Worth the Risk
Unexpected Love: Having It All
Rose & Thorn Society: Switching Seth
Cattle Valley: Truth or Dare
Cattle Valley: Fool's Gold
Convincing Cate
Second Time Around
Carnal Collision
Taking Control
Secret Santa
My Secret Valentine: Secret Rendezvous
Pleasure Bound: Aloha Kaua
Night Shift

STRIPPED BARE

Aurora Rose Lynn

Dedication

To my faithful readers. This one is for you.

Chapter One

Planet of Istanis

2478 Common Era

The preparations for the Festival of the Night Lord were beginning. Hidden from view behind an imposing stone pillar, Josie Hawkings observed several women getting themselves ready for the celebration. She shivered in the cool air so prevalent on the planet of Istanis. The sunlight barely filtered through the high windows set in the stone walls of the village meeting house – which was more like an old castle, Josie thought uneasily.

Even though she was clothed in a form-fitting tunic that merely skimmed the top of her thighs and felt like a ballet dancer's tutu, she felt overdressed. The women, all in their early twenties, were nude, painting each other's toenails and drawing sensual patterns on their backs. The following day, as the sun settled behind the Mountain of the Elks, they would vie for the Night Lord's attention. The one most pleasing to his critical eye would spend the night with him. Josie knew from overhearing the gossip between the pretty women that they wanted the lord to not only spend the night with them but also to make one of them his wife. Then they would leave behind the poverty and misery of the village and rest in comfort and luxury. The Festival of the Night Lord occurred only once every three years and, so far, none of the women had been chosen as the lord's bride.

Josie drew a deep breath and watched as dispassionately as she could. The women were fresh-skinned, blushing pretty and eager for the lord to explore their scented bodies.

Knowing she was Istanian, *The Daily Galaxian's* editor on Earth had sent her out on this assignment, saying there was always something more than met the eye, and he wanted the full scoop behind what really went on during the Festival of the Night Lord.

"Why don't you join them?"

The deep voice startled Josie. Clamping a palm over her trembling mouth, she whirled around, upset by the prospect of being caught eavesdropping. Her soft, teal-coloured tunic swirled around her hips with a whoosh.

Dark coffee-brown eyes assessed her with arrogant frankness, and she couldn't help thinking the man was sexier in person than on screen. She'd seen dozens of photos of the man who ruled Istanis with the proverbial iron hand. 'Caring' and 'gentle' were descriptions she hadn't seen used for this powerful man.

She took a step back, only to stumble. Lucien de Alvarez, the dreaded Night Lord of Istanis, grabbed her by the elbow and steadied her.

In one of the few instances in her life, Josie was at a loss for words, words that usually came far too quickly and unthinkingly to stop. The man was definitely more imposing in person than on screen. His strong jaw sported a shadow beard, and his dark brown, almost black hair was caught up in a leather band at the nape of his neck. Not only did everything about him cry out wealth but also sexy and muscled. Biceps bulged beneath his soft, white silk shirt, his waist was flat and lean, and his thighs probably had seen more strenuous workouts than those of most athletes.

Josie shouldn't have been, but she was gaping at the man as if he were naked. Attempting to recollect herself, she blinked and stepped away from the circle of his outstretched hands. Her teenage-like behaviour annoyed her. What in tarnation possessed her? she demanded of herself. She was thirty-two and not unacquainted with the male body and sex. But Lucien de Alvarez was overpoweringly male. And, Josie reminded herself, off limits. This was her job, not a sexual liaison.

"You should be one of them," the lord said, indicating the women who continued to chatter and primp and were oblivious to his presence. He seemed to take no interest in them.

His undivided attention was wholly for her, Josie realised with trepidation.

"You understand that I can order you to strip and join them."

She shook her head, straightened her shoulders and decided she'd better show her mettle, or she'd be in the melee of nude women. And she wasn't into the competition thing. The whole idea sounded barbaric and smacked of disrespect to females, but then Istanis was a backward planet where superstition and ignorance reigned supreme.

"I understand that," she said meekly, unwilling to spoil her chances of finding the information she wanted. Josie couldn't tell him she was originally from Istanis but now resided on Earth. If she did, that would be the end of her assignment—and the end of future ones, too. Derwin Mann had already mentioned the fact her job was on the line, telling her she simply didn't cut it as a reporter who had to be able to get the down-and-dirty for the readers who always wanted more stories filled with blood, rage, sex, lust and murder. If she couldn't report the goings on behind the festival activities, there was always someone else who was willing and able.

How was she to dissuade the lord from carrying out his will, though?

"But you won't want me to join them," she said after a moment, "because I can strip right here. For your pleasure."

There! That should make him think twice.

It was like trying to stop the dominoes from falling over in a chain effect.

His eyes burned through her. "You're more beautiful than any of those women." He indicated the courtyard with an imperious wave of his hand.

His hot gaze seared her, pinned her against the stone column where she felt the cold seep through her back and her rigid spine. Breathlessly, she waited for the lord to say more. He didn't disappoint.

"I'm ordering you to strip," he said, his voice silky smooth and arrogant.

She repressed a grimace and reached for the closures between her breasts. Her nipples were tight against the tunic, and her panties were damp with arousal. There was an aura of danger around the lord to which her body was responding with wild abandon. Her mind was cluttered with images of erotic positions and, like a movie, played successively, one after another. She was spread-eagled on a bed, her wrists bound, waiting breathlessly for him to thrust his cock deep into her wet sheath. Her hands were cuffed behind her back and her breasts jutted forward as he minutely licked and laved each one in turn. Each fantasy was with him as all-powerful and she his sexual servant.

Lucien stayed her hand with a light but firm touch over her knuckles. "Not here. In my carriage."

Josie couldn't help but see the rampant lust in his dark gaze. Goose bumps broke out along her arms. Was he kidnapping her? As lord of all Istanis, he could do whatever he willed, and no one could oppose him. There was no such thing as diplomatic immunity for journalists who were cautioned to travel at their own risk. Josie wasn't even certain Lucien de Alvarez would understand the niceties of diplomacy. He was a lord who knew nothing but that he could do whatever he damn well pleased.

Lucien said nothing as he ushered the woman into his carriage. She hadn't curtsied or fumbled over the few words she'd spoken to him, which told him she was audacious—or more likely didn't know who he was. He didn't usually take an interest in chance-met women, but she'd intrigued him as she watched the courtyard covertly, and he'd suddenly wanted to know more about her. Who was she? Why did she show no fear of him? What was she doing watching the other women?

He was mesmerised by her small, tight arse as she climbed into his carriage that bore his coat of arms, a lion fighting a wolf. The sight of that emblem was usually enough to strike fear into his people, a fact he'd never get used to. But, once again, the woman showed no sign that she knew his identity.

She seated herself facing forward and delicately arranged the slight folds of her tunic. Not that there was much of it. Her thighs were practically bare, and he caught a hint of her panties. He chuckled softly. Soon she wouldn't be wearing them.

Lucien sat beside her, his black-clad thigh touching hers. Warmth from her body flooded through him. She appeared so fragile, but he knew better from the thrust of her chin. She was determined, on a mission, and nothing would stop her.

The carriage lurched forward slightly as the four matched, black horses sprang into action, urged on by their well-trained driver. Lucien relaxed, turned toward the woman and caught a few strands of her wheat-gold hair in his hand. He twirled them around his thumb as he enjoyed the view of her lovely face. He found her mysterious and intriguing, shy and bold all at once.

Her eyes, an odd but memorable turquoise, were filled with not only consternation but with an uneasiness shaded with bravado. *Very intriguing, indeed.* Lucien witnessed all the

emotions in a split second before they vanished like the sun behind stormy clouds, replaced with an icy cold.

What the hell?

Her lips, two moist, pink ribbons, were slightly parted. Her warm breath fanned over his wrist where his pulse beat with an unusual frenzy. All she had to do was gaze at him with her curious, turquoise eyes, and he was hot and aroused.

"What are you going to do to me?" she asked in a breathy voice.

It stirred his already rock-hard cock. Her gaze locked with his, and he had the not unpleasant sensation of being analysed.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked, still twirling her silky hair around his finger.

Outside the carriage, the scenery to which he was so accustomed flew by. Large fields, gleaned of their wheat and vegetables for the year, lay fallow, readied for the coming season. He knew the two moons, Pharo and Orpha, would rise only minutes apart in a few short hours. It was the night before the two full moons that only occurred every three years, and he became a horrible creature, a lupus. But he wouldn't let himself think about that now, not with a beautiful woman facing him, ready to pluck like a blooming rose.

Mutely, she nodded, swallowed and ran her wet tongue over her lower lip. She lifted her fingers and pressed them against the juncture where her neck met her throat, and a small, choked sound came out. She cast her gaze downward to his lap.

He smiled, and was relieved she couldn't see his grin. She was probably seeing how hard he was for her, his shaft straining against the zipper of his black pants.

"What am I going to do with you?" he asked, repeating her question for effect.

A fierce blush swept across her high cheekbones. Her fingers fluttered against her throat as if she were thinking about the possibilities of hot, sweaty sex with her lord. And master, he added with a twinge of guilt. He owned this woman as he owned everything he saw on Istanis. Yet, he wanted more. He wanted a woman to love him. *What foolishness*, he admonished himself. In his position, he couldn't hope for real love.

"What's your name?" he asked, his tone harsh and demanding. Why couldn't he treat her kindly, and then, when he was sated and finished with her, let her go with a precious jewel that she could sell if she wanted?

“Josie,” she said in a tremulous voice. “But I’m not who—”

Abruptly, Lucien cut her off. “I want to make love to you. Unbutton your tunic.” He imagined the four closures being slowly opened and the fabric gaping wide between her breasts until, with the last closure undone, the soft globes spilled out, soft globes of flesh with erect nipples.

He witnessed the brief moment of indecision before she lowered her gaze and slid her hands to the top of her tunic. Her peach-coloured skin was smooth, and she reminded him of fragile strength in the set of her shoulders.

Lucien groaned. Josie’s gaze met his, innocent and suddenly eager. And speculative. He again told himself he was being a fool, allowing a woman to kick him off centre. Her naked conjecturing bothered him, too. What was she planning? Or was she truly as innocent as she made herself out to be?

Lucien wanted this carriage ride with her for the sex, he reminded himself. He wouldn’t take her to his home, the cold, dark, forbidding castle, and make love to her there. He’d never done that with any woman. Quick sex to satisfy his appetite and perhaps bring momentary joy to his partner was always his intention. Nothing in his world was for keeps, especially women. Or love.

He swallowed down the bile rising in his throat. His mother had trapped his father into a marriage he hadn’t wanted. She had claimed she was a princess from another galaxy, and Paro, his father, a compassionate and trusting man, had taken her word for truth. When she’d gotten pregnant, he’d immediately married her not only because he’d loved her but because he’d feared reprisal from a planetary government he’d never heard of. As soon as she’d given birth to Lucien, she was gone—along with a vast amount of money she’d wheedled from Paro. His father had never recovered and, as a result, shunned his son. For the first fifteen years of Lucien’s life, he’d been shuttled first from one nanny to another then from one school to another. He’d never had a father’s, or a mother’s, love, and avoided contemplating children of his own.

And the fact that once every three years he became a shunned lupus didn’t ease his mind. What woman with her wits about her would marry a lupus, a furred creature that ran on four legs and snarled and growled at the fullness of the two moons like a raving lunatic?

A shudder ran through him. Every time he was forced to shift from Istanian to lupus, he faced the possibility he wouldn't be able to shift back again and would remain a dreaded werewolf. Confined 'til eternal death separated his soul from his body, trapped in an animal's form with the mind of an Istanian.

"Lord?" Josie asked softly, tugging gently on his shirt.

The speculation was gone, replaced by outright concern that oddly touched and warmed his cold heart.

Lucien forced himself to turn away from a future that held no love and happiness and faced the present where a beautiful woman was willing to do his bidding. For a few minutes, he could dream about what it would be like to be loved and cherished. Hating the sound of 'lord' given the turmoil he continually was in, he growled, "Lucien."

The bone closures of her tunic and the baring of her breasts to his hungry gaze were all that mattered. Plus, why had he wanted her from the time he saw her? The question nagged at him, but he shoved it aside to be dealt with later.

"Lucien," Josie muttered, as if trying out the sound of his name. "Are any of your ancestors named Lucien?"

It came out more as an afterthought, he mused silently.

"Every other generation," he grumbled. At the questioning look in her eyes, he added, "Since the Seventeenth Century."

"Your ti—" She paused, obviously struggling for the right words.

Sudden anger rose in his chest, swirling, hot, demanding. "You're not here to ask me questions," he told her harshly. "You're here to please me. Only to please me." Yet in the back of his mind, he wondered what she would have asked if he'd allowed her to continue.

Bristling, she shifted against the velvet-covered seat but clamped her lips together, obviously trying not to say more. What was she hiding? Lucien had learned long ago that everyone, whether a lowly serf or a mighty king, had at least one secret. Whatever hers was, she was a willing participant in this little drama of his creating.

Doubt assailed him. Had Josie set him up and led him to think he'd engineered this encounter when he hadn't? Did it really matter? Why was he questioning himself constantly? Yet he didn't even know the woman.

Calming himself by watching her, he set the tips of his fingers to the first bone closure of her tunic and slid it apart. The fabric edged toward her arms the merest fraction of an inch. The next opening loosened the soft material even more. Lucien immersed himself in the sight of his broad, tanned fingers against the backdrop of her green-blue clothing and the peach of her skin. Every inch of her was his for the taking. He groaned, realising how hard he was for her. Why was he so turned on by her?

The third parted, and the tunic's bodice gaped wider. The edge of the soft globes of her breasts were visible to his gaze, now. Her pale skin was such a contrast to the darkness of her clothing. "Great god," he moaned. One last fastening to open, and he was lost, like a teenager who couldn't think of anything but sex.

Josie's chest heaved with a slow sigh. He gazed at her face, at the parted lips, her aquiline nose and her unusually coloured eyes, which aroused him to fever pitch. But for some reason he didn't understand, he wanted to enjoy slow sex—which was all it was, he reassured himself.

Lucien pried open the last bone. The tabs sprang wide, revealing her magnificent breasts, high, firm with oh, such pert nipples. Lucien lost himself in the sultry experience. When had any woman he'd bedded had such delectable nipples and erotic breasts?

"Screw this," he muttered, reaching up beside the carriage window and slipping a leather band down from the straps. He was so taken by Josie he couldn't let her go. He'd tie up her hands then have sex with her. If she were bound, she couldn't get away from him if she wanted to, he reasoned. Just this one time. Then he'd let her go.

Honestly.

Chapter Two

With her hands tied behind her, Josie frowned. She'd only fantasised about being bound by the Night Lord so he could have his way with her. Now it had become reality. Or did he know she was a reporter sniffing out a potential story with a great headline?

Cool air fanned a gentle breeze over her breasts. Her nipples hardened impossibly into tighter buds. She allowed a soft moan to escape her lips. Incredibly, Lucien was staring at her chest as if he'd never seen a pair before. The pupils in his eyes had darkened, and his cheeks were flushed. She could see the slight throb as his pulse beat erratically at the base of his tanned throat. She watched as his gaze lifted to her face.

Was he perplexed, or hadn't he had any in a while? Why would he be perplexed? She wasn't anything out of the ordinary. "You should have chosen one of those other women preparing for the festival if you're in a bad way," she said, frustrated that her questions were leading to even more questions.

Her bemusement toppled into the background as Lucien gave her a sharp look.

"Are you questioning me? Your lord?"

Uh-oh. She'd stepped on his toes, already. That wasn't a good sign. Not with a man who was reputed to change his mind faster than a tornado changed directions. She could remember the tales from when she'd lived here, and the reports she'd read before she'd come on this trip only confirmed it.

She bit her bottom lip and watched anger, arousal and wariness wash across his face in quick succession. Josie could have slapped herself if her hands had been free. She'd done the unthinkable and questioned the great Night Lord of Istanis. She shook her head, averting her gaze from his face, down to his groin, which was a big mistake. His cock was hard and huge. She felt a fierce blush sweep up the column of her throat and across her cheeks.

Josie lifted her head as he brushed long fingers through a stray lock of hair on his forehead. The muscle in his left cheek was working overtime. "The other women don't have what you have," he finally said, blinking.

He was struggling with...what? Perhaps incessant inner demons?

Puzzled, Josie waited for more. Why was Lucien answering her question when she must have been nothing more than a sex toy?

He grinned slyly. "None of them have the outright curiosity you do," he explained. "They're too intent on themselves and their own pleasure."

Josie shifted in her seat, uncomfortable that he was returning to a topic she couldn't discuss with him. What would he do if knew she was a reporter from *The Daily Galaxian* simply searching out a good story for voracious readers who wanted to know more about the quirks and secrets of the wealthy people in the galaxy, of whom he was one?

He bent his head and swirled his tongue over one furred nipple before he said, "Go ahead. Ask me another question."

Josie couldn't help the flutter of her heart. *Did* Lucien know who she was? Was he taunting her? There were no rules on Istanis other than the ones he decreed. He could do anything he wanted to her, which thrilled her when it came to sex. She could always tell her grandchildren she'd had sex with the Night Lord. Naw, that wouldn't be a story to tell kids.

She groaned as he slid his hand along her bare upper leg, tantalising her senses and stoking the passionate fire burning within her. Need spiralled deep inside. Honeyed juices soaked her panties.

"I'm sure you can think of some." His voice was ultra husky, and his warm fingers caressed her upper thigh with sure, firm strokes.

She managed to squeak, "What kind?" as his digits slid between her leg and the elastic of her panties. Her spine knotted up, and her back arched, thrusting her pelvis forward. She wanted his fingers playing with and teasing her cunt.

The tip of his index digit circled her wet clit. "Let me see," he said softly, laving one nipple then kissing the soft skin between her breasts to the other one. "You could ask how I like to have sex."

Her breath caught in her throat. "How you like sex? Must be with your partner bound so she can't do anything that displeases you." The question was more thinking out loud than a query to his face. He'd shocked her with his suggestion. Didn't he take what he wanted, how he wanted?

He lifted his gaze to hers and nodded, a flash of irritation passing across his features. "Most women in my experience like sex when they're tied up. I don't know why. Maybe they feel sexier that way." He paused, his fingers still between her thigh and the panties' elastic.

She was certain he did it to drive her crazy.

"A man such as myself likes sex in certain ways, but respects that his partner might like it a different way."

"I didn't think you gave an option." *Whoa!* She was talking to Lucien as if he were her buddy. Josie hadn't thought respect was a part of his vocabulary.

"You must think I'm a barbarian. Or worse."

Was he alluding to raping women? No, he wasn't the type. Lucien was more a recluse, and in her research, she hadn't been able to find anything detrimental about him other than that he enjoyed the women he chose during the Festival of the Night Lord. "Why don't you tell the woman you choose tomorrow night what you like?" Josie blurted out. She was treading a fine line.

His thick brows furrowed together. "'Woman I choose tomorrow night'?"

Josie was at a loss to explain the Festival of the Night Lord, especially to the man who'd instigated it. "Well, of course. You should know about that," she flashed back.

"Explain this to me." He spoke quietly, but his tone was that of an order.

His upper hand remained on her thigh, flicking at her clit with a sure-fire touch that sent pleasurable shivers down her spine.

Where should she begin? "But you know all this already," she reiterated, feeling the possibility of the long rope of a hangman's noose encircling her slim neck. No one dared talk to the Night Lord like she was doing.

"I might, but tell me."

Josie sighed as one thick digit slid into her sheath. The muscles of her vagina clenched around it as if desperate to hold on. His finger plunged forward expertly in imitation of a rigid cock. Josie fought the coming orgasm as long as she could before she clamped her mouth shut as the climax rolled over her with frightening intensity. What was it about this man that drove her wild?

The carriage jolted her and pressed them closer together. She heard a few splatters of rain falling on the rooftop, tears from the sky for a carefree life she'd never had. A life she never could have. She wanted to rest her head on his shoulder and take in some of his strength.

But, she reminded herself, she was a passing fancy to Lucien de Alvarez. In a few minutes, he'd tire of her, and that was one thing she couldn't let happen.

"Go ahead," Lucien urged quietly, watching as Josie closed her eyes to absorb the full strength of her orgasm. The powerful shudder shook his hand and travelled up into his body as tension compressed the air around them.

Her eyes, that curious but lovely shade, blinked open, and she appeared dazed by what had just happened. Her cheeks were flushed and her nipples had furled into tiny, tight, kissable peaks.

"The festival," she began breathlessly, "is for the Night Lord. That's you," she whispered hesitantly. "Every three years, when the two moons rise in their fullness, young women prepare themselves for you in case you should choose one of them." The blush deepened. "To make love to."

"To make love to?" Lucien snorted, continuing to plunge his finger into her inviting channel. Although he was certain she had a secret or two up her sleeve, she was refreshingly honest and daring, he had to admit.

She squirmed against his touch. He bent his head and flicked his questing tongue over the full expanse of her silky breast. She wore no fragrance, yet he inhaled the scent of musky arousal and freshly washed skin wafting along the breeze.

He had no idea what the Festival of the Night Lord was. He was normally too preoccupied in shifting to lupus and back again when the two moons were full. Lucien gave an involuntary shudder. How he hated that night above all nights.

But the festival was news to him. This afternoon, he'd gone to the village to speak to one of his undercover servants and, after meeting with him, had covertly walked through the village, where he'd seen the women. Despite their nudity, they hadn't drawn his attention as much as beautiful Josie had.

“Yes. Those women spend two whole days getting themselves ready so you’ll have sex with them.”

Lucien felt her heart racing, whether with anticipation or with fear, he didn’t know. He gazed into her face, saw the lowered lids and the parted lips. “So every three years I’m supposed to have sex with a strange woman?”

He watched her response, a tight nod, and didn’t understand how he had such a reputation of taking young women, deflowering them and tossing them back into the dark streets of poverty, ignorance and superstition. In the ten years since he’d inherited the throne of Istanis from his father, he’d done everything a man could do to raise his people out of their largely self-inflicted misery. He’d appointed undercover men and women to slowly change the fabric of society by teaching quietly and unobtrusively new modes of thinking and new means of doing old jobs. Each time they made a convert, society was better off and, as the new generation replaced the old, the new ways would gain a stronger foothold. The process wasn’t a quick, overnight one but would work given time. He’d had no other options since the old ways of superstition, ignorance and hatred were so entrenched in Istanian society. Come to think of it, this Festival of the Night Lord was probably another one of the antiquated ways of doing things.

Not knowing how much Josie knew, or what her background was, although he suspected she was far more intelligent than the average Istanian, he said nothing to contradict her impression of the Festival of the Night Lord. If he wasn’t taking the women, who was?

“What happens to the women after I’m supposedly finished with them?” he asked, pressured by the need for an answer.

“I don’t know,” she whispered, her eyes narrowing speculatively.

“What are the rumours?” There were always several of those floating around. Worthless bits of made-up information.

“Rumours have nothing to do with fact. Why am I talking to you about things you should know about?” Hesitating, she lowered her gaze.

The alarm bells began to ring louder than ever. Who was Josie really? Lucien knew he wouldn’t get a straightforward response, so he didn’t bother asking. But he was determined

to find out. There was something that wasn't quite right, something he couldn't put his finger on.

"Why did you tie my hands behind my back?" she asked, a hint of fear sparking in her eyes.

He regretted doing so, but he couldn't afford to let her escape before he knew who she was – and before he'd sated his appetite for her. It was unthinkable she might be working for the underground, but he had to face the possibility. He gritted his teeth, hating the illicit Istanian movement that was resisting the improvements he was attempting to make.

"Because I want to make love to you," he said calmly, non-threateningly. He wanted Josie to like him, not because he was the Lord of Istanis but for who he was, a man who wasn't the cold-hearted beast so many of his people had made him out to be.

"Wouldn't it be easier, simpler, if you untied my hands so I could participate? Or are you afraid I'm going to assassinate you?"

Lucien noted her chin went up in marked defiance. He'd never met a woman quite like her. "That hadn't crossed my mind. About the assassination part," he elaborated. "But you do have a point about participating." He felt like a ruthless barbarian throwing a woman over his shoulder and hustling her off to the nearest cave. Come to think of it, that wasn't so far off in history, was it? "Promise me you won't try to run away." *Like my mother*, came the unbidden, disturbing thought.

She nodded. "I promise."

The firmness with which she agreed warned him, once again, that she had an agenda of her own. He slid his finger from her soaked sheath and untied her wrists.

She rubbed them gingerly. "You lords sure have insecurity issues, don't you?"

Lucien chuckled at her flippant remark. Josie had that right, and his being who he was didn't seem to bother her. She didn't cringe or quail from him, and he found that extremely invigorating and refreshing. Now, if only his advisors had such guts, then he wouldn't feel as if he were pulling teeth in making reforms to help his people.

* * * *

Anton Collier clamped his broad palm over his heart and breathed a huge sigh of relief, glad that Lucien had left with the snoopy woman. She'd been hanging around in the background at the courtyard for several hours, and Anton didn't want witnesses who might ruin his fun. Observing the women from under hooded eyes, he rubbed his hands together with glee. This time tomorrow night, Lucien would be busy with his shifting business, and Anton would arrive in the courtyard pretending to be the Night Lord. He could choose any of these women and have a night of hot sex with them, no questions asked, no holds barred.

He smiled with satisfaction as he watched one in particular who was painting her toenails a crimson red. She had large globes that jiggled with each slight movement she made. Anton could definitely bury his head between her breasts as his cock plunged into her cunt while her arms dangled from overhead supports. The women had never offered resistance and had done anything he'd demanded of them unquestioningly.

He laughed quietly. What would these women do if they knew he was admiring them and calculating which of them would give him the greatest sexual pleasure? Or could he change the rules and choose all of them and create a harem-like environment where each one vied for his undivided attention?

His roving eye settled on a younger woman who held back from the chattering group as if she believed she really didn't belong among the gay ribbons, coloured hair and fragrances that made his head swim. She had long, dark tresses to the cleft of her arse, and her breasts were high with a slight, snooty arch to them. The cinnamon-coloured nipples were upturned, as well. Anton wondered what it would be like to make her squeal with a couple of well-placed nipple clamps.

God, but he was hard already, just thinking about the possibilities—one of which involved rolling a long necklace of shimmering pearls, one by one, into her cunt and asking her to squeeze her thighs together. She would come in a delightful orgasm and cry out for more.

Or what about the female in the centre of the small throng, the one with short, red hair and a small arse? Anton would bend her forward over a table, play his fingers through her pubic hair and watch her wiggle her bum in anticipation of his thrusting his hard shaft in her cunt. None of the women he'd been with before had questioned him. For that night, and sometimes on other nights as well when he wanted more sex, he played the part of the Night

Lord, and none dared disobey or question him. He liked sex that way. It gave him a sense of power he wouldn't otherwise have.

Working for Lucien was hell at times, watching the lord, who was nothing more than an Istanian man, 'lord' it over his people. Anton snickered softly. Petty jealousy wasn't his style, but when the lord had everything he could possibly want and still hungered for something he couldn't define, there had to be something wrong. Anton, his High Chamberlain, wanted the indefinable, too. Like more money and more respect. Every three years, when the two moons rose pregnant and full, he'd given himself the opportunity.

He surveyed the women and counted. Ten, eleven, twelve beauties, all his for the taking. But which one—or better, how many of them? It wasn't as if he had to support them or anything. And they'd each have a good memory to take home with them along with a trinket he'd filch from Lucien, who would never miss the tiny baubles.

With one last, longing look, he strolled away into the shadows. He didn't have to decide today, and no matter how difficult it was, he wouldn't masturbate, an act which might take away his full power to choose and to sate his sexual appetite. Slipping his hands into his pockets, he didn't cast a backward glance at the naked females. Yeah, he just might take all of them tomorrow night.

His breath stalled in his lungs at the vivid scenery in his mind. Twelve women who looked up to him and did his bidding without question. That had to be the greatness of power, hadn't it?

Chapter Three

Josie had a sudden thought as Lucien threw the leather strap on the floor. "I've got an idea," she whispered, hoping he wouldn't throw her out of his carriage. Somehow, she had to make herself indispensable to him and, apparently, the only way to do it, as of this moment, was sex.

His eyebrows squirreled upward.

"Why don't I tie *you* up?" she asked, much too gaily for her liking.

"Are you going to assassinate me?" came the quick reply. His pulse throbbed visibly and energetically at the base of his throat.

Josie pursed her lips. "Are you that concerned that someone will kill you?" She kept her voice low. A man in his position had to have a few enemies but, if he spent all his time worrying about being killed, then there had to be a good story there.

He nodded and ran the back of his hand across his forehead as if he were too warm.

Should she prod him for more information, or should she let the concern go?

He made the decision for her.

"What did you say about tying me up? For sex?" His eyes widened.

It gave Josie the distinct impression that if he weren't threatened, then he'd enjoy something like that.

She moistened her lips. Lucien really was an endearing man. Not only was he powerful and wealthy, but he was also sexy and charming in an almost school boyish way, a fact she was sure he kept hidden from the populace at large. She met his gaze frankly. "For sex. I'd tie your wrists to those straps up by the window, free your gorgeous cock and ride you like the wind."

His easy, carefree smile warmed her heart, and his eyes widened mockingly.

He held his hands at shoulder level. "Are you sure you can restrain me? I'm pretty strong, you know."

What kind of life had he led behind the pomp and luxury? Josie wondered. He obviously hadn't been loved and cared for, judging from the lightning fast changes in his emotions. She swallowed hard. She was some kind of judge, since she hadn't had much of the same, growing up in poverty with her little sister. Remembering her little sister – her best friend – brought tears to her eyes, and her vision shimmered.

"Are you okay?" Lucien asked gently, patting her forearm.

She fought back the tears. "I know it's stupid, but I was thinking of my sister."

He nodded sympathetically, as if he understood. His dark eyes took on a haunted, tired appearance. "She's dead?"

Josie inclined her head, relieved for this moment of grace as she checked the tears and struggled to hold back the choking sobs. His hand was still on her forearm with a strong, comforting pressure.

"How?"

"Lightning. We were walking on the hill outside the village when a bolt of lightning struck her. She was killed instantly." She dabbed at her eyes with the back of her hand.

"Your mother and father?"

"They were gone long before that." Why was she talking so freely to the man who probably heard stories like hers frequently but had hardened himself to them?

"I'm truly sorry."

The gentle compassion in his tone caused her to look up. His eyes were shimmering with unshed tears.

"I truly am," he said. His small smile was melancholy. "Here we are, supposed to be having sex, and we're talking about what matters to us."

'Sex' was such a dispassionate word. Josie also pondered his use of the word 'we'. Was he including her, or was he simply using the royal method of designating himself?

He seemed to read her mind. "I meant you and me."

She pursed her lips again, driving Lenora back into time where she belonged. Josie was alive, and nothing she did or said would bring her sister back.

Lucien lifted his hand from her forearm to her cheek, which he caressed tenderly with small strokes. "We can't bring her back no matter what we do," he whispered. "What we can do is enjoy the moment and treasure it for the rest of our lives."

"What a strange thing to say," Josie murmured.

"My mother left my father and me when I was barely out of her womb. It left a hole in both our hearts."

She nodded understandingly. If she could keep him talking, then she'd get the inside scoop on his life for her story. The thought immediately gave her a twinge of guilt. Here Lucien was, opening up to her, probably in a way he never had to another person before, and she was ready to put it on screen.

"But enough of this morose business. Your tits are beautiful and bare and begging for another kiss." He chuckled softly. "I always wanted to say 'tits'. You don't mind, do you?"

Amazed at his considerateness, she shook her head. "Not at all."

He breathed in with what she took as relief.

"That's good. I don't want to hurt your feelings." Lucien bent and kissed each nipple tenderly. "Now, you were about to tie me up and test my strength." Amusement lit his tanned face.

"Your strength, as in of your wrists or of your cock?" She clamped her hand over her mouth again. Goodness, but she was being bold with the Night Lord.

"It's all right. No one's ever spoken to me like that. I like it. It's refreshing."

Josie lowered her hand. "You won't hang me or lock me up in your dungeon?"

His eyes clouded over for the briefest of seconds. "I don't have a dungeon in the castle. Or anywhere else, for that matter. And hanging is a thing of the past."

"Okay. Let's do this."

"But I want you completely naked," Lucien told her, his voice commanding and brooking no dissent.

"Well, you'll just have to take the rest of my clothes off then, won't you?" she replied mischievously, her nipples giving a little quiver of delight.

His eyes lit up again. Dark eyes that hadn't ever been intended for brooding, but he'd probably lived a lifetime filled with sadness she'd never understand.

“My pleasure.”

The sex with Josie was going to be fantastic. Lucien had never met a woman quite like her. Compassionate, daring and ready to throw caution to the winds. And he enjoyed her company immensely. He'd never realised how lonely he was until now with this wonderful woman.

He tugged the tunic down her body as the carriage gave a little jolt. He'd ordered the coachman to simply journey until either the horses tired or Lucien was finished. “Wait a minute,” he told Josie.

He angled his face out the window and shouted to the driver, “To the castle!”

“Yes, lord!” the man shouted back. “Right away!”

Lucien pulled his head back inside. Seated on the plush, red, velvet-covered cushions, Josie was naked except for her pink panties with a tiny, lacy edge. The carriage lurched and jolted, and she swayed from side to side. Such beauty with her rosy nipples, expectant expression and slightly parted thighs. He had the feeling wanting Josie so passionately was no longer about sex but about latent curiosity.

Josie tensed. Had she angered Lucien?

He held his hands up, palms forward. “When are you going to restrain me?”

Josie relaxed, pleased he welcomed her idea. She could never hope to bind him so he was completely helpless. He was strong and extremely powerful, physically. “Right now.”

His muscled thigh was next to hers, and that possibly unintentional touch sent shivers of pleasure down her spine and into her core. Lucien hooked his fingers into the side of her panties and, with one careless tug, divested her of them. The soft fabric fluttered to the carriage floor and rested on top of her tunic.

“Will you let me look at you first?” he asked, his dark gaze pleading.

Her eyebrows arched upward. “You already are looking at me. Not just a bit of me but everything.” She wondered if he made love to other women so playfully, but a spark of envy rose inside her. What did it matter what he did? He'd take her back to his castle, pleasure

himself with her then send her home with nothing but the memory—and hopefully a tantalising story that would make Derwin's eyes sparkle.

"Lie down on your back and put your thighs up here." He patted the top of his own legs. His fingers were trembling.

Josie swallowed. "What do you want to do?" She couldn't see having sex in that awkward position. The schoolboy charm had reappeared, though. Why was he asking as if she had the option of turning him down rather than ordering her to do as he wanted? Maybe he was giving her the illusion she could stop him.

Hastily she quelled the rising fear. Being with the Lord of Istanis wasn't for the weak-hearted, she told herself sternly, especially when they weren't being honest with him. Sex was only a means to an end, which was a story the reading public hungered for. "Okay," she said demurely.

He turned to face her and casually rested his back against the wall of the carriage. Josie sucked in a breath. The man had a hard-on the size of a planet. Averting her gaze and feeling the heat of a blush surging up her throat and to her cheeks, she scooted sideways and gingerly lifted her legs, setting her ankles on his lap. She kept her knees together, but Lucien's slight shake of his head silently warned her he wanted her to edge her thighs apart, to expose herself completely to his hot, slumberous gaze. She repressed a deep sigh, knowing she'd do anything to save her job.

"You can stop at any time you choose if this is making you uncomfortable," Lucien told her.

He must have been observing her face. Josie shook her head curtly. She had to do this, give her body in exchange for information, but to whom better than Lucien? she thought, trying to cheer herself. He was kind, and she was, in fact, having the new experience of fucking the Lord of Istanis whom she could only have dreamed of seeing up close when Lenora was still alive. Let alone having sex with him.

Spreading her thighs wide, she watched Lucien's gaze slide from her face down to her breasts and lower still. She licked her dry lips and, for no reason she could think of, wanted to neck with him, but she forced herself to lie still without squirming.

His gaze was so intent, he seemed frozen in time. What was he so wrapped up in? Why didn't he say or do something? Finally, he moved in slow motion and rested his warm palms on the tops of her knees. She felt the almost imperceptible tremors shaking his body.

Without thinking, she blurted, "Am I that beautiful?"

She could have kicked herself.

Lucien's eyes narrowed, and his predatory gaze met hers. "This was a bad idea," he murmured and unzipped his trousers.

He moved so quickly, it left her head spinning. He pushed her ankles from his lap, wriggled out of his pants and lay down between her legs, leaning to shift his weight to his hands on either side of her head.

"I can't wait longer," he muttered, his gaze caressing her aching breasts. His heavy cock nestled against the tip of her slick entrance.

Josie grabbed his upper arms more for an illusory safety net than a need to hold onto him. He plunged into her sheath, and she cried out at his hard thickness slipping into her. His expression was so all-consuming and burning with passion that she squeezed her eyes shut against the potency. What had gotten into him? It was as if the devil was spurring him on. Her fingers bit into his arms in wonder.

Somewhere in the humming silence, she realised they had stopped, but Lucien's thrusting into her was forcing the undercarriage straps to squeal softly. Did the coachman know Lucien was making love? How couldn't he with the noise and Lucien's grunting?

Then thoughts ceased as her body sang in time with the lord's thrusting. She arched her back, pressing her breasts with their hardened nipples against his chest.

"Oh god, Josie," he said in a strained whisper. His thrusts were fast and furious, and her arse rubbed against the cushions under her with his frantic pace.

She was certain they'd go over the edge together in one fantastic spill of colour and vibration. Opening her eyes a fraction of an inch, she was startled to find the extreme intensity on Lucien's face. It was almost as if he hadn't had sex in a long while, and the passion was overcoming him.

Josie shuddered, and once again, he called out her name. Her chest heaved up and down, and sweat trickled from his body to hers, wetting them both. Then they slid over the

top and spiralled down the other side in a kaleidoscope of rapidly changing shapes and colours. The world was about to end.

Chapter Four

What the hell had just happened? A torrent of sensations had rushed through Lucien which both amazed and mystified him. He'd noticed his emotions were greatly heightened in Josie's presence, but did that have anything to do with his body preparing to shift to lupus form the following night? He tried to recall if, during previous shifts, he'd been inundated with feelings he couldn't name. Passion, mingling with startling melancholy and obsessive rage, diluted by the presence of an emotion he could only say might resemble...love.

Josie's eyes were still closed, and anger furled up from within him. "Josie? Did I hurt you?" He'd always prided himself on treating women with distant courtesy, but with Josie, he'd snapped and only cared for his needs, not for hers.

She blinked and gazed at his tear-stained cheeks. "No," she muttered as if attempting to regain her senses.

"You're the most powerful aphrodisiac I know of," he said, searching for some means to soothe both Josie and himself. She'd become reserved in a heartbeat, and guilt fanned its tentacles around him. Lucien had no idea why she'd made such a difference to him in less than two hours. He wanted to ask her a dozen questions but settled for saying quietly, "I'll make it up to you. I promise." Oddly, he didn't owe her a thing, which made taking her so brutally even more unfathomable.

Their bodies were still joined, his half-flaccid cock lodged in her sheath, almost hanging on for dear life, he thought miserably.

She blinked again. There was no recrimination in her eyes, only a sad loneliness that could not be hidden from him. "Lucien?" she whispered raggedly.

"Yes, sweetheart?"

Her eyes widened at the endearment, and her body under his stiffened. "You're heavy on top of me."

"How callous of me!" He immediately rolled off her and reached for her clothes.

She sat up, rubbed her eyes with her knuckles, then wasted no time in pulling on her panties and tunic. When she was dressed, she gave him a look of reproach. "Who are you, really?"

"What do you mean?" His heart stopped for a fraction of a second. Did she know his secret? Was that why she had such power over him?

"You can't possibly be the Night Lord. He wouldn't ask. He'd command."

He didn't know how to reply. No one had ever questioned his identity before.

He spread his hands out imploringly. "Josie, I know it's hard for you to believe, but I am who you think I am."

Adamantly, she shook her head. Her silky hair swung from side to side. "No, you can't be," she retorted. "I've seen screen pics of you."

She seemed to think she had said too much. Her eyes widened in horror, and she clapped her hand over her mouth, a dead giveaway, if Lucien read people right, that she had a secret agenda.

To give himself time to think, he dressed slowly and deliberately. A quick glance out the carriage window told him they were in the castle courtyard. All he needed to do was call out, and this woman would be imprisoned in one of the more modern cells. He hesitated, unwilling to give the viper entrance to his nest, but he had no other option. He was a man of his word, and he'd promised to make it up to her. But while he did, he would have her kept under strict but surreptitious surveillance. If she made any rebellious move against him, he'd have her arrested.

His heart flipped over. He didn't want to do such a thing, especially after the great sex they'd had.

Her hand fluttered to her waist as she continued to sit on the cushion, waiting, watching.

"I believe you know, without a doubt, who I am. But Josie, I don't have a clue as to who you are. However, I will find out." He made certain his tone was gentle yet threatening.

She didn't resist as he cupped her elbow and ushered her out of the carriage, through the empty courtyard and into the hushed castle. Servants magically appeared and opened doors or stood at the ready to obey his orders. Josie marched next to him, her leather-soled

shoes making a soft, shuffling sound. Up the grand staircase where countless of his ancestors stared unseeingly from their portraits lining the walls at visitor and occupant alike.

When he threw open the door of the room next to his, she gasped and tugged on her arm. "I will not become your whore," she managed, annoyance playing on her features.

Lucien smiled placatingly. "I have no desire for you to become my 'whore', as you so succinctly put it."

Her shoulders relaxed a fraction, but the doubt remained in those curiously coloured eyes.

"I want you to be my mistress."

Josie couldn't believe her ears or her eyes. The room he'd led her to was more sumptuous than any she'd ever been in. The colour scheme was that of vibrant autumn, and the curtains, the bedspread and the expensive furniture matched each other flawlessly. Odd, that a population could live in a medieval style but the lord lived in as modern a castle as could be had.

She stamped her foot and jerked on her arm to no avail. "I will not be your mistress, which is the same thing as being a whore."

Lucien's face was a study in amusement. "You will be whatever I want you to be." His voice was now commanding. Irritatingly so.

How could she argue with that? Just because she'd had sex with him didn't mean she had any rights. She had to remember that—and also that she had an assignment she had to turn in. Either way, she was in the proverbial hot water.

"I'm glad you won't argue." Lucien led her into the room, and motion-sensor activated lights came on automatically.

Dusk had fallen, and soon Istanis would be enveloped in the darkness of night when a man and a woman were meant to make love and enjoy each other sexually, Josie thought uneasily. She trembled at the mere prospect that Lucien would want her again tonight.

"Strip out of those clothes and have a hot bath," he suggested, opening yet another door to a luxuriously appointed room with what looked like heated towel racks and a marble, heart-shaped tub.

Josie didn't dare disobey him. She didn't have any family that would miss her. Lucien could spirit her away anywhere he liked for the remainder of her life, which was a long time.

"My suite is right next door," he said conversationally, turning her to face him.

Her eyes reluctantly met his. His jaw was set in a hard, unrelenting line. She shivered involuntarily. Her finely honed reporter instincts told her she was in for a lot of sex with a man who had a great many secrets and wasn't willing to divulge even one.

As her gaze swept over his face, Josie quivered with aroused need. Lucien was ever so handsome. Her lower lip sagged, and her pulse picked up.

"You want me, don't you?" he asked gently, bending close to her ear.

She couldn't help herself. "Yes," she answered in a husky voice. Her nipples pressed tightly against her tunic, and her pussy was wet with desire again.

"Have your bath," Lucien murmured, kissing an erotic line from her cheek across to her waiting mouth.

Her arms stole up his and around his neck. She didn't want to be his prisoner—yet she was already, wasn't she?

He nibbled on her extended lower lip and parted her mouth with his hot tongue. He possessed her lips with a hunger Josie found entrancing. Her body responded to his advances, and she reached up on tiptoe to press her stomach against his bulging erection. The kiss was frenzied, passionate, and left her wanting more, much more.

His large hand slid between her legs and up to her pubic mound, making small, swirling motions in the curly hair. Then his fingers were resting against her pussy. "I want you again, sweet Josie. Again, and again. And I'm afraid I might never let you go back to wherever you came from, and to whomever you were pretending to be."

Confused--alarmed, she let her hands fall to her sides. Lucien arched a finger into her pussy, and, forgetting the intense moment of fear, she leaned into him and moaned. With his free hand, he ripped her tunic and panties from her and thrust them behind her. Once again, she was naked in front of him. His finger was immersed in her sheath where she couldn't hide the fact she wanted him.

Abruptly, he jerked his hand from her pussy and stepped away from her. Unprepared for the suddenness of his action, she almost fell but caught herself and balanced on the balls of her feet.

"I have a few calls to make," he said as if he hadn't just been starting to make love to her. "Then I'll be back." The smile he gave her was one of wicked amusement. He left without a backward glance.

Josie sank to her knees and whispered forlornly, "What have I done?" No job was worth the risk of having her real purpose discovered by the great Lord of Istanis.

Chapter Five

Anton had returned to work and saw the lord bring in his strumpet with him. Which was highly unusual. Lucien must really have the hots for her bad. He didn't normally flaunt his latest conquest to the servants, who liked to gossip discreetly.

Anton bowed with the others as Lucien and the female strolled by on the way to the royal suites. What was it about this woman that caused the lord to treat her as if she were special? Was it the colour of her hair or the curious shade of her eyes? Or was it her fine arse and upturned breasts? Who could say for sure what Lucien saw in her?

A plan began to shape in his sharp mind, a plan which would put to right, once and for all, Anton's need for revenge. Tomorrow night, he'd have all the women he'd seen in the courtyard—and also the toy Lucien had brought to the castle. As a lupus, wasn't Lucien helpless against a silver dagger aimed directly at his heart? Most Istanians were so afraid of the wolves, they killed them without a second thought. All Anton had to do was make sure Lucien's woman knew what he truly was, and she'd complete the task Anton set for her.

He rubbed his hands together with glee. Yes, Lucien would die as lupus, and the woman would be so distraught she'd come to Anton for comfort.

Anton, who was about to become the new Lord of Istanis.

* * * *

Lucien raked his fingers through his hair and blew out a long breath. He'd made several calls and talked to even more of his castle servants, but no one seemed to know who the Night Lord was. Or, more exactly, who was impersonating him. Lucien had been the ruler of Istanis for ten years, since he was twenty-two. He felt so old, now. And helpless.

Who was acting as though he were the Lord of Istanis when Lucien had no choice but to run off into the forest surrounding the castle and shift into a lupus? It had to be one of his servants, but which? Anton couldn't possibly be the culprit. True, Anton was his half-brother

as well as his High Chamberlain, and they'd grown up together, so Anton knew everything about him. But there were also a few others whom Lucien implicitly trusted who knew his secret.

Gellis, his horsemaster, knew. Lucien wrote him off right away. Gellis knew horses, but he wouldn't have cared if Lucien turned into a flying machine every other month. Then there was Barton, his valet, but the man was without ambition. Lucien ruled out him, too. That left Genra, his housekeeper. But no, the impersonator couldn't possibly be a woman.

So who else could it be?

Frustrated, Lucien sighed. That left no one and a big headache coming on.

He called Anton into his suite. The man arrived in short order, his black hair slicked back over his forehead and his dark eyes deferential.

"I've got a problem, Anton," Lucien began. "I've compounded it by bringing a woman here. While I'm gone tomorrow night," he didn't have to mention where since it was silently understood, "I want you to keep an eye on Josie. Something just doesn't seem right about her, but I can't put a finger on it."

"Of course, sir. Would you like her to have free rein of the castle, or is she to be confined to her rooms?"

"Free rein, but she's not to make contact with anyone outside the castle."

"Is there a particular reason for that, sir?"

Lucien turned away and looked out the window into the night. His heart was gripped with a brooding fear for which there was no reason. "I believe she might be part of the underground resistance, so it's best to isolate her for the moment."

"Yes, sir. Is there anything else, sir?"

"No." Lucien dismissed him and heard the door click closed softly behind him.

That had to be it. Josie was part of the underground resistance. That was why she'd known from the first who he was.

* * * *

After her hot and somewhat relaxing bath, Josie looked through the walk-in closet for something she'd feel comfortable in, although she sensed she shouldn't be in here. After all, wasn't she simply a kept woman and not a lady with a title? She was wrapped in a plush robe, and the soft, warm fabric felt like a cocoon around her.

The clothes for women ranged from elegant and appropriate for dinner to almost bare negligees and bed attire. The ball gowns glittered with all the tiny diamonds and precious jewels that had been sewn on. Gorgeous shoes of every colour and style lined the wall. She tried on a pair of kitten heels. They fit perfectly.

She was just about to step out of them when she heard, "Are you looking for something to wear?"

Josie whirled around at the sound of the confident voice. Her heart raced. "I know I shouldn't be in here."

With his arms crossed, Lucien leaned against the doorjamb. His dark gaze roved up and down her body, and a low-burning fire lit within her belly. He wore a fresh, white button-down shirt and black trousers, and she couldn't avert her gaze from his hefty erection. Would he take her roughly as he had in the carriage, or would he slow down his passion and make love tenderly?

His brow furrowed. "Who said that?"

Josie shrugged. "I did. These clothes," she said, waving a hand towards the beautiful apparel, "weren't intended for...me." She'd been about to say for people like her, people who'd been raised in abject poverty.

"Maybe they were," he said softly, his focus going dreamy.

Vehemently, she shook her head. "I don't think so."

"Come here."

His voice was a strong contrast to his gaze and was a peremptory order, which she dared not refuse. Moistening her bottom lip, she strolled toward him on the plush carpet, her footfall absolutely silent. Lucien straightened, reached to the tie fastening at her waist, undid the luxurious fabric and pushed it off her shoulders. The robe fell to her feet with a soft whoosh. Cool, tantalising air swirled around her, caressing her.

For the third time, she was naked in front of Lucien.

"This time, I want to go slow and savour every part of your body."

"I thought you wanted me to tie you up and ride you," she blurted out. She didn't know what it was about the man that made her rush her thoughts and voice them.

"That, too. All in due time." He stepped closer and pressed his rigid cock against the juncture of her thighs. "Unfasten my trousers."

Josie watched her hands as she pulled down the zipper. He crooked his index finger under her trembling chin and tipped her head upward. His small smile kindled a response deep inside her.

"What do you feel?"

She blinked. Her nipples hardened into painful, tight buds. "I feel wonderful," she whispered as her knees quivered.

"I've felt that way since I first saw you." He kissed her lips.

The light, gentle touch turned her insides to mush.

"It's as if we were meant to meet each other."

Josie couldn't put her finger on why, but a dark, brooding sensation overcame her senses. She took an involuntary step backward. Lucien released her, slipped out of his trousers and briefs and stood before her in all the glory of a beautiful, naked man with a large, throbbing cock. The shadows in his gaze disappeared. Arousal, hot and hungering, appeared instead.

With a strong hold, he scooped her up in his arms and carried her to the wide bed covered in gold brocade.

"I want to make love to you properly, Josie," he whispered as he laid her down.

The fabric slid along her bare back like a lover's caress.

Lucien lay down next to her, propped himself up on his elbow and gazed into her eyes. "You're special, Josie," he whispered so softly she just caught his words.

She met his heated gaze directly and unflinchingly, unwilling to give herself away. He might think she was special, but all she wanted was her story, then she'd flee Istanis forever. She'd flee the poverty and misery and not only her past, but she'd also tell Derwin what to do with his job. Josie would find some other work to support herself. She enjoyed creating

jewellery from metals and precious stones from all over the galaxy, and that might be an option.

“What are you thinking?” Lucien stroked her forehead gently.

She repressed a grimace. Now wasn't the time to ask her for her thoughts. “That I like being with you,” she said, settling for the truth. If he weren't the Lord of Istanis, she'd have felt safe and wanted in the circle of his arms.

“Then we're agreed that we enjoy each other's company.” He kissed the breast nearest him, his tongue flicking over the soft skin.

The light touch drove her wild. “Don't you want me to tie you up?”

His eyes danced with sudden merriment. “You're not going to give up on that, are you?”

Lucien's searching, hot mouth found its way to her other breast where he ministered to the nipple as if it were a goddess in its own right. Josie trembled under his sure, expert touch.

“No, you promised.” Josie realised she was losing touch with what she wanted—her story—and becoming more and more involved with Lucien on an emotional level. And that bothered her.

He leaned over her, opened the nightstand drawer and lifted out two leather straps. “Show me what you're going to do.” His eyes beamed with pleasure.

Josie flipped onto her knees. “Get up to the headboard.”

He frowned.

How could she be so foolish, ordering the great lord around? “Please,” she amended.

He heaved a sigh. “All's fair in love and war.” But he did as she'd requested.

Josie did the best she could to tie his wrists to the headboard, but when she was finished, she guessed he could, with little provocation, easily free himself.

“So what are you going to do with me, mystery woman?”

She laughed, delighted by his nickname for her. “I'm going to ride you hard and fast.”

He chuckled. “You better hurry. My cock is dancing wildly for your pussy.”

His comment made her giggle. His large erection pulsed violently and pointed straight at the ceiling. Riding him might end up being a challenge—as if she didn't have enough of

those, she thought grimly. But this was a time for fun, not for recriminations or personal history lessons. "Poor baby," she said laughingly.

She straddled his thighs and touched her wet pussy to the tip of his bobbing cock. Then she grasped the shaft with both hands and settled his erection just inside her sheath. She gasped at his largeness and eased down on him slowly, enjoying the sensation of her vagina filling with him.

"Is this what you do to all your prisoners?" Lucien asked.

Startled, Josie gazed at him. She'd been so intent on her own pleasure, she'd almost forgotten about him, and he was the Lord of Istanis! She decided to make light of her tactical error, if he even realised she'd made one. "No, just to you."

"Have you ever ridden a man like this before?"

The question came right out of the blue and hit her between the eyes. "No," she mumbled. "You're the first."

He burst into laughter. "Tell me, beautiful Josie, where would you be if you weren't riding my penis?"

She paused and stared into nothingness. Yes, where would she be? Struggling to make ends meet for an editor who didn't appreciate her angles on the stories she reported on. Back on Earth and feeding the pigeons from a park bench. Thinking about Lenora and what would happen if she were still alive today. "I don't know," she confessed.

"Can you untie my hands, now? I want to tweak both your nipples into tiny pleasure points."

Josie gave him a reprimanding look.

He drew a deep breath and exhaled. His nostrils flared. "Just asking. Thought maybe you'd have mercy on me."

"Nope."

"I hardly think you watch naked women for a living." He'd changed the subject back again.

"Definitely not." The tip of his penis rested deep inside her. She began to move over his long length, up and down, up and down, stretching herself to accommodate his width. She closed her eyes and, in the prominent, friendly darkness, savoured the sensations roaring

through her. She was in control. She had feminine power oozing from every pore in her body. And most of all, she was riding the Lord of Istanis in his castle. Her news assignment would just have to wait.

“That’s good.” Lucien couldn’t imagine a female watching other women, not even if they were preparing themselves for the Festival of the Night Lord. Which had a nice ring to it. Once he’d found the impostor, he’d nullify this barbarity and change the direction of the Festival to arts or sciences, and there’d be no nude women for some stranger to take advantage of.

It was getting more difficult to think clearly. Josie’s cunt enveloped his cock like a snug, warm glove.

“What do you do when you’re not making love to me?” He knew most people on Istanis worked long hours for little pay. It was one of the current realities he was trying to change, but his people resented reconstruction, even if it meant better working conditions for them.

She batted her eyes open and paused again. His groin tightened with longing. He wanted an orgasm with Josie, unlike any he’d ever had before, and he realised he was coming to that. The pressure building up in him was testimony to that.

Lucien gave one hard tug on each wrist and instantly freed them. “I want to play with your nipples,” he said quietly. “They’re tempting little peaks that are driving me to distraction.”

Her cheeks flushed red. “I knew the straps wouldn’t hold you.”

“As your lord, I order you to tell me what you work at.”

He saw the indecision come into her eyes. Whatever she was about to say would be an outright lie.

“I design jewellery for sale on Earth.” She blinked repeatedly and finally averted her gaze.

Yeah, she lied, all right.

She began moving over his cock again, but this time with the frenzied speed of a racing horse out in the open fields. The bed squeaked with each movement, and he'd have found it funny if there hadn't been such an urgency to her lifting her pretty arse over his shaft.

His muscles began to tighten with the tension of the coming orgasm. He continued to toy with her nipples for a few moments longer, then his hands strayed to her waist where he clasped her with a strong hold. Tension spiralled through his body, from his thighs to his arms to his neck. The woman was riding him hard and frantically, and he loved it. But he wished he knew what she was hiding. She didn't create jewellery any more than he stoked fires.

Josie shut her eyes and sensed the rising orgasm twisting its way through her body. Lucien's heartbeat in his broad chest under her sweaty hands picked up to a furious pace. Then he groaned as if he were being tortured. His hot semen burst into her. She arched her neck, raised her face toward the ceiling and cried out as the spasms hit hard and fast, one after the other. Lucien's fingers dug into her tender flesh, but she didn't care. He'd cried out her name again. She flashed her eyes open, but his own were closed and fastened on whatever was going on in his head.

Why did he keep calling out her name as if she meant something to him? When she was as disposable as all his other women had been?

She waited as his cock went flaccid inside her pussy, then she raised herself up on her hands and rolled to one side of him. Lucien's breathing was still ragged, and a fine sheen of perspiration beaded his forehead. His dark hair was damp as if he'd overexerted himself.

He blinked his eyes open, turned his head and gazed at her with what she could only call affection. Then he tenderly took her into his arms. Her head rested on his massive shoulder, and her small hand settled on his beating heart.

Only for a moment, Josie wished they could stay like this forever, but impossibility reared its ugly head. The lord would marry a princess from another planet for a political alliance. He didn't need Josie Hawkings for anything but sex, and wouldn't he have plenty of that with his new wife?

Josie couldn't help but think the answer was 'yes'.

Chapter Six

Anton stopped in front of Lord Lucien's office door and poised his hand to knock. He'd discovered from one of his many sources who Josie really was. Anton was sure Lucien wouldn't care for the revelation, but the lord had other things on his mind right now. Such as getting ready to shift. Perhaps Anton could leave the disclosure until later, in case anything should go wrong this evening.

Yet there was a part of him that wanted to lash out and hurt Lucien before the final event. Anton snickered. Lucien wouldn't be returning from the forest tomorrow morning or any other day. Maybe, as the last hoorah, Anton could send Josie in the same direction.

He'd changed his mind about having her with the other women during the Festival of the Night Lord. What was the point in having sex with a woman when Lucien had already done so? Anyhow, Lucien would never know.

An addendum to Anton's original plan began to form in his mind. Why not bring down two birds with one stone? How advantageous could that be to Anton, the new Lord of Istanis? Yes, his half-brother didn't need to know more than he already did. He'd find out soon enough, just before his eyes closed forever in the sleep of death.

* * * *

To Josie's dismay, Lucien didn't return the morning after they'd made love. They'd spent the whole night titillating each other, finding more erogenous zones, and Josie had ridden Lucien again, at his request.

The morning had waned into mid-afternoon, and he still hadn't made an appearance. Should she seek him out, or should she leave him alone and let him come to her? It wasn't as if she were in danger in this luxurious suite, which had everything she could possibly desire and more. But possessions without affection were meaningless.

A discreet knock on the outer entrance surprised Josie. Without thinking, she answered, hoping it was Lucien. She threw open the door with a bright smile, but a short man with the lion and wolf insignia imprinted on his jacket at chest level faced her. Josie took him to be one of the castle staff. The man gave her the willies.

He regarded her with cool appraisal. "I am Anton Collier, High Chamberlain."

"Has something happened to Lucien?" She heard how straightforward that sounded. "I mean Lord Lucien?"

"No, miss. He's perfectly well, but he instructed me to tell you why he won't be coming to your rooms this evening."

"He couldn't tell me himself?" Had he gone away on business and left her alone with the servants? An emptiness cast a long shadow over her heart. Lucien had gone without telling her in person. Why did that fact cause her to feel friendless and alone?

"No, miss. There are some tasks Lord Lucien leaves to his household servants. That way, his privacy stays intact and is never invaded."

Josie perked up at that. So Lucien did have secrets he was hiding, which was excellent fodder for the article she was writing. "I see. Why don't you come in?" She didn't like the man, but if he were one of Lucien's household, then Lucien probably trusted him, and so she would have to do the same.

The man appeared at ease and didn't bother looking around in wonder at the luxurious room. Perhaps the rest of the castle was as opulent, and he'd become accustomed to it. "Lord Lucien is entrusting that this information will stay within the castle, and that when you leave, you will be considerate of his privacy."

"Of course." Except for the millions of readers who would see her story. But did she really have to write everything she learned – and did? After all, they'd shared more than sex. They'd made love. And that really was a private matter. Perhaps there were other things about her time with the Night Lord the galaxy didn't need to know.

"You might want to sit down," Anton urged politely, indicating a window seat that overlooked the lord's extensive, private gardens.

Reluctantly, Josie sat and primly folded her hands in her lap, glad she was wearing a long tunic that sheathed her whole body. Anton had sharp, assessing eyes, and if it hadn't been for him being part of Lucien's household, she'd have disliked him instantly.

"This will come as hard news for you, but he'll be away tonight."

She nodded.

"What he didn't want to tell you himself," Anton said, pacing back and forth, "was the reason he won't be returning tonight."

Josie wished Anton would hurry up and tell her why Lucien wouldn't, but perhaps this was how things were done in the castle. Quietly and without haste.

"He has a family ailment which forces him to go into the forest behind the castle once every three years."

Josie nodded again, her nerves tingling with anticipation. Anton was about to tell her dreadful news. She felt it in her bones.

"The reason Lord Lucien does this is because he turns into a lupus, or as more commonly known on Earth, a werewolf."

Josie stared at him. "He couldn't possibly be a lupus." Lucien was much too powerful, sexy and caring to be such a frightening creature.

"I'm afraid he is."

Such calm conviction sounded in Anton's voice she realised he spoke the truth. And he had no reason to lie to her. She blinked and wrung her hands together as distress flooded through her. So that was Lucien's secret. He was a werewolf. The horror of the revelation left her shivering and faint.

Anton had stopped his pacing and faced her stoically. "Can I get you a glass of water or anything to calm your nerves?"

Josie shook her head.

"If you need anything, the servants will be happy to bring it to you. Just ring this bell." He pointed at a long, golden cord. "Just pull on it and someone will be right here." With a curt nod, he left the room, closing the door behind him.

Josie continued to sit by the window. She believed Anton—yet how could it be true? Werewolves were simply legends, old tales to scare the populace. Tears streamed down her

cheeks for the man she was growing to love, the man with whom she'd shared a day and a night. No wonder he hadn't told her where he was going.

How could she help him? What caused him to turn from Istanian to lupus? Was it painful? How many years had he done this, alone, without support? She knew she might incur his wrath, but she had to find him, whether he was currently Istanian or lupus, and tell him he didn't have to be alone. She'd stay by his side and help him in any way she could.

Anton stood outside Josie's room and heard her snivel. He wanted to throw open the door and tell the bitch she needn't waste her time crying over Lucien. He'd be dead come first light. Anton would make sure of that. He reached into his hip pocket and retrieved a tiny, silver dagger. Just one stab in the heart, and Lucien would die no matter how shallow the wound was. Lupus and silver daggers were mighty enemies, and lupus never won against it.

He slid the knife back where he kept it. First, he had to attend to the Festival of the Night Lord. When he was asked which woman he'd chosen, he'd say all. Then he'd have sex with each and every one of them.

Then tomorrow night, with Lucien forever out of the way, he'd institute the Festival of the Night Lord as a nightly routine, much like a sultan lording it over his harem women.

Anton rubbed his hands in satisfaction. Istanis would be a different place come first light. He, Anton Collier, the shunned half-brother of the late Lucien, would be the new Lord of Istanis.

Chapter Seven

Quietly, Josie tiptoed out of her room and down the long corridor to the staircase that led from the first to the ground floor. She felt as if a million eyes were watching her as she made her way out. From what she glimpsed, the whole castle appeared to consist of luxurious sets of rooms with gold fixtures, expensive satins and brocades and many other features she didn't have time to admire. Dusk had set in with its murky, grey twilight and made it hard to see all the magnificence clearly.

At the back of the old castle, the shadows had morphed into indistinguishable dark and frightening shapes. She had no idea how one went about finding a lupus in the evening gloom. The only option she had was to call Lucien's name very softly and hope he would reply either in his human or lupus form.

Josie trembled from head to toe and forced her feet to move forward into the terrifying unknown. Some distance into the forest, she began to call his name softly.

"Lucien? Lucien?" Her heart shuddered against her chest, and her fingers had turned icy cold. How would she find him in such a vast area? And if she did, would he become angry with her for trying to help him?

Leaves rustled behind her. She spun around and, in the process, a branch slashed across her face. There was nothing there. She chastised herself. *Stop being afraid of every little thing.*

For some time she continued, moving cautiously, calling until she grew hoarse. She wouldn't be able to call out his name for much longer. Would he see her coming? Would he show himself, or would he hide? She could only imagine being in his place, an outcast if any of his subjects discovered what he was. Istanians were a backward people, she'd learned from her travels through the galaxy. They knew little but ignorance and superstition and, as a result of their religious backgrounds, a belief in angry gods and angrier goddesses.

The two moons had risen fully now in the eastern sky and gave a great deal of illumination, for which Josie was grateful. "Lucien?" she rasped out, wondering how much longer her voice would hold. *Probably not much longer.*

Someone caught her wrist in a tight, unrelenting grip. She screamed, but the attacker didn't give up until he'd dragged her into the bushes and onto what felt like a soft carpet of grass.

"What are you doing here?" His voice was terse and angry.

"Lucien! I'm so glad I found you!" she whispered hoarsely, relieved she'd discovered his hiding place. His face was dark and menacing, very unlike the assured Lucien she'd become familiar with.

"Don't be glad, Josie. You shouldn't have come. It's too dangerous for you."

"But Lucien—"

"For both of us," he continued as if he hadn't heard her.

"I want to help you," she protested, struggling to find comfort in the fact he hadn't shifted yet. He was so potently strong and handsome. How could he become an ugly lupus?

His fierce gaze met hers. "Help me do what, Josie?"

"I don't know," she replied in desperation, reaching out to touch his face. He hadn't shaved, and the hairs along his chin scraped the tender pads of her fingers.

"Who told you to come here?"

The painful, bitter question was tossed out like a bone to a dog. Hurt began to well in her chest. "No one. I came by myself."

His haunting gaze of disbelief pinned her in place. "You don't just walk into the forest in the dark and search for someone. You have to know where to find them." He shook her shoulders.

"Anton," she answered, suddenly afraid. She shouldn't have come.

"Did he tell you I turn into a lupus, and you could use that for your screen people?" he demanded, his eyes narrowed and raging.

"I don't want to use that for the readers." Where had he learned she was a reporter? Had he known all along? "Why didn't you tell me yourself?" She knew she was stepping over the line between subject and lord but no longer cared. Hadn't she risked her safety coming out into the unknown?

Obviously annoyed, he pressed his lips together. The pulse at the base of his throat beat with a furious intensity. Finally, he said, "Anton is my half-brother. I trusted him with my

life until today, until I wanted to know more about you." His eyes lost their shine. "Until I realised he was the Night Lord you were talking about, that he took those women and had sex with them."

Josie slapped two fingers against her lips and spoke through them. "You mean you're *not* the Night Lord?"

Lucien shook his head. "I hadn't known anything about it until you mentioned what was happening. Whoever was taking my place had to know that every three years..." His voice trailed off.

She finished for him. "You become a lupus."

He heaved a deep sigh. "This time, for some reason I don't understand, nothing is happening. It's as if the curse or spell or whatever it was has worn off."

"How long have you been like this?" Josie risked reaching out and stroking his upper arm.

"Since I was a child." He paused as if deep in thought.

Josie knew it was an annoying act, but she tugged on his sleeve. "What, Lucien? Tell me," she urged.

"There is a tale that when Pharo and Orpha are full, magic and curses are easier to perform. That is, if you believe in them. Anton must have cast the spell on me."

"What makes you say that?" Josie yearned to kiss him full on the mouth, to comfort him, but held back.

"His mother was a charmer. You know, one who casts spells. She's gone, now, but she must have taught him a few tricks, and one of them could have been how to turn your half-brother into a lupus." His tone was wretched. "I trusted him."

"Does that mean the spell has worn off?" Josie asked, her gaze focusing on Lucien's handsome face.

"I think so. By this time, I've normally already become a lupus." He rose to his feet. He was dressed in a dirty white shirt and black trousers. "Come with me, Josie," he whispered. "Let's see where Anton is and stop him."

They made their way to the castle stable where Lucien bridled horses but didn't take the time to saddle them. They leaped on bareback and set off at a gallop for the village. Josie hung on desperately.

Only a few dozen yards from the courtyard, they reined to a halt, jumped to the ground and ran to where a small crowd was assembled. The women Josie had seen the day before were in centre stage and naked, she saw with shame. All because a selfish man had an ego larger than two full moons.

"Here he comes," she said as a cool breeze stirred the night air. Josie pointed towards the left of the crowd.

Lucien said nothing as Anton made his appearance in a swirl of black cloak and smoke.

"Is he using magic?" Josie asked.

Lucien nodded, then he strolled through the crowd to the stage. "Get your clothes on," he commanded the women.

The red-haired one said, "We don't have any. Who are you?"

Anton came to his side. "He's an intruder. Arrest him!"

As Josie expected, no one came forward to do the deed.

"What are you doing, Anton?" Lucien asked his half-brother. "You demean these women by your ogling them and taking them back to the castle for your nefarious purposes. But it stops right now." With confident self-assurance, he said, "Arrest this man."

A group of soldiers marched forward and surrounded the two men. Their bodies made it difficult for Josie to see anything, and she elbowed her way forward.

Anton snarled. "Why aren't you a lupus? What are you doing here?"

To her dismay, Josie saw him surreptitiously slide a silver dagger from his pocket. "He's got a knife!" she shouted at Lucien, just as Anton leaped up to attack him.

Josie jumped forward to deflect the blow, but everything happened too fast. She screamed as a flash of pain shot through her arm, the guards seized Anton, and Lucien picked her up in his arms and carried her through a crowd of mumbling Istanians to the waiting carriage.

"I won't let him hurt you," she protested, struggling to free herself from Lucien.

“Hush, mystery woman. He won’t ever have the opportunity again. The guards are locking him up in a jail cell.”

Josie sagged in his arms as the adrenaline wore off. With shock, she realised Lucien’s shirt was soaked with blood, and Anton must have hit him. “He got you, didn’t he?” she asked sadly, gazing into Lucien’s face.

“No, he got you, but it seems to be a superficial wound. I’ll have the doctor look at it as soon as we get home.”

The word ‘home’ sounded good, but Josie’s mind was growing fuzzy. Home sounded like a long way off as she slipped into the blackness.

Epilogue

For one of the few times in his life, Lucien had been wrong about the severity of a knife wound. Anton's dagger had narrowly missed a muscle in Josie's arm but not an artery. Luckily, the royal household employed a super good doctor, and he attended to her quickly and efficiently. Then he reproached Lucien for not bandaging her arm immediately.

Lucien's tears flowed until Josie awakened. They were back in her sumptuous room. The doctor had left after saying he'd be back to check on her in a couple of hours.

She blinked her turquoise eyes open.

"Marry me," Lucien said, drying his tears with the back of his hand.

"First things first," she commented drowsily. "What happened?"

"The knife wound I thought was superficial wasn't. You lost a lot of blood."

"And how are you?" she asked, looking him up and down.

"I'm fine." He straddled her thighs. "Marry me, Josie. You can report on that all you want."

"How do you know I'm a reporter?"

"I did some research." He grinned at the sudden amusement in her eyes.

"Oh, yes, the great Lord of Istanis has instant information at his fingertips."

Her comment made him laugh. "Not instant, perhaps, but I can find things out. Wouldn't it be easier to be a reporter if you were Lady of Istanis?"

She shook her head. "I was going to quit, anyway. The job was far too demanding, and I didn't have the heart for it anymore."

"Marry me, Josie Hawkings, soon to be Lady Josie."

"No."

Lucien was shocked. He loved Josie, who hadn't thought twice about stepping in front of him to save him from a silver dagger. And he loved her for being just who she was and ending his loneliness. "No?"

“Not until you strip me bare and thrust your cock in my pussy.”

He burst out laughing again. “You’re an amazing creature. You’ve lost a lot of blood, and the first thing you think about is making love.”

“That’s the only way I’ll say yes,” she countered with a twinkle in her eyes.

“And you’ll make love to me for as long as we live?”

“Yes.” With one arm, she pulled him closer until his face was inches from hers. “Forever. I love you, Lucien.”

As the first of the two full moons dipped below the horizon, Lucien couldn’t think of anything he’d enjoy more than making love to his bride-to-be. He’d never have to deal with shifting into a lupus again. That was a closed chapter in his history. Now he was ready to open another chapter. With Josie in it.

About the Author

Aurora Rose Lynn, a bestselling erotica author, lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband and conure. She enjoys writing romance with a sensual twist but first and foremost, her stories must be about love. When she isn't writing romance, she writes young adult and fantasy stories under a pen name.

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MOON SHY

Victoria Blisse

Dedication

I owe thank you's to my husband, Kev, who came up with the fantastic title for this story and to Angel from Clique who created the name of my villain.
So thank you both very, very, much.

Trademarks Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

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Chapter One

His hands moulded her arse, and she couldn't believe it. She'd worked for ten months at this boring, mouldering old firm just because he did, too, and finally, she had her hands on him – and he on her, come to that. He was drunk, she was drunk. It was an office party, after all.

They'd simply been chatting over the table of nibbles when he'd asked her to dance. She had accepted and enjoyed rubbing up against him while onlookers gaped at quiet little Jenny, dancing with the hottest property on the fifth floor.

When he'd whispered in her ear about meeting her in his office, somewhere quiet for them to come to know one another better, she'd jumped at the chance without thinking of the sadness of ten months working together and him only just knowing her name.

They'd left the party together. The company was so broke, they were doing the typical Christmas do several weeks early and in the office itself. No one seemed to mind, though. There was plenty of free booze.

As soon as they'd reached his office, his lips had been on hers, his hands on her arse. If she'd been even a drink or two more sober, she would have slapped him. But she was drunk and horny, so she'd slipped her arms around his neck and pulled him closer.

As he undid the zip that slipped down her back, she loosened his tie and opened his shirt.

She was soon clad only in her sexiest bra and knickers before him, too desperate for his cock to worry about her chubby tummy or wobbling thighs. He seemed to find her attractive enough. She dropped to her knees to see to the bulge hidden under his trousers.

His dick was hot and hard and fitted nicely in her mouth. She sucked for a little while before he barked out a command. She obeyed instantly, leaning over the desk, feeling the warmth on the wood where his buttocks had just been pressing and the chill on her breasts of the cold, early November evening.

He spanked her, teasing her, before he pulled off her knickers and forced his way inside of her. She rocked back against him as he banged furiously into her with no care for her

satisfaction. When he came, spurting all over her buttocks and back, she was still aching for more. But he passed out on his office chair. She covered him with his jacket, dressed and went home with the plan to wank furiously, but all she did was fall into bed.

The next morning, she was summoned to Mr. Taylor's office. It looked different in the daylight, but her cheeks flushed as she remembered the hi-jinks of the night before.

Mr. Taylor, though, was not up for a repeat performance.

"But-but you can't fire me. You were having sex, too!" Jenny exclaimed in an explosion of disbelief and fury.

"I was merely testing you, and you failed," he said, not a sign of a smile on his lips.

"You bastard! You snotty, fucking bastard!" she yelled. "Well, you can stick your crappy, little job up your arse, because I don't bloody well want it, anyway." And she stamped out of the room.

Just as she stood in the doorway, she yelled so the whole floor could hear, "And you're a fucking awful lay with your tiny penis and your lack of staying power. Go fuck yourself!"

She walked over to her desk, head held high, very much aware of the stares. She gathered her things and left, and it wasn't until she had walked down the street that she burst into tears.

She quickly pulled herself together and bought a copy of the local paper. She looked at the jobs section, and there was a big advert for Demonet. They were looking for new customer service representatives. She was not particularly keen on the idea of working for a company that would see her as a nameless drone, but she decided to apply for the position anyway. Times were hard, and she needed a job. She had a flat and associated bills to pay. Needs must.

Two weeks later, she walked into the Demonet building for her first day at work.

* * * *

Dessie was under no illusions. Everyone hated her. She was beautiful, and she knew it. She dressed in high heels and short skirts to show off her lean, lithe legs, and her makeup was always perfect. People were afraid of her and not just because she was employed to assess how well they were doing their job, but because she had an air about her. She was

dangerous. She fed on the fear she sensed, and she did not care that everyone thought she was a bitch. She was.

"Michael, I need to have a word with you," she said, striding into the executive's office without even knocking on the door.

"Oh, Miss Conall, do come in." The man struggled weakly against his fear as he ran his fingers through his salt and pepper hair and fixed her with his black-rimmed eyes. "Have a seat." He tried a smile, but it came over far more like a grimace

Dessie replied with a curt refusal. "I prefer to stand. You know I've been watching you over the last few days," she said, watching him fiddle with a pen between his nervous fingers as he nodded. "I have assessed everyone else and have recommended ten members of staff should be laid off." She watched his eyes bulge.

The small company was expecting to lose one or two of the slackers, but the number given shocked him and made him even more worried. His brows wrinkled deeply.

"I was deeply disappointed by the level of work ethos in this company. There are far too many slackers—or should I say *were*. Upper management has already fired the ten members I have mentioned."

Dessie watched as his eyes flicked around her face and her body, seeking a non-verbal hint about the rest of her message. He found none, but his eyes lingered longer on her pert breasts than they should have.

"Now, I have news about your job. I have watched you closely and seen you do actually do a lot of work." She saw him relax slightly, easing back into his leather seat. "But that work is not up to standard. It is sloppy and undisciplined, and your influence has filtered down through the whole company, poisoning it. So, I am going to recommend your contract be terminated."

"No!" He virtually screamed it, then, with blushing cheeks, he repeated himself. "No, please, Miss Conall. Can't you give me another chance? I'll do better. I promise you, I will do better."

This was one of her favourite parts, the begging.

"Michael," she used his first name again to further emphasise her position of power, "I have not seen a spark of excellence from you. Why on earth would I be willing to give you a second chance?"

"I'll do anything, Miss Conall, anything. I need this job. I have a wife and children and a pension only a few years away. Please, give me a chance."

"Anything?" she questioned, disappointed he had laid out his cards so quickly but not at all surprised. "Would you crawl on all fours to kneel at my feet and kiss the tip of each of my shoes?"

He thought for a moment, his tongue travelling over his dry lips, his eyes studying her visage, trying to see what his answer should be.

"Yes, Miss Conall, I would."

"Do it."

He hesitated for only half a second before dropping to the floor behind his desk. She heard him take a huge lungful of breath, then she saw him crawling in his suit over the thick carpet to her. He kissed each toe immediately and stayed with his head bowed at her feet.

"That is a good start. I will give you a reprieve—but on one condition. You will come to my room at The Cumberland Hotel at 8:00 p.m. sharp. There, you will bend to my every command. If you do well, you will have your job. If not, I will recommend to your superiors that you should go."

"I have a wife, a family. I can't...."

"If you're not there at 8:00, your job will be lost. It is as simple as that." She purposefully stood on his fingers before turning and walking out of the door. He would be there, she knew he would. She knew his type.

And sure enough, he arrived that night at two minutes after 8:00. Dessie tortured him. The stripping, the humiliation, the spanking and the domination—he enjoyed it all. His cock was hard no matter the punishment he took, and Dessie admired that in a man.

"Well, Michael, it seems today is your lucky day. Your cock is hard, and my cunt is aching." She ran a hand through his hair as he knelt subserviently before her. She pulled him forward roughly, and he winced with the pain.

"Don't disappoint me now, Michael," she purred. "You've taken it so well. Now get up here and fuck me."

She lay back on the bed. She was already naked, she preferred to lose her clothes as early on as possible, and it made proceedings easier and much less messy. Michael eagerly climbed between her thighs and began to thrust. She knew he wouldn't last long.

She pulled his head down towards her, and as he fucked her, she whispered in his ear.

"Do you know what tonight is, Michael dear? Tonight there is a full moon, and it is rising right now, as you fuck me. In just a moment it will be at full strength. I love the full moon, Michael. It makes me so very horny. So fuck me hard, lover boy, and enjoy it, for it's the last thing you will ever do."

And as the fat, pampered executive continued to pump, Dessie howled. Her flesh rippled, her soft, smooth skin erupted hair in thick clumps, and her wicked smile grew bigger and bigger until her jaws were wide and her smile was the menacing snarl of a wolf. It all happened in a split second, and before the man encased inside of her could scream out in fear, Desdemona, the werewolf, ripped into his flesh and tore out his throat. She discarded the body and ran off into the night. The full moon was still young, and she had a mighty blood lust to feed.

* * * *

Lowell was not the kind of man who brushed off a few minutes tardiness. He was the kind of man who had to be on time for everything.

That evening he was very organised, indeed. He left work and the comforting coldness of the basement at bang on 6:00 p.m. The servers were fully functional, and he was satisfied that all would go well until he got back at 9:00 a.m. the next morning.

He took the bus home. It was on time for once, making the twenty minute ride far more bearable, even though he was forced to sit next to a florid, overly made-up granny who insisted on talking to him until he reached his stop.

He walked into his house and locked the front door behind him then left his keys in the bowl on the table in the corridor. He hung up his long, beige work coat and took off his shoes. He placed their shiny blackness on the shoe rack and continued down the hall to the kitchen.

Lowell pulled out his Thursday night lasagne from the freezer and placed it, plastic lid pierced, into his microwave. As his meal cooked, he boiled the kettle and made himself a cup of tea and also filled a flask with the comforting brew—with two sugars—and placed it together with an apple and a packet of crisps on the end of the countertop. He didn't need to make sandwiches, as on Friday he treated himself to a meal in the Demonet canteen.

When the microwave pinged, Lowell plucked out the hot, plastic container, flopped it onto a cold, white plate and placed it on his tray beside his cup of tea and side plate of chocolate biscuits. He carried his meal carefully into the living room and sat down in his chair. He flicked on the television and enjoyed eating the food.

At precisely 6:30, he walked back into the kitchen, washed his pots and made up a bottle of cold water. He walked upstairs and went to his bedroom, where he stripped off his clothes, avoiding his reflection in the mirror. Other people thought he looked good, but he was nowhere near as toned as he'd once been, and it made him uncomfortable. He picked up his navy blue sweat suit trousers and pulled on a plain, blue T-shirt. Then he chose his clothes for the next day. Black trousers, an unadorned, white shirt and his Friday tie with a picture of Wile E. Coyote on the tip. He carried them downstairs, picked up his water and walked back into the hall.

He opened the door under the stairs, and once he was in, he flicked on the light and pulled the bolts behind him and clicked the key in its lock. He continued down the steep, stone steps and, in the damp, cold room below, put down his clothes on the plain, wooden chair and left the bottle of water on the floor beside it.

He looked at his watch. It was just a few minutes to 7:00. He pulled off what he wore and placed the things carefully underneath his work clothes. Sighing deeply, he walked over to the door at the far side of the tiny cellar, opened it and went in. After shutting it behind him, he drew the six bolts closed then checked each one of them again before he crossed over to the far wall.

Lowell sat down on the pile of dirty, ripped and torn blankets and lifted the back corner of the very bottom one. Under it was a pocket, and in the pocket was a tiny, silver key. He left it there, carefully turning the blanket back down, then lifted up the chain that ran behind the covers. He found the manacle and slipped it around his ankle. He repeated the same action on the other side, so both of his legs were in chains.

He sat still, his back to the cold stone wall, and waited. He waited several minutes. He always thought as he sat in discomfort each month that he could leave it a little later and save his bottom from the cold of the floor that seeped through the blankets and into his bones, but he never did. He was afraid he'd end up being late.

As the moon showed itself in all its full glory, Lowell changed. With a pained and pitiful yowl tearing from his throat, his body erupted with hair, his back arched and his face elongated into a snout. Within a matter of seconds, he was no longer a man.

He was a beast, and he strained and thrashed against his chains as he banged at the wall and slashed the crumbling brick with his hard, long claws.

Eventually the beast tired, curled up and fell asleep.

At 8:00 a.m., Lowell woke up, naked and shivering. He sat up with a wince—he always felt tender the night after his little problem—and gently he felt around for the keys. He picked up first one then the other and centred his thoughts on working his fine motor skills. With effort, he managed to unlock both manacles. He put the keys away again and went over to unlock the door.

It wasn't until he'd put on his clothes that he pulled the watch from his pocket and saw the time.

"Shit," he exclaimed and grabbed the flask and his food. "I forgot to set the damn alarm. Shit, shit, shit!"

He raced up the stairs and locked the door behind him, then he rushed along the hall and exited his home. He ran for the bus, panting and gasping and hating his lot in life, and reached the stop a mere moment after his bus pulled away. Once he'd waited for the next one, he was agitated beyond belief, and he scowled his way through the rush hour traffic. Then at his stop, he leapt from the bus and ran towards the Demonet offices.

He skidded past reception and cannoned down the stairs, panting and puffing. He was not as fit as he used to be, and he was very aware of his stiff and aching muscles. He stopped outside his room and checked his watch. Ten minutes late, not too bad. He'd make it up by leaving later than usual.

He walked into his room, and the comforting hum of the servers quietened his soul.

"Ah, Mr. Kenyon. Nice of you to show up." A woman was sitting in his chair, her delicate fingers resting on his keyboard.

“Erm, hello. And you are?” he asked, tersely. He did not like surprises, especially ones that sat at his desk.

“I am Miss Desdemona Conall. You can call me Miss Conall. Demonet has employed me to discover its weak links. I am here to work out where they can save money and which useless employees should be fired.”

“Well, Miss Conall, I think there has been some kind of mix up. This is my desk, my computer and my room. You will have to find your own space, I’m afraid.”

“Ah, Mr. Kenyon. Or may I call you Lowell? Well, I am here not to use your precious computer or take over your tatty desk. I am here to evaluate your usefulness to the company. And your turning up ten minutes late hasn’t exactly impressed me.”

“If you look at my record, Miss Conall, you will see this is the first time I have been late since I started with the company four year ago, and I am going to make up the time this evening by staying on an extra ten minutes.”

Lowell was not normally so combative, especially when senior staff was concerned, but something about this woman just rubbed him up the wrong way. She smelt wrong. In fact, he could smell a bitch. He assumed Miss Conall had a dog in heat at home. He didn’t realise the bitch was there in the room with him.

“Oh, I know your record, Lowell. I know exactly who and what you are, and considering the circumstances, I’ll let you off this one time. I will be keeping a close eye on you, though. I suspect you and I are one and the same, Lowell. I look forward to getting to know you more.”

She stood from his seat and sashayed towards him. Her skirt seemed quite short to Lowell, or maybe it was just that her legs were extremely long and lean. He watched her as she exited the room. As she walked past him, he picked up that bitch scent again—but so much stronger, the wolf that was left in him was attracted to it, and he found himself becoming erect in his trousers.

He shook his head and sat down at his desk. He had a lot of work to do. He had to forget Miss Conall and her cryptic messages. He had to prove he was worthy of his position.

Chapter Two

Jenny had completed her first week at Demonet. She still knew no one and was not at all sure how long she would be sticking at the job. It was easy enough. Call centre work was not terribly challenging, but it was draining. People were hard work, especially customers who felt they had been wronged or slighted in some way.

She needed to meet her rent, and the job paid well enough, and that was probably the only reason she'd made it to Friday at all. She hated doing a job that was beneath her, but that was what you ended up with when you shagged your boss and he turned out to be a total wanker. Jenny wasn't bitter, as such, but she just felt stupid for falling for his bullshit in the first place. Her dismissal was probably part of the reason she'd not approached anyone at her new job, yet—she was afraid to open herself up to such pain and embarrassment again.

Most days, she took in something to eat. But she'd woken up late and hadn't had time to do anything, so for the first time in the week she would venture up to the canteen for what was jokingly referred to as her 'lunch'. She was working slightly strange hours, and so her lunch didn't come around until nearly teatime. She jumped up as soon as the clock on her computer screen clicked over to 3:00—she'd been watching it intently for the past half an hour—and raced from the room before anyone could stop her to run yet another silly errand.

The canteen was very quiet. In fact, there was only one other person in the room, and he was seated in the very back corner. She picked herself up a sandwich and a drink and grabbed an apple and a little packet of biscuits. She paid the lady in pink checks who seemed as eager to finish her working day as was Jenny, and walked over towards the empty tables.

Usually, she was happy to sit alone, but it seemed strange to eat by herself when there was only one other person in the whole room. It was surely only polite to ask if she could join the gentleman in the corner. It would seem very rude to ignore him.

"Erm, do you mind if I sit with you?" she asked as she reached the end of his table.

"No, not at all," he replied. "Take a seat."

His words were friendly enough, but his demeanour seemed to show annoyance. But then she'd found most people carried around an air of irritability in this place, so maybe he was friendlier than she perceived him to be.

"I'm Jenny. I've just started. I don't think I've seen you around."

"No, I'm the server guy. Well, my name's actually Lowell, but most people just call me 'server guy'. I stay down in the basements, looking after the, well, servers, obviously." He blushed and looked down on his usual Friday treat of beef burger and chips with chocolate digestives for dessert. He loved chocolate digestives. He was a little irked someone had broken his quiet, Friday routine, but she was a very pretty young lady, and he was a little intrigued by her.

"Oh my goodness!" Jenny exclaimed. "It's you. You are Lowell Kenyon, right?"

"Yeah, I'm Lowell Kenyon. Do I know you?"

"No, not really, no. I was in the year below you at school. I used to watch you in the football tournaments and stuff." Jenny flushed. She used to watch him all the time. She'd had a massive crush on him, and he hadn't even noticed her, not once. "You look kind of different. I didn't recognise you, at first."

"Yeah, I'm not the same guy I was back in school, not by a long shot."

"I guess I'm not the same, either. I'm taller, for a start." She giggled nervously and was relieved to hear him chuckle, too. "How long have you worked here, then? I thought you were set to be a professional footballer or something?"

"Well, that didn't quite pan out," Lowell said, the pain on his face quite evident. "I've worked here for about four years. It pays well, and I have my own floor. Granted it's the basement, but I like it down there away from the pillocks upstairs."

He looked at her then shook his head. "Oh, I don't include you in that, of course!"

"No, you're right. I'm one of the pillocks upstairs, all right. A real pillock."

"No way. I can tell already you're cleverer than the average Demonet employee."

"You make me sound like Yogi Bear."

They laughed together, and Jenny felt her heart fluttering in her chest. Shit, she could really do without bumping into her school crush right now. She was supposed to be

foreswearing all kinds of sex-driven craziness. But at that moment, she was completely smitten again and thrilled that the most popular boy in school was talking to her.

"Well, you don't look much like Yogi Bear, either. Oh God, it really is painfully obvious I don't talk to people very often, isn't it?"

"You're social skills are a little rusty," Jenny replied, "but as with anything, practise makes perfect."

"True, but who's mad enough to let me practise on them?"

"Me," she answered instinctively without really thinking. "It's an 'I've started so I'll finish' kind of thing, you know?" Jenny added, hoping it made her sound a little less stalkerish.

"Oh, I see. I hope you're not planning to go on Mastermind with Lowell Kenyon as your specialist subject. That would be one boring programme."

"Stop being so modest. But no, no plans to talk about you on live TV. Just a desire to get to know you a bit better. You seem lovely, and I always wanted to talk to you back in school, but I was a total dork and never plucked up the courage."

"Well, I wish you had. I bet we'd have gotten on really well, and maybe I'd have been a little smoother. I was cockier back then."

"Oh well, what's past is past. We will just have to start from scratch, now."

"Sure, we can do that. I don't often come up here, though. Just on Fridays for my treat." He looked down at the half eaten meal before him.

"I normally bring my own food in, too. Maybe I could come and visit you downstairs on my lunch."

"Yeah, sure. That'd be nice." Lowell stood up. "I've got to get back. I've been pulled up once already today for being late. It's been great meeting you though, Jenny. See you Monday?"

"Yeah, see you Monday, Lowell. I'll look forward to it."

She watched him as he put away his tray and left the room. He looked back just as he reached the door and smiled as their gazes met.

Jenny was a goner, she knew it. The crush she'd all but forgotten had come back full force and harder. She wanted him, but not just in the way she had as an innocent teenager

who longed for a kiss and to hold his hand. No, now she wanted him to do far more than that to her.

Damn, she was smitten, and as she wandered back to her desk, she wondered what she should wear on Monday and just how hard it might be to seduce Lowell Kenyon. She thought it might be challenging, but she decided it was worth having a go.

* * * *

Coming in to work the day after a rampage was never fun, but Dessie was determined to make the most of it. The night before, she had been tearing flesh apart with her teeth and claws, and she would do the same today – but metaphorically, as bosses frowned on all that blood and mess.

She had checked all of the information for Demonet and found their most loyal and hardworking employee, and that was why she had sat at Lowell Kenyon's desk first thing Friday morning. It was easy to run out the weak and the useless, but the fun was to be had in making a secure worker insecure. It amazed her how many top-of-the-class employees would fall apart under just a little Desdemona pressure. It was one of her favourite things about the job.

Lowell's office in the bowels of the building was somehow comforting. Dessie's sensitive nose picked up on a scent that indicated the presence of a wolf, but it could have been decades ago, the scent was so weak. It excited her all the same, her brain still mostly werewolf. It always took some time to truly get back to normal after a change, especially if she'd killed many the night before. And last night she had been very successful, indeed.

It wasn't until he'd cannoned into his office ten minutes late that she realised why the room smelt as it did. He was a werewolf. Every pore exuded the scent, and as he came in the room, it was flooded with instant werewolf Viagra.

Dessie really enjoyed playing with him. She saw his hackles rise, but he seemed weak. She couldn't sense a kill on him at all. Maybe he was a new wolf that she'd be able to break in.

She left him reluctantly, but she had a job to do. Seducing a brand new werewolf would have to take its place. The one thing missing from her perfect life was a partner in crime. It

was all right bonking victims before she ripped them to shreds, but what she really wanted was a werewolf to have real, violent, doggie style sex with. Someone who could share the exhilaration of the kill with her. Lowell would be perfect. He needed training, obviously, and she was the woman to do it.

Dessie found it hard to keep her mind on work the whole day through. Visions of Lowell and her kept flashing on and off like an annoying alarm. It was strange because Lowell was not her type at all. He was too stocky, she liked lithe and lean herself, but the animal instinct had taken her over, and she wanted to mate with the man who was also a wolf, her equal.

She made her way through crap employee after crap employee. At this point, she was not allowed to just fire them on the spot. After observing them for a few weeks' time, she had to take her recommendations to the bosses. Most companies believed in giving their employee a warning signal first and, if they didn't buck up, then they'd be let go. Dessie thought it'd save money and energy by just getting rid of them straightaway. They rarely improved in the time given.

Her last interview of the day was with a new girl. She hated newbies the most. They were eager and smiley and approachable on top, but underneath they were incompetent and lazy.

A knock on the door roused Dessie from another wolf-on-wolf daydream.

"Come in," she said tersely

A tall, plump girl hesitantly popped her fuzzy red hair around the door. Slowly, the rest of her followed, and she walked over to stand in front of the intimidatingly big desk that Dessie had specifically specified to be put in her office.

"You must be Jennifer Woodford."

"Yes, Miss Conall. You wanted to see me?"

Dessie didn't need her wolf senses to realise this one was nervous. She could see the worry lines etched on her young brow, and this Jennifer was biting her lower lip. However, it was her wolf instinct that detected Lowell's scent on the girl. Jealousy raged in Dessie's heart. Lowell was not to even look at someone other than her. She was determined to nip this in the bud.

"Yes, please sit down, Jennifer." Dessie liked to use a person's first name. It established immediately who was senior in the situation. "I see you have only recently started with Demonet."

"Yes, this has been my first week," the weak redhead butted in before Dessie could continue.

Dessie hated that.

"Well, yes, and as such, I am instructed to give you a little slack. But allowances for your new status only stretch so far, and your productivity is only just over fifty percent of the rest of your team."

"I'm sorry, Miss Conall. I will do better."

"You better had. I will be keeping a very close eye on you. Your name is at the top of my list right now, Jennifer. You will be the first employee fired if you don't get up to speed, soon."

"Yes, Miss. I will do my best."

"Make sure you do. You can leave, now, Jennifer. Close the door behind you."

Dessie would make that girl's life a misery and, come the full moon, she knew exactly what she would be eating for a midnight treat. Something plump, juicy and red.

* * * *

Lowell always looked forward to his Friday meal in the canteen. It was simple and satisfying, and it helped him feel normal. Normal people went to the canteen for their lunch. All right, he timed it so there wouldn't be many people around, but it still made him normal, he'd convinced himself of that.

He had lived in isolation for about five years. He could not risk being around people at all. Once a month, he turned into a hungry, insane beast, and he couldn't risk anyone being close enough to him to get hurt. He was beginning to enjoy being alone. Who needed social interaction, anyway? Other people only had annoying opinions and boring lives that they insist on telling you all about. He had thoroughly convinced himself he was best off alone with only his computer and the servers for company. They were pretty predictable and easy to deal with, to boot.

At first, he was purely irritated that some woman was taking her lunch break so late. She breezed into the canteen with her shapely body and bouncy, red curls and filled the room with her sweet, apple blossom scent. It really put a guy off his rhythm.

However, when she asked if she could sit beside him, he found her impossible to resist. She had been a pretty girl from a distance, but close to, she was beautiful. Her eyes were this deep, seductive emerald green, and they glinted like real jewels, and she smelt good enough to eat. Her red hair just called to his fingers, they wanted to stroke and grab and pull at it. Her skin was pure and milky, and she had the kind of curves men only dreamt about.

The conversation did not flow as well as Lowell wanted it to. He was obviously a lot rustier than he'd imagined. He couldn't believe Jenny had been at his school and knew who he was. He was sure if he'd seen such a beauty back then he'd have smoothly chatted her up—but then he remembered how he'd really been in school and realised if she hadn't hung with his crowd, he wouldn't have noticed her at all. He had been such a dickhead back then.

Somehow, though, he managed to invite her on a kind of standing date, and she accepted. Lunch down in the dungeons was not the most romantic of places, but Lowell was determined to do his best to get to know that girl a little better.

It wasn't until he'd left the room and her scent began to fade that Lowell started to think straight. He was not allowed to get close to anyone, least of all a pretty girl. Had he never seen horror films? It was always the pretty girls that died the gruesome deaths.

He couldn't cancel their Monday date now. For a start, that would mean venturing up to the working levels, and the idea of that scared him half to death. No, he'd have to go through with it on Monday and let her down gently then. He couldn't risk being smitten, not only for the protection of her life but for the protection of his job. He was on a cushy number here. He knew it, and he also knew it would be almost impossible to get another job where he could spend such a long time on his own.

He stayed late by half an hour and left to get his bus. It would look good to that strange Conall woman, but the only reason he'd stayed so long was because of the bus schedule. It wouldn't hurt for her to think he was extra eager to make up the time, though. He was freaked out by that woman. It seemed thoroughly unfair to him that he should encounter two baffling females on the same day—and for that day to come directly after his 'monthly problem'. Life really did like to kick a fella whilst he was down.

At home, Lowell stripped off his work clothes and bundled them into the washing machine. He changed into his big, jogging bottoms and his comfy sweater then made himself a sandwich. He sat down and watched the news as he ate his supper.

“There has been a spate of vicious killings,” the middle-aged, male newscaster droned. “Three bodies were discovered this morning, all of whom had suffered from what appears to be a sustained animal attack. The police are looking into the incidents and warn the public to be on their guard. Do not approach any lone animal. Instead, report it to them as soon as possible.”

They cut to another reporter who strung together the details of the three victims. All seemed unconnected, and all had been ripped apart by some unknown beast. If Lowell hadn’t been securely attached to his chains this morning, he would have been convinced it had been he who had committed the murders. But as he had been tied up down in his cellar, there must be another werewolf on the loose again.

He felt strange. Part of him longed to meet this kindred spirit—the pack mentality, no doubt—but the other part of him was horrified and hoped the werewolf would move on quickly. He did not want the police looking into old files and somehow connecting everything to him. They hadn’t gotten him yet for what had happened the first time he’d changed, but he couldn’t guarantee they never would.

He switched off the TV and headed upstairs to his bedroom. He flicked on the computer in the corner and sat down to check his personal emails. All spam. He even found it difficult to reach out to people in cyber space. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to, he longed for some kind of interaction. It was just that people were so demanding. They’d want phone calls and webcam conversations, and Lowell couldn’t give that. It seemed far too much like a commitment, and he couldn’t commit to anyone. He was evil once a month, pure evil, and he couldn’t explain that to anyone.

He leaned back in his chair and scrolled through his bookmarks. He picked out his favourite and clicked it. When the delicious redhead snapped on screen, Lowell smiled. Jenny was prettier and more natural than that girl. He continued to watch as she pulled off her clothes, and he ran his hand into his pants.

She was masturbating right there on the screen for him, and he felt nothing, not a thing—until he imagined it was Jenny doing those things in front of him. Then his cock

became rock hard almost instantaneously. He shook his head. He couldn't think about Jenny like that, it wasn't right. He could never have a relationship like that with her. She was way out of his league for a start, but then there was his 'monthly problem' to contend with, too.

But he just could not shake her image from his mind. As the girl on the screen gasped and a guy walked into the shot, he entered his own little fantasy world where he walked in on Jenny naked on the sofa, masturbating, mumbling his name. He stroked himself rhythmically, and in his mind's eye, he was walking over to her, grabbing her and stroking his hand down to her wet pussy. He imagined fingering her, feeling her juices running all over his plunging fingers, and he heard her begging him to fuck her.

The best thing about fantasies was you could cut out the boring bits. Lowell stripped in the blink of an eye and pushed Jenny down onto her back. He climbed between her thighs and fantasised how good she would feel around his dick. He imagined looking into her eyes as they fucked, and he felt the cum heavy inside of him. He saw her thrashing around, eyes closed and mouth opened in a scream as she came. At that moment, he, too, orgasmed all over his moving fingers.

He panted heavily then clicked off the clip and the computer. He was somewhat disgusted with himself. He was not meant to give in that easily to sexual fantasies about this co-worker. It was dangerous, very dangerous. He mustn't let himself think it would be okay to get close to Jenny. For her safety, he could not.

Chapter Three

The weekend dragged by for Jenny. Unlike the average Demonet employee, she had no one to go home to, no bunch of girly friends to go out on the town with and no real plans at all. She spent the weekend doing household chores, reading and daydreaming about Lowell.

She fantasised about feeling his big, strong hands on her body, his firm, plump lips pressed against hers. She imagined them naked together, him inside of her, and she brought herself to orgasm several times thinking about Lowell fucking her. She was obsessed, and she knew it. She also was pretty certain she was on the road to heartbreak. Lowell had never looked twice at her back in school. Why should that have changed? Okay, back then he was the captain of the football team and the coolest guy in school. He had his own little gang of mates and girls, and unless you broke into that group, he didn't look at you. At least in the canteen he'd seemed more approachable. But who was she kidding? She was too fat and too frumpy for Lowell to think twice about.

However, it didn't stop her losing sleep on Sunday night, and it didn't stop her picking out a shorter than usual skirt and a tighter than usual top for work on Monday morning. She was confident her legs—from the knees down, at least—were attractive, and she knew from previous liaisons that men loved her breasts. The deep, dark green of the top showed off the colour of her hair and echoed that of her eyes. She felt confident as she left the house for work.

It was a very, very long time until lunch. The time dragged, but then the hour was upon her, and she felt as if she weren't ready for it. She began to walk down the stairs to the basement and took a deep breath. This was it, she had to be cool.

"Lowell?" she shouted as she walked along a corridor. The walls were rough and covered in whitewash. "It's Jenny. Where are you?"

"Keep walking to the end of the corridor," Lowell shouted. "My room is the last door on the left."

She was glad to hear his voice, it was a bit spooky down in the basement. The tiny, old-fashioned lights only seemed to intensify the darkness of the shadows, and her shoes echoed menacingly on the floor.

Lowell's office was a little more inviting. There was carpet on the floor, for a start.

"Hiya, Lowell. You weren't kidding about being in the bowels of this place, were you?"

"No, I'm a long way from everyone else, just the way I like it." He smiled. "Hi, Jenny. Have a seat."

"Hi, Lowell," she repeated and grabbed the simple wooden chair that stood by the wall. "I'll come and sit over by you, if you don't mind."

Lowell didn't have time to reply as she quickly strode over and placed her chair beside his near the desk.

"Sure," Lowell managed. "Erm, how's your day been?"

"Oh, you know," Jenny replied whilst trying desperately to get the lid off her booty box. Her hands were shaking so much it was proving to be more challenging than usual. "Pretty boring, really. I've had several calls but nothing unusual. I am starting to hope that bitch Conall does recommend they sack me. This has to be the most boring job I've ever done."

"Oh, you've met her, too?" Lowell was already munching away at one of his sandwiches. Jenny was still trying to prise the lid off hers.

"Conall? Yeah, I saw her Friday not long after I was in the canteen with you." Just then, Jenny's lunch box opened, but at the same moment, it slipped from her hand and threw her cheese and lettuce sandwiches all down her front. Her yoghurt tumbled off her lap, but as she squeaked in shock, she noticed Lowell's hand stretch out and catch it before it had time to make a mess.

"Sorry," she gasped, pulling lettuce from her cleavage. "I am such a klutz."

"No worries. I'm just as bad, really," Lowell replied without even a trace of a smirk on his lips. "Here, put those in the bin. You can share mine, if you like. They're just ham, nothing fancy."

"Thanks, Lowell." She felt his hand on her thigh as he picked up a piece of bread and put it in the bin. A tingle shot through her whole body, and her cheeks flushed hotter as arousal coursed through her veins.

"Hey, it could have been worse," he said with a chuckle. "They could have been tuna sandwiches."

They laughed together, then, the sheer hilarity of the scene hitting home.

"That's true," she giggled. "Thank goodness I only had cheese in the house this morning." She picked the last piece of it from her lap and placed it in the bin. Lowell lowered it back into place and passed her a white barmcake full of ham.

"I feel really bad about eating your lunch," she said.

"Oh, don't. It's fine. Accidents happen, you know."

"Yes. And more often than not, they happen to me."

"I don't believe it," Lowell shook his head. "Pretty girls like you don't suffer with accidents."

Jenny blushed at the compliment. "Well, maybe pretty girls don't, but I do."

"You are the exception that proves the rule, then," he said, his cheeks flushed as red as her own. She was sure he was blushing because he was embarrassed. She just wasn't sure if it was about lying or from admitting he found her pretty.

They sat in an awkward silence for a while, each one completely oblivious of the ham and bread they were chewing, both of them highly aware of the person sitting beside them.

Jenny spoke first. "Did you have a good weekend?"

"Not bad," he replied, thinking of the several times he'd masturbated over his Jenny fantasies. "I just stayed in, really."

"Yeah, so did I," Jenny replied, remembering how she'd lain on her bed with her fingers inside her, pretending they were actually his cock. "It's not very exciting, really. I think I'm turning into an old maid."

"You're not old," Lowell insisted. "If you were, it'd mean I was old, and I'm not accepting that."

Jenny laughed. "Well, okay, then. I'm turning into a young maid. Are you okay with that?"

"I guess." Lowell waved his sandwich in the air. "But I don't believe it. Don't you have a boyfriend?"

"Erm, no. I've gone off men."

"Oh, right. I didn't realise you were a lesbian."

Jenny might have imagined it, but she was sure his face dropped into disappointment as he said it.

"No, oh no." She chuckled to cover her embarrassment. "No, I'm not a lesbian. I'm straight, yeah, but I've just had a bad experience with a man, so I've given them up."

"Oh, right? Men are bastards, aren't they?" he said. "I've always thought so. It's why I've always been a ladytarian. I don't touch man meat."

Jenny laughed. "You're funny and sweet. I think that makes *you* the exception to the rule."

Their gazes met, and they smiled then looked down at their laps, and that uneasy silence fell again. Jenny reached for her yoghurt and pulled at the far corner of the lid. As she opened the pot, it spat out yoghurt all over Lowell's chest.

"Oh, damn." She put down the pot. "I am so sorry." She leant towards him and wiped at the mess with her hand.

"It's all right," Lowell said. "Don't worry. I get my own food down me all the time."

She looked up mid-stroke and found his face to be a gentle stretch away from hers. She didn't think, she moved, and their lips bumped together. The shock of the gentle impact made them both inhale deeply and hold their breaths, but Lowell recovered first and moved his mouth against Jenny's. The kiss blossomed, seemingly of its own accord. Both parties were swept away by the intensity of emotion, and Lowell reached forward and grabbed Jenny's arm for support. She clenched her fist around his yoghurt-spattered shirt as the kiss intensified, and she felt so light inside that she thought she might float away if she didn't hold onto him.

She was kissing Lowell Kenyon. Lowell, the coolest bloke in school and now the hottest man in her work place. Her lips were undulating against his, his tongue was entwining with her own, caressing gently and eagerly. It was the kiss she had always dreamed of, and it was better than she'd ever dared imagine.

After what seemed like a millennium in a split second, their lips pulled apart and silence followed as they untangled their limbs and pulled away.

"Well," Lowell said, his mind racing, heart pounding. "Wow. I didn't sort of expect...but wow, it was...and just yoghurt, too."

Jenny chuckled. "Yes, I feel exactly the same. Wow."

"I should just say I'm not so good at this stuff." The smile faded from Lowell's lips a little. "I didn't expect that at all, and...well, I've not been looking for that, and I'm kinda isolated these days."

"Don't worry," Jenny assured him, "I wasn't looking for it, either. I'm giving up boys, remember? It was a kiss. We can still be friends even if we've kissed, right? Don't have to rush to anything else."

"No, that's true, of course." Lowell nodded.

Jenny bit her lip and finished tidying up her lunch leftovers. In her mind, it all seemed very logical. It was just a kiss, and that's all it needed to be, but her heart and her pussy were both throbbing and aching for something more. She'd take it slow, though. She'd have to. She didn't want to frighten him off, now.

"Am I invited back for tomorrow, or have I blown it by throwing my food all over you?"

"No, of course not. I look forward to seeing you tomorrow." He blushed.

The scarlet on his cheeks made him irresistible. Before she thought, she'd bent forward and laid a gently kiss on his lips.

"Oh, okay, then. See you same time tomorrow." She stood up, smiled back at him and walked out of the room, her mind reeling with possibilities.

* * * *

Dessie hated this stupid company. Far too many of the employees were actually good, and the others actually increased their productivity when she warned them. She'd have to work a lot harder to create the reasons to sack some of those annoying people.

She had a million and one things to do. She needed to create paranoia and fear so people would slip up, but her mind was completely filled with Lowell. She had been on her

own for a very, very long time. She'd always longed for a partner to wreak havoc with, and it seemed so surprising to find him here, of all places.

She waited 'til a few minutes before he would leave then headed down to the basement. She could smell that silly woman's perfume and her sweat. Jenny had been down the stairs recently.

The scent increased as she neared Lowell's room, and she knew Jenny had gotten incredibly aroused in there, as had he. She became instantly jealous.

"Hello, Miss Conall," Lowell said without looking up. "Is there something I can help you with?"

"As it is, yes, Lowell. I want you."

He looked up, then, and saw the hungry look in her feral eyes.

"I noticed you've done much better today, except you took a few extra minutes on your lunch break. That's not a very good idea, Lowell, not at all." She walked over and stood right beside him, towering over him in his office chair.

"I've had no afternoon break, Miss Conall, to make up for that. I assure you I have worked as many minutes today as I should have."

"I am sure you have." She smiled and pulled on the chair arm, spinning him towards her. "But Lowell, there is more I want you to do." She stepped across his legs and put a hand on each arm. She was above him, and he cowered back into his chair like a well and truly beaten dog.

She pushed her face to his and kissed him. She raped his mouth. His lips would not open, so she ran her hand up to his hair and pulled hard. He gasped, and she pressed her tongue between his lips. Then she sensed his wolf genes taking over. He growled deep in the back of his throat and pushed her in the centre of her chest.

"Miss Conall, I am sure you're not employed to do that."

"No," she admitted, "but I did enjoy kissing someone so very much like me. You and I, Lowell, could run together. We *should* run together. It's in our blood."

He tried to hide the shock and fear in his eyes. "Miss Conall, I am sure you're a very nice woman, but I am not interested. Sorry."

"Very well, Lowell. I am here for the rest of the month. I am very sure you'll change your mind, sooner or later."

She stalked from the room. Her scent was everywhere, now, and she knew her special aroma would drive him crazy. She could be patient. His wolf tendencies were buried deep, but she would drag them out of him in time for the next full moon, and then they would have so much fun together ripping apart Demonet employees. She was going to have that girl, that disgusting, redheaded human, all to herself, though. She would destroy the competition.

* * * *

It had been a very confusing day. Lowell tried to process some of it on his commute home. He had thoroughly enjoyed his lunch with Jenny. Okay, it had gotten far more intimate than he'd wanted, but she seemed to be on the same page as him. It was only a kiss, it needn't turn into anything more. His body might have wanted much, much more, but his mind was in charge. He couldn't let her get closer than a lunch date. It was as simple as that. He could ignore his wayward cock and its desires.

As he'd made his way to work that morning, he hadn't had any plans to kiss or be kissed that day. But at the end of it, he'd been kissed by two very different women. Miss Conall scared him. She was a very domineering woman, and he did not like that one bit.

He didn't know what on earth she'd meant about them being the same. For a brief moment, he'd wondered if she knew about his curse, but he was pretty certain that wasn't the case. Who would kiss him after discovering that? She was a freaky lady who obviously liked dogs. She smelled heavily of bitch. The room had been filled with it, and Lowell had been very disappointed to note it had covered Jenny's sweet scent completely.

The week continued to be a tale of two ladies. He looked forward to lunch every day. It always involved a kiss, and each day that kiss lasted longer. But it was only a kiss. It seemed okay to him as long as that was all it was. A kiss between friends was a casual thing. So what if it set his body longing for more? So what if he dreamt about kissing those lips every night? It was all under control. And the even better thing was that he'd not seen Miss Conall at all—

which actually worried him a lot more than if she'd turned up every day. He felt like she was plotting his downfall or something.

One week passed into two, and Lowell found himself incredibly disappointed when Jenny didn't come down for lunch one day. He couldn't understand it. She'd not told him she wasn't joining him, and he'd received no message through the day. Maybe she'd gone off him. Maybe she was sick of the kissing?

The next day was Friday, canteen day, but Lowell's heart really wasn't in it. He knocked chips around his plate and looked at his burger.

"Oh, Lowell, there you are." Jenny walked over to the table where he sat.

His heart leapt, though he tried not to show it on his face.

"Lowell, I'm so sorry about yesterday, but that bitch Conall kept me talking all through my lunch break, then told me I had to keep working! I was fuming. She hates me, she does. She's constantly on my case. It's driving me nuts."

"She's a nutcase, that's true. I thought you'd gone off me when you didn't turn up yesterday."

"Oh, no, no. I'm so sorry. I wanted to get a message to you, but I was being watched. Gees, I hope the bitch does get me fired. I'm sick of working here. If it weren't for my lunches with you, I'd have gone already."

She flushed and smiled prettily, and Lowell's heart swelled. It was good to hear she enjoyed their lunches as much as he did.

"And I need to pay my rent, you know, and those awful bill things that keep coming through my letterbox."

"I know." Lowell nodded. "Show me the money, I say." He liked to slip in a film quote here and there when they sprang to mind. It made him feel clever.

"That's from that Tom Cruise film, right? It's got the blonde girl in it, too."

"*Jerry Maguire*," he said. "It's a classic."

"I've never seen it, you know."

"Really? How can that be?"

"I don't know. I just seem to miss loads of the big films, somehow. There must be dozens I know famous lines from but have never actually seen, like *The Italian Job* and

'blowing the bloody doors off' or *The Godfather*. I only know lines from that 'cos I've watched *You've Got Mail*."

"We need to remedy that," Lowell said. "I've got all those on DVD."

"What? Including *You've Got Mail*?" She grinned.

"Well, that I'm not going to say. But if you want, you can come over to my house and we could watch one."

"Oh, that'd be nice. I've got nothing on tonight."

Lowell tried not to think about Jenny naked, but it was too late. He had, and he was hard.

"No, neither have I." The image in his mind's eye suddenly got much ruder. "Want to come home with me when you finish? We'll pick up something to eat on the way."

"Sure, that'd be cool. It'll make up for me missing lunch with you yesterday, too."

"All right, then. I'll meet you outside the main doors. What time do you finish?"

"Seven," she replied.

That was an hour later than Lowell, but doing some overtime wouldn't do him any harm, he decided.

"All right. See you then."

It wasn't until Lowell was back down with the servers that he really thought about what had just happened. Somehow, he'd managed to invite a girl back to his house. On top of the shock of her actually agreeing to go was the sheer surprise he'd asked her in the first place. He did not let people into his house. He was always worried about them discovering the basement and the nastiness it held.

But he had invited Jenny over without a second thought, and the weird thing was that he didn't feel awfully worried about it even as he sat at his desk. Sure, he knew it was risky, but he managed to convince himself it'd be okay. He kept the door under the stairs locked. They'd be in the living room, watching films, and Jenny wouldn't be too nosey. He was sure he could explain why it was locked if he needed to.

He was excited, really excited. He had been really upset when she'd missed their lunch date, and now he was relieved she'd not gone off him. He'd gotten used to having her around. It should worry him, especially with just a matter of days until his next 'monthly

problem', but it didn't. He just pushed all the fears and worries down with excuses, the image of her smile and the caress of her ever-so-soft lips against his.

Yeah, he was thinking with his cock. He knew it, but his mind was quite happy to take a backseat to the whole affair. He'd act now, worry later. It wasn't much of a plan, but it worked for Lowell.

"So I thought we'd get pizza. I was going to suggest Chinese, but then I thought how messy that might turn out to be."

"What are you saying?" Jenny laughed as she perused the green and red menu before her.

"I'm saying you have a habit of throwing food all over me."

"Well, all right, I can't exactly deny that one, can I? I'll have a ham and pineapple, please."

"Fruit? On a Pizza?" Lowell shook his head,

"Oh hush, you, and order my pizza. I am starving."

"Yes, boss." Lowell chuckled and ordered two pizzas and a bottle of pop. It was nice to have someone with him, someone to mess about with, to verbally spar with. In the old days, he'd rarely been alone, and he had forgotten just how good it was to simply hold a conversation with a person other than himself or the odd shop worker or old dear on the bus.

"So, what are we going to watch?" she asked as they walked up the street, a pizza box each in hand.

"Well, I don't know. It's up to you. Do you want to watch *Jerry Maguire*?"

"Yeah, I kinda like Tom Cruise."

"There will be strictly no drooling on my sofa, though, missy. And if you mention anything about him being hot, cute or dreamy, you'll be out on your arse."

Jenny laughed, it was such a pretty sound. Then she shook her head.

"There's no need to be jealous, honey. Tom Cruise isn't tall enough for me. I like my men big."

"I don't think I want to know!" Lowell replied and directed her up the path to his house. As he fiddled with his keys and unlocked the door, she ran her free hand down his back, making him shiver with pleasure.

"I'm sure you've no need to worry about that, either."

She whispered it, so she probably didn't expect Lowell to hear, but hear it he did, and right then he started to feel nervous about the evening. He wasn't sure he was ready for anything more than a kiss. He wasn't sure he ever would be. He didn't want to run the risk of hurting her, however small that risk might seem to be.

"Okay, I think the house was in a decent state when I left this morning," Lowell smiled and led Jenny into his front room. He took her coat then went off to get glasses for the drink. When he came back, she was sitting on the end of the sofa, eating her first slice of pizza.

"I got started. I hope you don't mind, I couldn't resist."

"Yeah, don't worry. I'll just slide in the DVD, and I'll join you." He was still feeling nervous as he flicked on the film and sat down at the other end of the sofa. He opened his box and started to eat. If someone had asked him how his pizza tasted, he would not have been able to tell them. He was eating mechanically whilst thinking hard about the situation.

Now she was here, the worries he'd put aside were coming to the fore. She was in his house, now. Would she feel free to call at any time? What if she called when he was rampaging in the cellar? Would she ask awkward questions about the door? Now he was wondering whether he'd done the right thing at all.

"Oh! Oh, I'm sorry," Jenny gasped.

Lowell clicked out of his own little world to see that Jenny's glass was on its side on the coffee table.

"Don't worry," he said, leaping up. "I'll see to it." He rushed to the kitchen and grabbed the paper towels.

"I'm so sorry, Lowell. I'm such a klutz." Jenny sighed and grabbed a handful of thick tissue.

"It's okay, accidents happen." Lowell picked up her glass and started to clean up the spilt, fizzy orange. His hand bumped into hers as they wiped.

"I'm sorry," she whispered again as their gazes locked.

"Don't be," he replied, leaving the damp towel and placing his somewhat sticky hand over hers. "It really doesn't matter."

Nothing mattered, then, nothing but her soft, warm hand under his and her lips. Everything else was forgotten. The film played to itself, the partially cleared spillage was left to penetrate the white paper towels as Jenny and Lowell kissed.

At work, the kisses were short and snatched, lip against lip, but the rest of their bodies had tended to stay parted. Not so, here. They were pressed hard against each other. Lowell could feel the warm smoothness of her breasts pushing into his chest, and he wrapped his arms around her to steady himself as the kiss ripped through his body.

Her hands were on his back. He could feel their heat radiating into his flesh through the thin material of his shirt. As their mouths duelled and danced, Jenny gave under the weight. Lowell was above her on the sofa, his body pushed down onto her. Her legs had split around him as he and Jenny arranged themselves comfortably, and he was pressing into her. He could feel his hardness against her soft stomach.

"What are we doing?" he asked between kisses.

"I think we're making out," she replied. "I want you, Lowell."

It was the most arousing thing she could have said. Lowell smiled and dragged his lips down her cheek and chin to press delicately against her neck. She mewled. It was the hottest sound he had ever heard, so he kissed again in the same spot and was rewarded with a gasp and a groan and a tightening of her hands on his back.

He kissed down from her neck and over the skin of her chest. He scattered kisses all over the V opening of the front of her blouse, then, with shaking fingers, he undid first one button then another.

His lips followed seconds later and kissed the warm, scented curve that presented itself. He could see and feel her chest undulating from his attention, and he became immersed in her scent and hypnotised by the beating of her heart.

He was aroused to a level he'd never felt before, and he didn't know if it had anything to do with his new, wolfish senses or not. He had not even kissed a girl before Jenny since he had changed, but he knew he'd never reacted this strongly to any woman ever before.

He finished off the buttons of her blouse with fumbling fingers as he moved kisses up and down her neck and cleavage. When his hands were freed, they moved down to her waist and skimmed over her hips, feeling her sensible, knee-length work skirt rumpled up high.

Her skin was so soft and warm, he just wanted to seek out more of it, and his touch ran across her thighs, squeezing and stroking and enjoying the heat of her body against his.

She had gotten her hands between them, and as he teased her with his hot, shaking fingers, she was undoing the buttons on his shirt. Their naked chests pressed together, and their lips met once again as Lowell traced a path from outer to inner thigh with his fingertips.

His heart beat harder, and he felt as if it might just burst from his chest as he traced the skin of her inner thigh and skimmed across to the thin, damp material of her knickers. He caught his breath, eyes locked with Jenny's, as he lifted the corner of the material with a fingertip. He watched her face as he eased across the soft down of her hair, and he thrilled in her gasp as he discovered her pussy lip and carried on, the knicker material stretching around his wrist until he could feel the damp slit he was searching for.

He ran his finger up and down, his lips against hers, his eyes closing under the pressure of erotic pleasure. He found the bump of her clit and stroked it, feeling her writhe against him and pushing her pelvis up to feel more of his touch. He flicked lower, seeking the hot, moist centre of her sex and dipping inside with one and then a second finger. As their tongues danced, he fucked her. In and out he pushed and pulled his hand, making her squirm and making him all the more eager to fill her with his cock and not just his fingers.

She writhed and moaned as he found her clit with his thumb, his fingers still buried inside her. She began to rock in time with his rhythm, and she chanted, "Yes, Yes, Yes," over and over, her voice getting higher and more insistent until she shook and screamed out her orgasm.

"Wow," she gasped as he pulled his fingers from inside her, leaving her empty and aching, "that was amazing."

She smiled at him, and he kissed her savagely.

Chapter Four

"Damn," Lowell cursed as he tore his lips from hers.

Jenny's brow crinkled. She had been floating on the emotions and experiences of a dream come true. She was pressing her body into the hardness of her life's longest crush, and he had stimulated her to orgasm with his fingers.

"What's up?"

"I am really, really, really enjoying this, but I've got no...you know, protection."

"Oh, that's not a problem." Jenny smiled and pushed Lowell up and away from her. She felt cold, and every inch of her still tingled with arousal. She rolled off the sofa and crawled—her legs didn't seem to be solid enough to hold her—over to the hall where she reached for her handbag.

"I've got one." She grabbed a condom from it and crawled back around.

Lowell had shifted on the sofa. He was sitting down again, his shirt ripped open at the front, and his chest beneath undulating wildly. She winked as she sat back on her heels in front of him and pushed his knees apart.

His blue eyes sparkled as a long, lazy smile stretched across his face. She reached forward and popped open the button on his trousers and very gently rolled down the zip. She could feel him, a thin layer of material could not hold back the heat of his erection. She wanted to feel it naked in her hands, so she grabbed the top of his trousers and undies and pulled down. He lifted his bum off the sofa as she tugged, and she groaned as his cock was revealed. It was more than she'd ever imagined. Thick and engorged, its hot, red skin begged to be stroked.

Jenny pulled his trousers down to his ankles, but she lacked the patience to take off his shoes and remove his socks. So she just clambered over the slack material to rest her shaking hands on his cock. He groaned as she traced a fingertip up and down his length, then he gasped as she gripped him.

She couldn't believe she was here. She was aroused beyond belief and happier than she'd ever been before. She was having sex with Lowell. Jenny wanked him for a moment and watched the way his cock moved in and out of her fingers. She drank in the motion and the visual as she imagined that cock inside her.

She licked her lips and realised she needed to taste him. She felt his hand cradling the back of her head as she leant forward and wrapped her lips around the tip of his dick. He tasted so good, sweet and salty, and the feel of him in her mouth was electric. She undulated and ran a hand down her body, under the waistband of her skirt and into her knickers. Her clit was painfully aroused, and as she sucked, she had to rub herself to relieve that discomfort. She knew they both could've come like that in a matter of moments, but, as hard as it was, she pulled herself away from his cock.

He whimpered like a disappointed animal as he popped from between her lips, but she grabbed the condom packet and placed it in his hands.

"You sort that out, and I'll get out of my knickers," she said. "I need to fuck you."

She heard the rattle of foil as she pushed down on his knees to stand up. She stepped back and bumped into the coffee table, sending both drinks over with a tinkle. Jenny didn't care. She was too busy pulling down her knickers. She left her skirt on—she was more than a little sensitive about her stomach, and the longer it could stay hidden the better, in her mind.

Lowell soon had the condom fitted on his cock. Jenny pushed at the side of his leg, and he took the hint. He lifted up and shifted around until he was lying full length on the sofa, his trousers still crumpled around his ankles. Jenny wasted no time in moving over and straddling him.

"I've wanted this for so long," she groaned, and she gripped him and pressed his cock against her entrance. As she pushed down, they both moaned, the sounds melding together as one.

"Fuck," Lowell groaned, "that feels so good."

She could see his enjoyment painted on his face. His eyes were closed and his mouth open and his cheeks flushed with lust. She took a moment to get into a rhythm. She found herself so overwhelmed that at first it was hard to concentrate. She was fucking Lowell Kenyon, and it was a hundred times better than she'd ever imagined.

He gripped her hips as she moved, his fingers digging into her flesh possessively. She rested her hands on his chest and moved with more force. She was moaning and gasping with every movement, and her cunt spasmed around him. She loved how well he filled her, how good he felt inside her.

"Fuck, Jenny, I'm going to come," he growled.

"Yes," she cried. "Come for me, Lowell."

A few seconds later, he did, with a roar that petered out into a wolf-like howl. His nails dug into her flesh, and he held her immobilised, speared on his cock like sexual prey as she screamed out her own release.

He let her go, and she slipped down onto the sofa. He moved over and onto his side, and they lay face to face, their arms draped over each other's bodies.

"You're better than I ever imagined," she whispered.

"You've imagined us fucking before?" he asked, genuinely surprised.

"Sure, lots in the past few weeks. But I fancied you something rotten when we were at school, too. I had a massive crush on you."

"Really? I wish I'd have known, back then."

"You didn't even realise I existed."

"No, I was a bit of a prat in my school days," he admitted.

"What happened to all your friends?" Jenny asked. "You never went anywhere without them, back then."

"Oh, I just changed a lot, and we lost contact. I've found out I'm rather fond of my own company."

They lay together on the sofa for quite some time, just talking, before they dressed, cleared up the mess, and Lowell rang a taxi to take Jenny home. They kissed goodnight on the doorstep.

"See you on Monday," Lowell called as she ran down the path to the taxi that waited for her in the freezing rain.

"See you," she called and smiled over to him as she got in.

She couldn't stop smiling for the whole weekend, and she wished for Monday morning to arrive quickly.

* * * *

She could smell that damn woman everywhere, and Dessie was not happy. It was only a couple of days until the full moon, and she was antsy. She couldn't wait for it to rise, to change her and enable her to rip the annoying red head from the rest of the simpering girl's body.

She walked into Lowell's office unannounced.

"Your performance review is scheduled for Thursday at 5:00. Don't be late," she said, turned on her heel and left. She heard his faint protest behind her but paid no attention. It was going dark now by around 6:00, and she knew he had requested to go home early that night. She wanted him there at work so they could change together and feed together and fuck like animals like they should.

She had a day of firings to look forward to, and she was most looking forward to telling that stinky, little girl Jenny that her time was up. Not only was she to be fired, she would be there to witness Dessie and Lowell change, and then Dessie would rip the disgusting, annoying woman to pieces. Maybe she'd let Lowell join in. That would be quite wonderfully ironic.

She hated Jenny with everything within her. She knew the girl went down to Lowell's office every lunchtime, she watched them on a discreetly hidden CCTV camera. And every day they kissed and pawed at each other, and Desdemona found it sickening.

They laughed and joked and talked about how evil she was. That was the only bit she enjoyed. It was nice to see her hard work acknowledged. The day before, she had been busy and so had only checked the camera halfway through Lowell's lunch hour. It seemed strange, but Jenny hadn't been there, and Lowell had been at his desk, typing away as normal.

It had become apparent just where Jenny actually had been a few minutes later when Lowell had stopped typing and closed his eyes. His mouth had formed an 'O', and his hands had gripped the sides of his office chair. Moments later, the smug redhead had crawled out from underneath the desk, licking her lips and giggling. Dessie's had curled up in distaste, and she had seethed with even more anger than before.

But at least now she had something interesting to show them both as she fired them. She couldn't wait for Thursday to come around.

* * * *

Lowell could not get home from work in only an hour. He had thought it over and over, but there was just no way he could do it. The buses just didn't run at the right times. That damn woman was insufferable. He was glad she'd be gone at the end of the week. With Miss Conall no longer breathing down his neck and being all weird around him, maybe he'd actually get some work done.

There were no two ways about it. He'd have to lock himself up here at work. He had some chains in the bottom drawer of his filing cabinet for just such emergencies. He didn't like the idea, but he had found a tiny storeroom down the corridor with no windows and a thick, heavy door. He would sit in there and wait it out.

Lowell was agitated, anyway. He had thoroughly enjoyed the last week or so with Jenny. The first time she'd come home with him had been such a revelation. He hadn't expected anything to happen, but having sex with Jenny was amazing, so much better than the meaningless sex he'd had earlier in his life when he'd been shallow and completely stupid.

They'd even done more than kissing at work. It had been such a rush to have Jenny suck him off below his desk, her soft lips teasing him to orgasm. One time he had fingered her as they sat side by side on their chairs. He had made her come all over his hand. And what was the worst thing that could happen if they were caught? They could only be fired, and somehow that had lost its horror for him.

Lowell marvelled at how little he cared about possibly losing his job. Finding a new one where he could be so isolated would be difficult, but it seemed that Jenny made doing anything worthwhile. He'd become a damn TV celebrity if it meant keeping Jenny in his life.

He'd occasionally worry about Jenny's safety with him. What if she turned up out of the blue during his 'monthly problem'? He knew that as long as they didn't get into having a copy of each other's key or living together that her seeing him when he didn't want her to would be practically impossible. He tried not to think much further forward than that. If they

were to continue in a relationship, he would have to commit to her seriously. To do that, he would have to tell her his secret. He wasn't sure he would be able to do that, so he tried his best not to think too far ahead. He didn't want to consider a life without Jenny in it.

Lowell glanced at the clock, sighed and stood up from his desk. Thursday had come around all too quickly. Jenny was scheduled for her performance review at 5:15. He had told her he would see her briefly afterwards, but that he had plans that night. He had five minutes to talk to her and console her before he'd have to race back to the basement to lock himself down. The time between full moons was just not long enough, in his opinion. Why couldn't they come around once in a million years or something?

He took the elevator up to the top floor and walked across the landing to Miss Conall's door. He knocked.

"Ah, Lowell, come in," she called. "Sit there," she told him as he entered the room.

"Lowell, you didn't have a good start, did you? But I must say that since that first day you've barely put a foot wrong. My only complaint is that you've taken too long on your lunch hour several times, but as you've made up the time at the end of the day, I can hardly dismiss you for such a trifling thing."

Miss Conall made him nervous. She had an even stronger scent of bitch on her today, and it was driving his senses crazy. He hated the day before the full moon. His wolf self was far too in charge, and as he smelt the scent he became aroused which appalled him. His instincts might have been animalistic, but his heart and mind were still both human, both very much Lowell. The sooner this damn full moon was over, the better.

"So, I am very glad to announce, Lowell, that the company will be keeping you on. That is, if you don't accept my job offer. I need an assistant. You will get ten K a year more than you're getting here, and there will be other bonuses, too. I don't need an answer right now, but if you're interested, please ring me." She slid a business card across the table, and Lowell picked it up and put it in his pocket.

"Thank you, Miss Conall, but I am very happy here. I will think about it, though." He didn't want the weird bitch to be insulted and to fire him on the spot.

"That is fine, Lowell. I look forward to hearing from you. You can go."

Lowell stood up and raced for the door. He did not want that mad woman to see his physical reaction to her scent. He couldn't wait to get back down to the basement where Jenny's sweet perfume would erase the bitch smell and ease his mind.

Chapter Five

Jenny knew she was going to be fired. She walked up to Miss Conall's door at exactly 5.15 and knocked.

"Enter."

She did, and Miss Conall pointed at the seat before her desk.

"I'm not going to beat around the bush, Jenny. You're a terrible employee. You do not sell, you do not push, you don't put any effort into your job at all. That isn't all, though. You take long lunches and don't make up the time, and during these lunches you do things explicitly forbidden by company rules."

Miss Conall turned the computer screen to face Jenny, and Jenny saw black and white footage of Lowell climaxing. Her jaw dropped as she saw herself appear from below his desk and wipe her mouth. She had no idea they had cameras down in that room.

"So you see, Jenny, I have to fire you."

"I see," Jenny said, still in shock. She'd had a whole defiant speech prepared, but it had completely disappeared from her mind.

Miss Conall stood up. "Let me just get your paperwork," she said, "then you can go."

The next thing Jenny was aware of was a tightness around her wrists as they were dragged behind her back and a harsh throbbing in her head.

* * * *

"Ah, Jenny, you're awake. Good."

Jenny looked round the stark, concrete walls of the dark room illuminated by a harsh light above her head to see Miss Conall naked and licking her lips.

"What the hell is going on?" Jenny rasped. Her throat was sore, and she was finding it hard to focus.

"Oh, you know, kidnap, assault, murder, nothing to worry about." Miss Conall laughed, but the more she did, the more it sounded like a howl.

"You can't do this!" Jenny shook her head. Her heart was thudding inside her echoing chest, and she was panicking. This crazed woman was going to hurt her and probably kill her, and she was totally helpless. As she realised what was going to happen to her, she started to scream.

"Help, help, help!" she yelled at the top of her voice.

Miss Conall just laughed and howled harder.

* * * *

Desdemona was enjoying herself for the first time in weeks. She'd hit that puny redhead so hard that she had dropped instantly. It took her a matter of seconds to lift the prone body to her shoulder and take her down in the executive elevator to the basement. The girl had proven no challenge whatsoever. It was just the way she liked it.

A length of rope tied her hands behind her back as the unconscious body rested against the cool wall, and another bound her ankles together. She'd not be moving anywhere. Even if she did break free, the door was locked and, within a matter of moments, Dessie would be in her true form. And nothing would escape her, then.

She removed her clothes. It was a good suit she was wearing, and it was worth preserving.

Jenny started to stir and asked the same, unimaginative question they all asked. Dessie inhaled the fear as she told the girl of her fate. It was the best aphrodisiac she knew. She laughed as her dinner screamed for help.

"No one can hear you, oh no. We're deep in the bowels of the building. There's no one around to hear you through these thick, thick walls. I'm afraid it's just you and me, dear. Oh, and the glorious full moon which should be making its appearance soon. And then, oh, then, you're in for a treat."

Suddenly, there came a heavy clanging from the other side of the thick, storeroom door.

Oh goody, Lowell had arrived. She unlocked it and let him in.

"What the hell are you doing, you stupid bitch?" Lowell pushed past Desdemona, who just laughed and pulled the door shut behind him, locking it firmly.

"Lowell," Jenny gasped, "Oh, please help me."

The weak one burst into tears as Lowell worked to unfasten the knots around her ankles.

"Oh, I like a little sport with my dinner, too, Lowell. Good idea. Free her feet so we can chase her."

"What the fuck are you on about?" Lowell spat. "You're demented."

"Oh no, darling, I am just like you. Join with me. We can be the start of a new pack. I invited you earlier to be my assistant. I am now asking you to be my partner. I know who and what you are, Lowell, and in just a moment, we'll both be ripping this puny human to pieces with our teeth and our claws."

"No!" Lowell screamed. "No, I will not. I love her."

"Pfft, she's just a girl. I am your equal." She pulled Lowell up by his collar. The moonlight was close to its apex, and she could feel the strength and ecstasy flowing through her veins. "Join me."

"Never!" Lowell howled.

Dessie's world began to sing. The change was upon her.

* * * *

At 5.30 precisely, Lowell stood in the main foyer, waiting for Jenny. He remained there for a good five minutes, but she never came. He was irritated. He could feel the full moon's pull, and he needed to get down into the basement for safety. He could not wait for her a moment longer.

He walked quickly to the elevator and, as he dropped down, he sent Jenny a text message to enquire where she was. He ran to his office and picked up his chains. He had to hurry, there were only ten minutes until the change. He raced down the corridor, and he could sense something was wrong. Something was very wrong. As he got closer to the

storeroom he'd earmarked for his incarceration, he worked out why. He could hear Jenny, and she was screaming for help.

"Jenny," he yelled and banged on the locked storeroom door. He was scared and angry. He knew before the door opened whom he'd find in there. He yelled at the surprisingly naked Miss Conall and fell to his knees before Jenny. He quickly ripped off the bindings from around her ankles and tried desperately to free her arms.

"Whatever happens, you need to run—run, but lock this door before you do," he whispered in her ear as he frantically fumbled with the bindings at her wrists. But as the moon rose, his fine motor skills were decreasing, and the wolf was rising.

"...join me." Miss Conall finished her speech.

Suddenly, it all became clear. She was a werewolf, too.

"Never!" he yelled.

But as the word burst from his throat, he felt his bones and his body cracking. Stretching and mutating. The change was on him. He threw himself away from Jenny, and when the beast awoke, he howled. Wolf Lowell heard the higher-pitched call of a wolf and looked around. A dark-furred female stood beside him. He could smell her. She was in heat, and her scent was like pure sex. She growled at Lowell and paced right past him.

Lowell saw a body cowering in the corner and growled a challenge. It wasn't until he stalked closer and picked up the scent that he remembered it. Something filtered through his animal instinct, and a word lodged there. Jenny. He knew this was something he had to protect. With a horrific howl, he launched himself at the female wolf. He knocked her to the floor, a foot or two away from Jenny, who cowered in the corner.

At first, the female wolf thought he wanted to mate, her whimpers and barks indicated she was ready for him to take her. His nostrils were filled with her tempting musk. She begged him with scent and sounds to fuck her.

He moved to the position, controlled by instinct, but just as he readied himself to slip inside her, he heard a sob and looked up. He saw Jenny, and anger raced through him. Instinct told him he had to protect that delicate thing from the female wolf below him.

Dessie sensed the change in him, and as he lunged to take a bite from her flesh, she twisted below him. He fought back as she scratched and pummelled. His claws raked as he held her down, her snapping jaws aiming for his throat. She was strong, but he was stronger.

He let her thrash out some of her energy, and the moment she tired and left a gap in her defences, he buried his teeth in her furry neck and began to rip apart the flesh.

He did not come out of the fight unscathed. Although the other wolf was injured, she fought to the very last, landing scratches and bites along his body.

He pulled away from the bloodied mess of battle and collapsed to the floor.

Chapter Six

Jenny tried to break her bonds, but she could not. Even if she managed to get to her feet, her hands were still tied behind her back, and she would not be able to unlock the door. She was shaking all over, the shock of what she'd just seen still ruling her mind and body. Tears rolled down her cheeks.

She'd been so relieved when Lowell had arrived. He must have come to look for her when she hadn't turned up in the foyer on time. How he'd found her, she didn't know, but it was a miracle. She hadn't understood why he had wanted her to lock him in with the psycho bitch as he whispered his directions into her ear. She hadn't known why until a few seconds later when everything she'd known as Lowell had fallen apart.

The noises coming from them as they'd changed had filled her heart with terror. She'd *seen* them change. One moment they had been human, and the next they had been large, evil wolves. Werewolves. Her mind had not been able to register it, but she had known she was in danger as they howled in unison to the moon.

Miss Conall—or at least the beast who had once been Miss Conall—had turned on her first. Jenny had never given much thought to the way she'd die, but she sure wouldn't have predicted she'd end up doggie chow for some mythical beast.

She had felt the hot, horrid breath on her cheek as the slathering beast had drawn closer to her, then suddenly a blast of cool air had chilled her, and the howls and grunts had started again. Jenny looked. She had tried closing her eyes tightly, but the dark had been worse than the reality before her.

Lowell, *her* Lowell in beast form, had been on top of Miss Conall. Jenny hadn't understood until she'd looked closer and seen how excited the Lowell beast was. He'd been going to fuck the bitch right there in front of her.

Her heart had shattered. Maybe they'd planned this all along. The two wolves were in cahoots. They'd fuck, then they'd eat her. She had sobbed as her heart had throbbed with pain. She could have sworn it literally had been breaking.

He had looked across to her, then. The beast's eyes had been a different shape and surrounded by a mass of shaggy hair, but they had still been Lowell's eyes. She had wept in terror, heartbreak and shock, but instead of pouncing on her or plunging his animal phallus into the willing female below him, he had howled, and a battle had begun.

Fur literally had flown as did spurts of blood. Teeth had flashed, claws slashed, and Lowell had seemed to be fairing the worst. He had attacked, not fucked, the bitch. He had seen Jenny, and he had changed his animal mind. She had seen Lowell as she had looked into those eyes, and he had seen her.

And now he was protecting her.

Or he wanted the human treat all to himself, and he was killing the competition, or trying to. That was a sobering thought, and Jenny began to struggle in her bonds again, trying desperately to loosen them. She watched the fight before her. She flinched every time Lowell was hit, scratched or bitten. Even when he was a beast, she loved him, and even if he tore her to shreds, she would love him. A psychologist would have a field day with that, she decided.

But the wolf on top came out on top. As Miss Conall faltered, he went for the jugular. Jenny had to look away then as he tore at the flesh until he was sure the challenging wolf had been vanquished. When the only noise she could hear was that of her heartbeat and his heavy, laboured panting, she opened her eyes again. He was injured, very injured, and loosing a lot of blood. He looked up at her for a moment, then he collapsed to the floor.

Jenny worked at the knots at her wrists. Lowell had managed to loosen them somewhat. She was determined to get her hands free, to escape. Lowell was a beast, and if he came to, he would have her for dinner. But as the rope loosened and she managed to painfully manoeuvre her hands free, she didn't immediately get up and run.

She sat looking at his poor, battered body, and tears coursed down her face. He'd ended up like that protecting her. And even though he was a hairy, bloodthirsty beast, she owed it to him to help him.

Finally, she got up and ran to the door. She opened it and flew down the corridor to Lowell's office. She picked up the standard first aid kit from the bottom drawer then raced to the toilet next door. She emptied the ugly, cheap vase of fake flowers and filled it with water.

Then she walked back to the storeroom, verbally berating herself for her stupidity the whole way. She carefully tiptoed around the bloodied body that had been Miss Conall—no beast could survive those wounds—and put the water down beside Lowell. She took out the bandages and cotton wool from the first aid kit and began to bathe his wounds.

She was surprised to find they weren't so bad beneath the dried blood, but then all the werewolf stories had them healing super quickly. Maybe that was happening here with Lowell. She tried not to think about him waking up in his beast form as she tenderly washed the blood from his matted fur.

She worked for ages, cleaning him, checking every now and then that his strong heart was still beating. Once she was certain he was not bleeding to death, she lay down with her head on his newly healed side and closed her eyes. She was soothed to sleep by the beating of his heart.

* * * *

Whenever Lowell woke from a full moon, it took him time to remember who and what he was. As he came around, he felt the cold floor beneath his naked body, and he became aware of something warm resting against his chest. He stretched a little and winced. He ached all over and not just from the change.

As he lay there, the events of the previous evening unfolded in his mind, and he opened his eyes. He was still in the storeroom. Jenny's ropes were discarded on the floor. Where was she? He moved and looked down. The warm weight on his chest was Jenny.

"Hey," she smiled up at him, "you're awake, then."

He nodded and moved to sit up as she did the same. He looked around the room. Miss Conall was nowhere to be seen.

"I know. I worried about that, too. But I guess she blinked out of existence with the sunrise," Jenny said. "I'm pretty certain she was definitely dead." She shuddered then, and a tear splashed down her cheek.

"I'm so sorry," Lowell said. He was overcome with pain, regret and fear. Fear of what was to come.

"We'll talk in a bit, Lowell, we will. But first, we need to tidy up and get you into some clothes. People will be arriving soon."

Lowell nodded. No one ever came down to the basement, but it was better to be safe than sorry. He carried the ropes to his room as Jenny took the vase of bloody water to the bathroom to empty it. Lowell stashed the rope in his rucksack after he took out the spare garments he'd brought with him. Clean shirt and trousers, just in case something happened to his other clothes.

He went back to the storeroom with some cleaning supplies and swept up the remnants of his old clothes. He put Miss Conall's neatly folded suit into a bin bag and disposed of it.

"Well, I should go home. I've been fired," Jenny said as he walked back into his office.

"I've got my job, but I can't sit in here, today. Can I come with you?"

Jenny sighed then nodded. "We do need to talk."

"Yeah," Lowell agreed.

They walked together, but Lowell felt as if they were a hundred miles apart. He was amazed she could even look at him now she knew what he was. He didn't know why she'd stayed with him, but he hoped that maybe it meant they would be able to sort this out.

It was only a short journey to Jenny's small flat. She went into the kitchen part of the room to brew up, and Lowell sat on the sofa in the living area.

"Mum always says a cup of tea is perfect for dealing with all emergencies."

She handed him a brightly coloured mug then took her own and sat at the other end of the sofa.

"I guess we should talk," Lowell sighed, cupping the hot brew in his hands.

"Yes. I guess so. What are you?"

"Most of the time, I'm a man. I'm Lowell. But when the full moon comes out to play, I become a werewolf. An evil, disgusting beast."

"And when were you going to disclose this little fact to me?"

"Well, I was hoping never," Lowell admitted with a sigh. "I was hoping to keep it a secret."

"How the hell do you keep a monthly, bloody rampage a secret?" She shook her head and put her cup down on the floor beside her.

"When the full moon is out, I lock myself in my cellar. I have shackles in the walls and a very thick door that I lock with several bolts every time. I do not rampage. I sit in my cellar, and I endure the horror of that one night, then I carry on with life as usual."

"Oh," Jenny said. "I wondered why the door under the stairs was locked at your place."

"Yeah, I try to keep that whole, nasty business a secret."

"Well, how long have you been a...well, you know."

She was uncomfortable. Lowell understood that feeling very well.

"I've been like this for five years, now. I was turned in my very last year of university."

"You went to Uni?" She seemed shocked.

"Yeah, I did. Mostly to hang out with the gang I'd been with since secondary school and to play all the different sports. I didn't actually do much work," Lowell replied with a wistful grin. "I went off to a big football competition we were in, we'd come top of the local heat. Anyway, after the final match, we were celebrating kinda hard for the win, and I found myself outside, being violently sick all by myself."

"I heard the most blood-chilling howl, and I think I must have fainted from fright or passed out from booze. I woke up in the morning in the dewy grass, and I had this row of deep scratches and bruises on my chest and back that looked like a huge jaw mark. I managed to get myself up and dressed and on the coach back, but the weird thing was the cuts healed in a little over a day. I just put it down to some bad beer and thought I must have been hallucinating."

"Then the next full moon hit. I was staying in student digs on a floor with all the old gang. I ripped apart from limb to limb four of my very good friends. I didn't realise it at the time, but when I woke up naked and in the university grounds, I ran back quickly, cursing them for their practical joke. But as I walked into my room, I noticed red stuff oozing from under the bathroom door. I went in and discovered my then girlfriend torn to shreds and spread around the whole room. I threw up in the sink, but then I don't really remember what I did. I was in shock."

"I was inconsolable. And when I found three others from the gang in the same state, I started to put things together. I thought it had been a dream, but the weird aches in my body and the dark stuff under my nails suggested it was the truth."

"I panicked, rang the police and handed myself in. They didn't take me seriously. They thought I was in shock. There was no way I could have inflicted the injuries, it was a wild animal attack, they told me. They thought the act of discovering them had driven me temporarily insane.

"I knew it was me, though. I knew what I was, and I quit university. I couldn't stay so close to so many people, not when I was such a monster. I moved here to this house and basically lived like a hermit for a few months while what little money I had lasted. I made the shackles in the basement and established my monthly routine. I stayed away from people. I shopped online, so I only had the delivery person to see. I did not leave the house at all in those first few months."

"You must have been so lonely," Jenny interjected.

"I was, and I deserved it. I'd always had the gang around me, but I'd killed them without thought. I didn't want to hurt another soul, so I stayed here. I even contemplated suicide one time, but I didn't have the balls to do it. I would have stayed in this house forever if my cash hadn't run out. I needed a job, and that's how I ended up in the basement of Demonet."

"So tonight was your first kill since your first full moon?"

"Yeah. And even though the bitch deserved it, I feel bad about it. She was everything I never, ever want to be. She'd embraced her werewolf nature. I could never ever do that, never. I could never run with her, because I don't run in the moonlight, I hide from it."

"Lowell, why didn't you kill me?"

It was the big question, and he had known she would ask it.

"Honestly, Jenny, I don't really know. When the werewolf takes me over, I work on instinct. I don't think, I feel. I don't know what it was about your scent, but from the moment I smelled you, I knew I had to protect you. I didn't know who you were or what you were, even. I just knew I had to stop the bitch from reaching you. And thank God, I did."

"You got knocked about pretty bad," she said.

Lowell couldn't tell if it was sympathy or just stating a fact.

"Yeah, well, I won in the end. She was pretty strong, though, and I've never fought another werewolf before. Hell, the only contact with my kind I've ever had was some random rampaging beast that had a nibble on me."

"I am not sure I can get my head around this, Lowell." Her voice caught, and she took a long, shuddering breath. "I have always liked you, and the last few weeks we've had together have been a dream come true."

"For me, too," he interjected quickly, moving in his seat to be closer to her. "I've never been so happy before in all my life."

She simply nodded, then she looked at him, directly into his eyes for the first time in the whole conversation.

"I want to be with you, Lowell, I do. But you're dangerous. What would happen if you ever got loose? You're not just a man, you're a...a...werewolf."

"I am, Jenny, I am," he sighed. "And I am dangerous. I should leave, now, before I hurt you any more."

He moved to stand up, tears pooling just behind his eyes, his whole body aching with loss.

"No," she yelled, and her hand shot out and grabbed him around the arm. "Don't go."

He laid his hand over hers. "Jenny, I can't do this." The tears hiding behind his eyes started to mist up his vision. "I want to stay with you. I want to stay with you forever, but I am a monster, and I can't endanger you any longer. I'm destined to be alone for the rest of my life. At least I'll have memories of you now—" He wanted to say more, but her lips hit his and cut off his sentence.

The tears he'd been holding back flooded down his cheeks and mingled with hers as they kissed. He felt and tasted her sobs. He wanted to take away her pain, her fear. He wanted to make her happy again. He tried so hard to do that with his kisses.

"I can't lose you," she gasped the moment their lips parted for a second. "Don't leave me, Lowell, don't leave."

"But Jenny, I'm a monster." The tears streaked his cheeks, and he wiped a hand across his eyes to dash away the new ones threatening to break forth. "I don't deserve happiness, I don't deserve to be with you. But I want it. I want you."

"Lowell, you've not hurt a person in five years. For most of the year you're a sweet, gentle, handsome man. I don't have to see you on the nights when you're something else. Just because you turn into a beast once a month, it does not make you a monster." She moved her hand from his arm to cup his cheek and to gently make him look at her.

"I don't want to hurt you, Jenny. I don't want to take the risk."

"If we'd not taken risks, we wouldn't have had the last month of pure, fucking joy. Don't make excuses."

"But Jenny." His breath shuddered from his body. "You deserve better. You deserve a lover who can be with you every day and night without fear. You don't deserve a loser like me."

"I don't care what I deserve, Lowell, you silly, silly man. I want you. I need you. Dear God, Lowell, I love you."

The words hung in the air as the revelation hit. Love. She loved him. It was a miracle. He'd thought himself unlovable, he'd resigned himself to a life alone and away from everyone, but here was this beautiful girl, stroking his face as tears slipped down his cheeks and professing to love him, knowing full well exactly what he was.

"I love you, too, Jenny, and I don't want to lose you."

"You don't have to. We can work something out."

He looked into her eyes and knew he had to take the risk. His life would not be liveable without her.

"We can try, right? But you must promise to come nowhere near me on the full moon."

"Oh, now that's an easy thing to promise." She chuckled and slid her hand to his chest, patting him there. "I love you dearly, Lowell, but I can do without witnessing your 'monthly problem' from here on in."

"Promise me, Jenny. Please, just promise me you'll stay away from me when you need to."

"I promise, Lowell, I promise."

Their lips met again, and the energetic kiss helped crush any fears Lowell had. They could do it, of course they could. It might prove tough at times, but it would be easier than having to keep the whole thing secret. It was as if a weight had lifted off him. He'd not really

realised before how much of a strain keeping it all to himself had been, but now he'd shared, he felt lighter than he had in years. He was amazed how something so good could have come out of such a horrific situation.

"Come with me." Jenny smiled and pulled on his hand.

"Where are we going?" Lowell asked, knowing full well where. She only had two rooms in her flat, the other being the bedroom.

Chapter Seven

"Don't ask questions," Jenny replied with a cheeky wink. "Just follow."

It had been the most bizarre, scary and wonderful twenty-four hours of her life. She'd been threatened by a psychotic woman who turned into a crazed werewolf and rescued by her boyfriend who was also a werewolf. As horrified as she'd been, she hadn't run away after all that. And she had amazed herself by inviting him back to her home.

What a story he'd told her, what a sad time he'd had since his chance encounter with a werewolf. It wasn't long before the horror of what he changed into was forgotten and replaced by a dull ache of sadness for his lonely lifestyle. It didn't matter, she discovered, what Lowell was once during a full moon. The only thing that mattered was their love for one another.

When she got him into her bedroom, she pulled him onto the bed with her.

"Oh, so this was your plan." He grinned as she wrapped her arms around him. "You're going to have your wicked way with me."

"Oh, yes, that's just it. I want you, Lowell, and I want you right now."

They came together with passion and tender caresses. Clothes seemed to melt away, leaving them nude, hot skin against hot skin. Jenny kissed him all over, admiring the miracle which was his fully healed and no longer hair-covered body. She pressed her lips to every last inch of him as if she were checking that he was, in fact, completely changed back.

Once she had tortured him with the loving softness of her mouth, he took her by surprise and rolled her onto her back. He was above her, and he kissed her fiercely as he wrapped himself around her protectively.

She enjoyed the nip of his teeth at her neck and the playful tracing of his lips over her chest. He feasted there, massaging one breast as he sucked and nibbled the other then swapping. Over and over he did it until her mind and body were both dizzy with desire.

"Protection," Lowell panted as he lifted his lips from her skin.

She nodded as he lifted up, giving her room to roll to her side and lean over to the bedside cupboard. She pulled a condom from the little drawer and passed it to him. She watched as he ripped open the packet.

Jenny was so turned on, she felt painfully bereft as his body no longer touched hers. So, as he unwrapped the condom, she ran her fingers down to her wet cunt and started to rub at her aching clit.

Lowell moaned and watched her for a moment, his eyes following the movement of her long finger as it rubbed then dipped down inside of her to pick up more of her own juices to help aid her masturbation. He didn't watch for long. Moments later, he was rolling on the condom, and as she gasped and bucked below him, he began to feed his hard, sheathed cock into her.

They were together, joined intimately as one. She still had one finger pressed against her clit, and her other hand reached around Lowell and clung to him as he violently fucked her. There was no tenderness, now, just the raw passion of a man receiving a second chance. She wanted this passion, she needed this heated joining, and she moaned his name as the constant pressure on her clit caused her body to shake in orgasm.

Lowell felt Jenny contract, her body shake as she came all over his pounding cock. He couldn't hold it in any longer, he was overwhelmed not only by the sheer joy of being inside her, fucking her, but by the love and forgiveness she'd just shown him.

"I love you," he groaned as his orgasm built.

"I love you, too." She pulled him tighter into her embrace.

He continued to chant, "I love you, I love you, I love you," until the last repetition faded into a long, orgasmic groan of pleasure.

As they lay side by side, Lowell could not believe how happy he was. It seemed unthinkable so much good could have come out of such a horrific and terror-filled incident. He was still trying to understand why she could still love him after what she'd discovered. Lowell rolled to his side and laid an arm across her stomach.

"Oh, hey, I was just drifting off, then," she giggled and rolled over to face him.

"Sorry, I should let you sleep. It's been a long day."

"Oh, no, no. Never apologise for touching me." She smiled. "It's good, really good."

"Oh, yes. Touching you is amazing," he said, jokily squeezing her breast.

She giggled and playfully slapped at his hand. "Sheesh, you werewolves are never satisfied, are you?"

He smiled. "I think it's the man in me that longs so much for your flesh, Jenny, not the wolf."

"Oh, good. The man bits of Lowell are my favourite bits." She cupped his softened cock.

He groaned as sexual sparks began to explode inside him. "Are you sure you're okay with all that I am, Jenny?" he whispered as she continued to manipulate him, his dick hardening.

"Lowell, you are the man I love. It is as simple as that. Nothing else really matters," she said.

He could see that she meant it by the sincerity in her eyes.

"I love you, too, Jenny." He smiled and let the warmth of her hand envelope him. He was a lucky beast, something he'd never thought he'd be able to say. He'd found contentment and love despite his 'monthly problem'.

Maybe it wouldn't be so much of a problem any more, because he would know when he woke from that terrible, living nightmare that he was no longer alone in the world. He had found his true love.

About the Author

Victoria Blisse is a mother, wife, Christian, Manchester United fan and erotica writer. She is equally at home behind a laptop or a cooker and she loves to create stories, poems, cakes and biscuits that make people happy. She was born near Manchester, England, and her northern English quirkiness shows through in all of her stories. Passion, love and laughter fill her works, just as they fill her busy life. If you want to know more about Victoria and her brand of rosy, raunchy romance please check out her website.

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Summer Exposure: Hot Shots
Sexier Side of the Hill

The Seeds of Dawn

DREAMS

Jambrea Jo Jones

Dedication

Thank you Joy, without you I don't think I would be half the writer I am. Angie, your notes have made me better and put me in the right direction. Jess, thank you for taking a chance on a new author, reading over my first story and encouraging me to submit it. Can you believe it is finally being released?

To the International Heat ladies for being there for me! Sherry, V, T, Essi, Rae Rae, Jayne, Jess, Viv and Lila - my days wouldn't be nearly as fun without you in them. Your help and laughter is invaluable.

Also to my family, my parents for always telling me I could do whatever I wanted and to my husband Anthony & my son PMan for understanding when I need to take time away to write.

I love you all! xoxo

Trademarks Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

BMW: Bayerische Motoren Werke Aktiengesellschaft Corporation
Chevy: General Motors Corporation

Chapter One

David Sanders sat in the diner in the podunk town of Robinsville, ready to give up. His alpha had sent him to this rat hole of a town to find Anabella Pouge and bring her back to the pack. When Russell Masters gave an order, you followed it or risked the consequences.

Finding Anabella was like searching for a needle in a haystack. No one in town knew anything about her, and when he showed her picture, he caught a vague sense of recognition but nothing firm. He didn't know if his being a stranger factored into their response and if the town was circling the wagons to protect their own, or if they really didn't know anything about the woman.

David had been in town three days, and he knew he would have to call Russ this morning to inform him of his failure. He'd never let his alpha down before, and being the bearer of bad news left a bad taste in his mouth. Hopefully, Russ would tell him to come home, but David feared that would not be the case.

He couldn't stay in the town much longer. The urge to change to his wolf form rolled over him constantly, but David didn't want to risk transforming in this unfamiliar place. Frustration at his failure made the urge stronger, and each day he struggled more with the wolf within.

Where the hell could she be?

David waved the waitress over for a cup a coffee. He pulled his phone from his pocket to call Russ, then he caught a scent in the air—a new fragrance, fresh and musky all at once. It smelled like home and set off a hunger he'd never felt before. He turned, trying to locate the source of the essence.

Then he spotted her, and his body went on high alert.

The woman made his heart stop. Beautiful didn't even begin to describe her. The goddess—all curvy and lush—caused his libido to go haywire, making his cock swell and throb. Usually lust didn't hit him this hard or fast. It had to be the heavenly aroma coming from the woman. She looked to be close to six feet with long, flowing red hair. He wanted to

tangle his hands in it and pull her to him for a kiss. He tried to shake it off, but the urge became stronger, almost like a spell compelling him to go to her.

When she turned around, their eyes locked. He could easily drown in their liquid, green depths. She blinked, and the spell shattered until her tongue darted out to lick her luscious, red lips. He felt his cock swell even more.

Her face turned a beautiful shade of rose. David wondered if she could see the tent his dick created in his pants from looking at her. He got up from his table and took a step forward then hesitated when he noticed her backing away. She slipped out of the diner, but David's eyes never left her.

It appeared he'd found Anabella Pouge.

Bella felt someone staring at her. She clutched her wolf pendant and turned to look for the source. She spotted the man in the diner, and a wave of lust washed over her body. She couldn't believe he existed. Her dream man, the man who haunted and teased her, making her want what she knew she could never have. Her knees weakened, and she had to clutch the doorframe. Her face flushed, her body going up in flames from the heat of his stare.

The man had to be over six feet tall with black hair and black eyes. He looked like he'd been painted straight from her fantasy. He even had the scar by his right eye. She wanted to reach out and trace it like she had so many times in her dreams. He'd done things to her she'd never dared allow a living, breathing man to do. Her panties dampened as she thought about him and their night time romps. She had to leave now, because if she didn't, she would touch him.

She missed a step on her way out of the diner and fell on her ass.

The heat of embarrassment surged up her face, and she glanced around. Of course, her dream man saw her and walked straight towards her, stalking her with a look of lust in his eyes. She tried to scramble up, but the long skirt she wore tangled around her feet. At least she could say this was the first time she'd fallen head over heels for a guy. Bella covered her mouth with her hand to stop the hysterical laughter from bursting forth. She needed to get away.

She couldn't let him touch her, or she would have a headache for a week. Bella had learned the hard way that a touch from someone caused a weird echo in her head, as if she

merged with the other person's mind. It created a psychic pulse that stayed with her, sometimes causing her to black out. She'd never learned to block it, and that was why she stayed away from people. How stupid to think coming into town would be a good idea.

She managed to get to her feet as her dream man reached out to her, closing the distance. She inched away from him before he could touch her.

"Wait! Stop. I need to talk to you."

He sounded as wonderful in real life as he did in her dreams, but she couldn't stop now, no matter how much she wanted that honey-coated voice to wash over her. She needed to get away—fast. She turned and moved towards her car.

"Anabella...wait."

Those words stopped her in her tracks. How did he know her name? Who was this man?

She turned back around as dread pooled in the depths of her stomach. He rushed forward again, and Bella put out her hand.

"Stop! Don't move." Her voice held a slight tremor.

His presence loomed over her, larger than life.

"Who are you, and how do you know my name?" She lowered her arm to her side, relieved when he didn't make any further move towards her.

"I need you to come with me, Anabella. I'm not going to hurt you."

Bella backed away, shaking her head. This might be her dream man, but she didn't know him, and she had no plans of going anywhere with him. She watched movies, and being the dumb bimbo who merrily went along with the killer did not play into her plans.

What is that noise?

She cocked her head as the sound of tires screeching on the pavement caught up to her. She twisted towards it, and her skin began to crawl. A sense of evil washed over her, permeating her very being. She didn't have time to think about the sensation, because one minute she stood frozen with a car barrelling towards her and the next, dream man hoisted her over his shoulder and ran.

She heard the car's brakes squeal, and the sedan doubled back, headed their way. She tried to see if the Chevy still aimed for them, but the speed at which he ran forced her head to

flop around. He dodged between buildings, carrying her as if her height and weight meant nothing. She had to control herself because she had this weird urge to bite him to see how he tasted.

What the hell was wrong with her? Sure, he'd rescued her, but she still didn't know him from Adam. Bella hoped she woke up from this dream soon, because these things just didn't happen to her.

Neither of them had said a word since the tackle, not that she could talk in her position. And it'd all happened so fast, Bella hadn't notice immediately that she couldn't hear inside her dream man's head. No thoughts, no emotions, nothing. Zip, zilch, nada. The foreign feeling had her reeling.

He shoved her into a car. Her head spun, but at least the throb from her visit to town had slowed to a dull roar.

"Get down and don't move." Dream man threw the car into gear and raced off.

Bella didn't react fast enough to his command because her thoughts couldn't settle. Still flabbergasted, she could only look at him. At her hesitation, he shoved her down onto the floorboard, startling Bella out of her stupor.

"Who are you? How do you know who I am? *What is going on?*" With each word, Bella became more hysterical.

"My name is David. Keep still and quiet so I can concentrate on not killing us both."

Short and to the point. David. She thought for sure she'd wake up any minute. Bella curled into a ball on the floor, rocking back and forth to calm herself. She didn't think to fight or defy him. She wanted answers, and he could provide them. She had to give him some credit, he'd saved her life. But that would take him only so far. Everything happened for a reason, but that didn't mean she wouldn't question his motives. Her parents had always told her to believe yet question, and that was just what Bella intended to do.

David half expected a fight from Anabella. She surprised him when she didn't try jumping out of the car or attacking him. Well, she couldn't be too calm. She hadn't stopped rocking since he'd told her his name.

He glanced into his rear view mirror. *Fuck!* The car still trailed them.

What did this woman mean to his pack, and who wanted her dead? *Hell, what does she mean to me?*

His hard-on still raged. The situation should have caused his erection to wilt, but her scent kept him stirred up.

Goddamn it. He had to shake himself from his thoughts.

He rounded another corner and felt the car slipping a little. "Fuck!"

He didn't want to scare Anabella any further, but he didn't have a choice. He reached into his pocket for his mobile and threw it down to her.

"I need you to dial a number and give that back to me." David rattled off the digits and waited for her to hand him the phone.

It rang two times before someone answered.

"Zareb, I need a favour. I've got a tail I need to get rid of. Can you help, or am I too far away?"

A crash sounded behind them. David looked into the rear view mirror to see the car that had been following them turned over and smoking.

"Thanks, Zar. I owe you one." David closed the mobile with a snap.

"You can get up into the seat, Anabella. We're safe for now."

An hour later, Bella and David pulled into the car park of a hotel.

"I would like some answers, now. I think I've been patient long enough. You know who I am. Now tell me what is going on."

He hated the tremor in her voice, but he couldn't do anything about it now. Not until he had answers.

"Look, I'm going to get us a room," he said wearily. "Stay here. Don't try to run, because I will find you." He looked deep into her eyes, and she rewarded him with a look of strength he hadn't expected to see. He hoped his next words didn't drain her courage. "You can't run from me."

David left the car and went into the hotel. He walked up to the counter, worried she'd bolt. It didn't take him long to get a key. When he looked towards the vehicle, he relaxed. She sat there, waiting. He hurried to the BMW and opened her door.

"Let's go. I got us a room on the ground floor, and after I make a call, we'll sit and talk."

* * * *

Bella sat in a chair by the window so she faced David. "Who are you calling? Does this have anything to do with that Chevy in town?"

He continued to the chair by the room phone without answering.

"Why aren't you using your mobile?"

He gave her a look and dialled. Apparently, he'd meant it when he said he would talk to her after his call. She gave a deep sigh as he ignored her. She drummed her fingers on her chair as her calm slipped away.

Her head started to pound from the echoes of the people in the next room. She wanted to go home. Usually it took longer for the voices to affect her, but with the day she'd had, the wave of thoughts came at her faster than normal. At this rate, she would pass out before David got off the phone.

The pain usually started with a dull throb and escalated, depending on how many people surrounded her. Tonight, she couldn't even hear David over the roar in her head, and she really wanted to know the details of that phone call. She wanted to understand, but she couldn't even focus. She would give anything to block the sounds coming from the room next door. The voices echoed in her head, bouncing around like a marble game she couldn't win.

"That's my hot momma, come to daddy."

"Yes, baby, I like it there, baby. More, more. Harder, harder."

"Wait, no, no, no. Stop"

"I want more."

"No, stop."

"Right there. Can't this lug hurry up, already? Maybe I'll fake it. I need to get home to my husband. Come on, stud."

"Man this bitch is hot."

It flowed through her head with no end, one voice wrapping over the other.

Bella felt a tap her on her shoulder and jumped. She couldn't focus her gaze, and David looked fuzzy. She tried to reach up to his face. She wanted to wipe the frown away, but she couldn't even move her hands.

"Anabella, are you okay? I've been calling your name for a couple of minutes. What's going on?" David looked worried.

"I...can't...I..." Bella passed out.

Chapter Two

"What the fuck?" David moved to catch Anabella as she fell out of the chair. He carried her to the bed and laid her down gently.

He brushed the hair off her face. "Anabella, wake up."

She didn't budge. *What the hell?* He felt for a pulse and breathed a sigh of relief. He calmed down at the steady rhythm beating under his fingers. The hopelessness that crashed over him felt wrong. He shouldn't feel this attraction or need to protect.

Gently he nudged her again.

"Anabella, you're scaring me, here. You need to wake up."

Still nothing.

Fuck.

David pounded his fist on the bed, not that it helped anything.

He couldn't explain why his heart ached just looking at her. His emotions were out of control. Something was happening between them.

What will I do if she doesn't wake up?

The thought she could be his mate fluttered through his mind. He remembered the tone of his father's voice when he spoke of his mother and the ritual. A twinkle had appeared in his eyes when he'd told David the signs to look for in a woman destined to be his. Could this woman really be the one?

David glanced back down at Anabella. She appeared to be fine, just sleeping. They had a little time before they had to move again, so maybe he should leave her to her rest.

He could revel in her scent all night. He wanted to do more than let her sleep, though. He growled low in his throat and gave in to temptation as his control stretched past its limits. He buried his face where her neck met her shoulder. He tangled his hand in her glorious, red hair, brushing it aside to get closer to her scent, the very essence of Anabella. He inhaled deeply, nuzzling, and before he could stop himself, he licked her neck. A long, slow brush of

his tongue, flesh against flesh. He couldn't stop. He moved closer, almost on top of her, and started to nibble.

She tasted as wonderful as she smelled. David got the uncontrollable urge to bite. *Mine.*

Before he could give in to the urge to claim her, mark her as his, she began to stir. Her eyes popped open, and he found himself mesmerised.

She blinked up at him. "What-what's happening? I don't hear anything. It's so quiet."

Not what he expected. He'd figured her first question would be 'why the hell are you on top of me?' David rose from the bed and backed away from her.

"What happened? How did I get over here?"

She scrambled towards the headboard. Her eyes had a wild look in them, and he wanted to put more distance between them before he answered her, but a high-pitched sound stopped him in his tracks.

"Noooooooo."

Anabella's agonising scream of pain made him jump, and he rushed back to her.

"What's wrong?" He placed his fingers over the ones she clutched to her head.

She slowly let her hands fall and stared up at him with a look of amazement. "It's you. When you touch me, everything is silent. You're blocking it somehow with your touch."

She looked down to where his fingers remained over hers, and he followed her gaze.

"How can this be possible? *Should* this be possible?" she asked with awe. "What is it about you that brings silence to my world? I didn't think I would ever get it back."

David released her. What was she talking about?

She grabbed at David and slowly shook her head. "No, please..."

"What is it, Anabella?"

She drew in a deep breath and began talking.

"It's Bella. Please, call me Bella. I...I have a problem, and you seem to be the answer."

"I thought that was my line," David said with a crooked grin. He stroked her arms, as it seemed to be keeping her calm.

Bella gave him a slight smile, but her face looked tight. She took in another deep breath and he tensed, preparing for the unknown.

"I..." Her voice came out a little scratchy, and she cleared her throat. "I hear people...in my head." She rushed on, and David continued to stroke her arm. "I can hear the people in the next room. Their thoughts and feelings are all merging in my head, and I can't make them stop. But with you...I get nothing. I can't read you, and when you touch me, everything else goes away, and I hear nothing." Her voice held a tone of awe again. "I didn't think I would ever hear this blessed silence again..."

Bella looked at him. He knew she waited for his response, but he needed to tread carefully, he didn't want to jeopardise what could be between them. His revelation might be too much for her. He knew people like her existed, but she had no idea that his kind lived.

"Well...aren't you going to say anything?"

David took her hands in his and gave them a slight squeeze. "Bella, I believe you, and everything will be okay, I promise. I think I know what might be happening, but I don't want to scare *you*."

Scare me?

What could David have to share that would make her scared?

"This is what we're going to do. I'm going to hold your hand, and we're going to go over to the phone. I'm going to have you sit in my lap while I make the call. That way, I'm still touching you."

Whoa...sitting on his lap? She didn't think that was a good idea. *Nope, not at all.* Not when images of the two of them naked on the bed were front and centre in her mind. They were wrapped so tightly together she couldn't tell where he ended and she began. Bella wanted to groan at the graphic image, but she cleared her thoughts instead as he settled into the chair and pulled her down with him.

She looked around the room while David waited for his call to go through. What she saw made her pause.

That painting appeared in one of her dreams. Bella's thoughts became clear, and things began to click.

Oh. My. God. He's going to be my lover.

She should have realised when she saw David in town that her dream had not just been an erotic fantasy but a premonition. Her breath came in short pants as she remembered her vision.

She met his gaze and saw his eyes darken. He inhaled deeply like a dog catching a scent. Bella caught a smell as well, a wonderful aroma that seemed to be coming from him. This would happen, here, tonight. She couldn't deny it now. She leaned into him, edging closer to his lips, unable to stop herself from getting just one taste.

"David, is that you? David!" The shout coming from the phone broke the spell.

David looked away, but she could tell she still affected him. She could feel the evidence in his lap, and she wanted to touch him. She closed her eyes. She didn't want to read the passion in his gaze, or she would start kissing him again, and she wanted to concentrate on the phone call.

"Yeah...it's me, Russ. There's a problem with this connection. Let me call back in a minute."

David hung up, and Bella's eyes flew open.

"What? Why didn't you talk to the person on the other end?"

"I think you and I need to talk first."

"Umm...ok."

She didn't understand what was going on.

"Bella...I think I'm your anchor. I have so much to tell you and so little time. I'm going to ask a lot of you, and I don't deserve your trust."

His hand went to her cheek to caress her face. She leaned into his palm.

"Tell me, David. I can handle it."

His nostrils flared, and his pupils dilated. Her body responded to the look of lust gracing his face.

"I'm going to kiss you, Bella."

She could feel his breath caressing her. She closed her eyes again and waited. He growled as his mouth connected with hers.

Her dream lover put all of himself into their first kiss. She could have told him there would be more, but she wanted to enjoy this moment. His tongue caressed her lips, asking

for entrance. She couldn't deny him. The rest could be put on hold. She opened her mouth, wanting to savour every taste and texture. She suckled his tongue in welcome. Her dreams had nothing on real life.

She needed to face him. She turned and straddled him. She wanted more, she wanted it all.

David growled again as he nibbled on her lips.

She groaned low in her throat. "More...I need more," she panted.

David stood up with her in his arms. Bella's legs locked around his waist as he carried her to the bed. They fell, and he twisted so she landed on top. He settled between her thighs and buried his face in her neck.

"Bella, wait. We have to talk first. I have more to tell you before this can happen." He looked like he had some control back.

She needed to feel all of him. He couldn't stop now.

"David...I need...I need you, now...please."

"No, Bella. Not until you know everything."

Now he wanted to tell her everything, when they were just about to get to the good part. Bella exhaled and untangled herself from David. She knew they would be together tonight, so she might as well let him say what he needed to say.

"What, David? I know you're my anchor. That means you ground me, right? You help me deal with the outside world. Almost like a shield. What could be more important than that?" Her frustration bled through, but she couldn't help it.

"Brace yourself, because what I'm about to tell you may come as a shock. I'm a wolf."

"What...say that again?" Bella didn't know what to think. That hadn't been what she expected.

"Well, a werewolf, to be exact. My pack is born human, and our first shift comes with puberty."

"Umm...a wolf? Uhhh...mmmm." What could she say to that?

"I know this is a lot to take in, Bella, and I'm asking for a lot of faith here. Do you want to know more?"

Well...her desire had taken a back seat.

Maybe I should run now. This can't be true. Werewolves don't exist. They can't. Then again, he hadn't run when she revealed one of her secrets, so she could at least hear him out.

"Yes, please tell me more." Bella moved to the head of the bed, not losing contact with David's hands because she didn't need to hear anything but him.

"I've only heard the stories that my parents passed on. Our pack goes back to the original shifters from Africa. The medicine men created us centuries ago to protect a tribe against a great evil. There are rumours of two immortals that started it all. The tale goes on to say these friends were about to begin a great journey as protectors of their tribe. On the day of their holy transformation, they went on the ritual walk of purity and stumbled upon a relic in the desert. They brought the vessel back with them, and it caused havoc among the people, making changes that only a protector should receive. It caused a rift between the two friends, bringing war upon the people. I'm not one for history, so I'm sorry I can't tell you more. I do know that I'm here to protect you, not hurt you."

David paused in his story. Bella tried to wrap her head around all this information. Could she really believe him?

Wolves? It seemed too unbelievable.

"David...I...this is..." She couldn't form a coherent sentence. "It sounds too unreal...I-I don't know what to say."

"There's more. My alpha sent me to find you because—"

"Wait...alpha? Is that some kind of code?"

David gave a bark of laughter. "No. An alpha is the leader of our group, our pack. Sort of like a father figure."

"Okay...go on."

David continued, "My alpha, Russ, had a dream that you are the key to helping our pack. He sent me to find you and bring you back. He's supposed to explain more once we get to the house."

"Is that all? You're my anchor, a wolf and you are supposed to bring me to this Russ person. And if that car hadn't tried to run me over, how had you planned to take me back to this place?"

"I hadn't thought that all the way through. I had a hard enough time finding you. It really doesn't matter now. I have you, you're here, and we're heading back to the pack house."

"What if I don't want to go with you, David? Did you ever think about that? I have my own life. Granted it isn't much, but it's mine. And you expect me to just leave it behind to help you? And you say you're a werewolf. Well, I want proof. Show me."

Chapter Three

Well, shit.

"You want me to shift? Here? Now?"

David knew disbelief flooded his voice.

"Yes."

He really shouldn't be surprised she needed proof. Wolves had to be a big stretch even if she did have powers of her own.

"You know if I shift I won't be able to touch you, right?"

"Can't you just...I don't know, shift a little?"

He sighed. It was the least he could do. Who knew what would happen once they reached the house?

He had to concentrate. He didn't do a lot of partial shifting. He felt the pull and twitch of his muscle and bone transforming into a paw. He heard Bella's intake of breath, but he couldn't smell fear. He let his paw turn back into a hand and waited for her to respond.

"Oh my god, oh my god...this can't be real, but it is, I saw it, it's real. Ohmygod, Ohmygod."

She looked at him in shock, but he didn't see disgust in her eyes. David released the breath he hadn't known he held.

He used the hand that had changed into a paw to cup her face. "It's real, Bella. Can you handle it? Is it too much? Because there is something else I need to tell you, something very important to you and me."

"There's more? How can there possibly be more?"

David saw her try to calm herself. He wondered if she knew she stroked his hand as if to steady them both.

"Ok, hit me with it."

David had to smile. Anabella surprised him at every turn. She had so much strength. He really thought she would be hysterical now. In the short time they'd known each other, they had been through so much. He hoped she could handle this next part.

"We...umm...you and I..." He put his other hand on top of hers to stop the stroking.

Fuck. When had life gotten so complicated?

"We're mates." There. He'd said it.

Bella cocked her head to the side as if contemplating this new piece of information.

"That's why I stopped, Bella. If we have sex, I won't be able to fight the urge to claim you and make you mine."

"How...wha...I mean, how do you know that?"

"I felt the pull when I first recognised you by your scent in town."

"Right...my scent?"

David could hear the disbelief threading back into her voice.

"I have a strong sense of smell, Bella," he said with a grin. "But it isn't just how you smell, it's how your scent affects me. My heart is pounding so hard it's as if it wants to come out of my chest and give itself to you. And I have this uncontrollable urge to protect you and make you mine in all ways possible. To bite you." David drew the last part of his statement out, and he could tell it had the result he wanted. The pulse in the base of her neck jumped at the idea.

She leaned in as if waiting for him to do it right then, and he took that as her acceptance of what would happen. He licked her throat, then his canines extended and sank in. Bella gasped and arched into him. He released the mating fluid and backed off when his canines retracted. He licked her throat again to close the wound.

"You are mine in mind." He spoke softly, caressing her with his words.

He sat up and tugged on Bella's shirt. "Too many clothes."

He couldn't control his hands. The need to feel her overrode any idea of slow and gentle. He exposed her breasts, wrapped in a silky bra. He ripped it off Bella's body. She gasped, but David couldn't stop. He needed to claim her as his.

He leaned down and licked her nipple before he sucked the rosy tip into his mouth. She threw her head back, and David moved to her other breast and suckled. When he could

stand it no more, he licked the spot by her heart, bared his teeth and sank them into her flesh, releasing more of the mating fluid. Heaven, her taste was pure heaven and so intoxicating. He licked his mark closed and whispered "You are mine in heart."

He pushed her back on the bed so he could pull her skirt and underwear off then threw them to floor along with her shoes. He wanted to lick and nibble every bit of her flesh. He growled again, low in his throat, and removed his clothes. He wanted to feel every inch of her, but first he needed to complete the mating ritual.

He leaned back down and licked her belly. He felt her shiver against his tongue as he kissed his way down to her very essence. He buried his face in her heat, inhaling her scent. He nuzzled his way to where her thighs connected to her female core and once again bared his teeth and sank them into her flesh. "You are mine in body," he whispered as the last of the mating fluid flowed into her. He closed the wound.

One more step and Bella was his.

He crawled back up her body for a kiss. Slow and deep, he filled it with all the love and passion he felt for this woman, this virtual stranger he couldn't get enough of. His lips released hers, and he whispered in Bella's ear, "You are now mine in mind, heart and body forever more."

And with those words he joined their bodies, making them one. Bella tensed, and David froze when he felt the slight barrier in his way.

Warmth spread through his body when he realised Bella had given him her virginity. As their hearts and souls joined, the animal urges rushed over him. He forced himself to slow down. He didn't want to hurt her.

"Bella, what...oh shit. I'm so sorry. Baby, if I'd known..." He pulled away, but Bella wrapped her legs around his waist.

"Are you sure?"

She nodded and pulled him down for a kiss.

He'd never lost control with a woman before. Of course, he'd heard tales from the other men in his pack that when you found your mate control was no longer yours to have but hers to take. He sank into Bella, trying to take things slowly, but she raised her hips to meet his, and just like that, she took his control. He pumped faster and faster, reaching for climax with his mate. He'd never felt as whole as he did in this moment.

"Yes. *David!* Yesss," Bella moaned.

He could feel her inner muscles clenching, stroking his cock as though she couldn't get enough.

"More, David...I feel, just...more, please."

David growled as he nuzzled, licked and nibbled on her neck, trying to bring her closer to the edge.

"David," she howled.

Her scream pushed him over the edge, and he had to catch himself before he collapsed on top of her. He rolled them over so he didn't crush her with his weight. He stroked his hands down Bella's back as she continued to shake.

He lifted her face and framed it with his hands. He gave her a gentle kiss. "I can't say all of the things I feel for you right now. My emotions are so out of control, and words fail me." He pulled her back down and cradled her in his arms as they drifted to sleep.

Chapter Four

Bella woke from the best night she'd had in weeks. She stretched and felt a wonderful ache all over. She reached out and touched the area next to her but only felt the warm spot where David had slept.

She bolted upright and clutched the sheet to her chest only to see him sitting beside her. He'd put on his jeans but left his shirt off. He looked so lickable.

She hadn't gotten to play much last night and hoped to make up for it this morning.

He stared at her with a serious look in his eyes. It took a moment, but she noticed the voices were gone and he wasn't touching her. She concentrated and felt a shield wrap around her. It slipped a bit when she tried to manipulate it, and she could hear the voices from the next room. She slammed it shut without much effort.

How did she have a shield now when she could never develop one before? Yesterday, she'd needed his touch. Why not today?

"There's something else, something important we didn't talk about last night. I'm sorry, Bella. I lost control. Fuck, this is hard." He looked so serious.

Bella's stomach started to sour as uncertainty settled in her bones. Her mind raced, and she wished he would get on with it and tell her.

"What is it, David? I think you can say it. How bad can it be?"

"You're one of us, now."

That gave Bella a start. Her dream hadn't revealed that.

"I'm one of you? What does that mean? I'm not a wolf, I'm human. I may have special gifts, but I'm *not* a wolf!"

David edged closer to her, but she backed away from him. "When I performed the ritual, it changed you. You'll start to feel the urge to change soon, and we need to get back to the pack before that happens. It won't be easy, and we'll need the open space so you'll have room to run once you assume your wolf form."

She couldn't say anything, she couldn't even think. He'd started talking again, and she focussed on his words.

"When we made love last night, I performed the mating ritual. I bit you three times and recited the words that made us one. First, I bit you at the throat and said 'You are mine, in mind'."

David reached over and caressed her throat. Bella leaned into him then jerked back.

"Then I bit you here," David touched above her breast by her heart, "and said, 'You are mine, in heart'. And last, I bit you here," David moved his hand down to where her thigh connected to her core, "and I said 'You are mine, in body. Then I pierced you with my cock and said, 'You are now mine, in mind, heart and body forever more.' That completed the ritual and now you are *mine*." David said the last with a low growl.

Bella jumped off the bed, wrapped the sheet about her and rushed into the bathroom. She needed to see his marks.

She turned to look at him. "Is this why I'm blocked, now? Why I can't hear other people even if you aren't touching me?"

"Bella, talk to me. This is big, and I fucked it up."

"First, answer me."

"I think so, Bella." He walked over to stand before her. "We'll have to find out together, because I'm just as new to this as you are. We're connected. I felt it before the ritual, and now we're tied together even more because of it. I can feel you here," he took her hand and placed it on his chest, "in my heart and in my soul." He took her other hand and placed it over her heart. "Can you feel them beating as one?"

Bella knew she should be furious, but she found it hard to stay angry, especially when he said things like that. Yesterday, she only had to worry about dreams and other people's thoughts. Now she had to worry about an inner beastie coming out to play.

"Yes...I'm angry, David, but there's nothing that can be done about it now, is there? Is it going to take me a while to come to terms with the fact I'm a wolf? Yes. I know we're connected and meant to be together. I think that's why I'm not yelling and screaming. I'm not going to waste my energy on something that can't be changed. That's life. Sometimes your choices are taken away from you, and you either deal or die, and I would much rather focus on dealing."

She paused for a minute. She still felt nervous, but she could feel *him*. They were one, and if she could accept his turning her into a wolf, he'd better be able to handle her dreams.

Time to let him know.

"Sometimes my dreams become reality. You appeared in my dreams for the first time the year I turned eighteen." She rushed the words together.

She glanced up at his face for his reaction. He looked a little startled.

"Me? What did you dream, Bella?"

"Let me start at the beginning. On my eighteenth birthday, I dreamed my parents died in a crash. Their car rolled off an embankment, trapping them inside, and caught fire. Some nights I would wake up hearing their screams as they tried to get out of the vehicle. I always stood off to the side in the dream, watching it happen as if in slow motion, but I couldn't do anything. I had the dreams for a few months, then it happened, and they were gone. I did nothing to stop it." Bella kept her voice matter-of-fact.

"Hon, you didn't know, you couldn't have known."

"The dreams of you started a few months after my parents died. In them, you always held onto me. I almost couldn't wait to sleep each night. Then my powers grew. They forced me to find somewhere away from people, because suddenly I could hear them. But you...you stayed with me.

"I recognised you when I saw you yesterday. That's one of the reasons why I bolted. Of course, I never dreamed I would become a wolf." Bella gave a slight shake of her head. She still had a hard time believing she would turn furry.

Bella felt a hand touch her face. She lifted her head to look at David. His lips captured hers. Mouths met and locked in a duel of tongues. It seemed as if neither of them could get enough, and Bella's heart ached. She felt his acceptance of her with every lick and nibble.

She dropped the sheet she held and wrapped herself around David, accepting him just as he accepted her. Two halves now one.

David broke the kiss with a groan and placed his forehead against hers, trying to catch his breath.

"What you do to me, Bella should be illegal. I can't control myself around you. One touch, and I lose all thought except getting my hands on you. I want to be inside you so bad right now, I hurt. Do you know how sexy it is to know I starred in your dreams?"

David leaned back down for another kiss and ravaged Bella's lips. He went a little crazy when she sucked his tongue into her mouth. He pushed her back against the wall, felt her shiver, and he wanted more. He needed to get his jeans off before he had a permanent mark from his zipper. His hands met hers at the waist of his pants. He moved his so she could have full access, but his mobile rang.

"Shit!" David lifted his head to look at Bella. "Who the fuck could be calling *now*?"

He walked towards the phone. "Hello? Yes, okay. All *right*, I hear you!"

David shut the instrument and went back to where Bella stood. She'd grabbed the blanket to cover up herself. He wanted to take it away and drive himself into her until she cried out in release, but they didn't have time. He picked up her clothes and handed them to her with regret.

"I'm sorry, Bella. That was Russ, and he told me the person who tried to run you over is headed here. We've got to go. Now." He pulled her to him for a quick, rough kiss before he backed away.

He watched her get dressed, wishing the clothes were coming off and not going on, when he realised she would have to go braless. The drive to the house would be pure hell. He drew in a breath and forced himself to turn away from her before he took her there and then.

Minutes after the call, David accelerated out of the parking lot, full speed. Bella kept stealing glances at him under her lashes, and he could smell her desire. His cock ached. He shifted in his seat but couldn't find comfort.

He heard a click and glanced over at Bella.

"What are you doing?"

He looked back at the road, but she didn't speak.

What the hell is she up to?

She slid closer to him and lay down so her head rested in his lap and moved her hands to unzip his jeans. He lifted a little, and she freed his cock. He couldn't contain his moan. She

wrapped her hands around his erection and slid them up and down. She started at the base and traced her way to the tip. She did it again, tip to base, back and forth, up and down. He wanted to tangle his hands in her hair but needed both of them on the wheel. His knuckles turned white as he gripped it tighter.

She stopped licking and nibbled her way down to his balls, stroking them too, rolling them around with her tongue. She moaned, causing a wonderful vibration, and David answered her with a groan of his own. She swirled her lips around the head of his cock. She sucked it, then she plunged down and up, again and again.

David raised his hips up, fucking her mouth. He tensed and spilled his seed, clutching the wheel and trying to keep the car from swerving. As he softened, she gave him one last nibble. Then she put him back into his pants, zipped him up, scooted away from his lap and rose to sit beside him once more. She snuggled against him, and he took one hand off the wheel and curled it around her, pulling her as close to him as she could get. She rested her head on his shoulder.

David kissed her forehead. "Thank you. That was great. Not necessary but much appreciated."

Bella smiled and closed her eyes.

* * * *

David pulled up the car to the pack house and stopped in the drive by the front door as Bella looked up.

Her eyes widened as she took in the place. "Wow."

"Welcome back to the living, sleeping beauty."

She turned her face up to his, and he leaned down to brush his mouth against hers as if he'd been doing it forever, it felt so natural. Bella returned the kiss, but before it got out of hand, David heard footsteps coming up to the car. He broke away and turned to see Russ knocking on the window.

"Stay here for a minute, sweets, and I'll introduce you to our Alpha."

David didn't give Russ time to say anything once he got out of the car.

"I hope you can explain why I went on a mission for you and ended up with a mate. What is going on, and why is Bella so damn important to you?"

"Patience, David. Let's get the two of you inside, and I'll tell you what I know. I would really like to be introduced to the new member of our family." Russ walked back into the house.

Russ didn't seem surprised at all that David and Bella had mated. David had the answer to one of his questions. Russ had known when he sent David to chase after Bella that she would come back as his.

That fucker. He could have given me some kind of warning.

He shook his head and went to Bella's side of the car to help her out.

"We'll go inside and see what kind of answers we can get out of Russ."

Bella stepped out, looked around, and the colour drained from her face.

She slid to the ground in a faint.

"What the hell!" David scooped her up in his arms and hurried into the house. He went straight to the den and put Bella down on the couch.

"Honey...I need you to wake up. Sweets, you're starting to scare me, here."

She stirred then bolted up from where she lay. David sat down and pulled her onto his lap.

"What is it? Why did you pass out? It isn't the change, is it? Do you feel the need to shift? Talk to me."

"No...no, that's not it. It's just...I've been here before in my dreams. The one that made me go into town where we met. This house, this property is going to burn, and I think I'm going to be trapped here. I thought it happened in a town, but I was wrong. This compound is going to burn."

Bella cuddled into David's arms. He could feel her shaking and squeezed her tight, offering her the comfort and warmth of his body. She put her head on his shoulder, and he stroked her hair to help her calm down.

"I was afraid of this."

David looked up at Russ' words.

"I'm Russ, and you must be Bella. From what I've overheard, we don't have much time." He approached David and Bella and held out his hand.

"What's going on here, Russ? I don't understand any of this." David's frustration showed through his voice.

Bella's presence calmed him, though. He felt her hands running up and down his arm. He intertwined his fingers with hers. He kissed her palm and placed their hands on his thigh.

"The Ancients sent me a vision that showed three possible outcomes. One saw Bella at her house, dead, and another placed her here in a fire. The third option showed the two of you mated and here at the house. So I sent you to get Bella.

"The second outcome could still come to pass, but I'm hoping with Bella here we can figure out together how to avoid that. I think I know who is responsible. But I don't have proof, and until I do, the Ancients are lost to me. If I can prove that Bastian Donovan is behind this, the Ancients will take care of him because he's their rogue. Somehow he is blocking them, but if I show them he is indeed bent on destroying us, he becomes their problem, not just ours."

"So my fire vision was meant to bring me into town so I could meet up with David? Do you know why he anchored me and why, after he turned me, I got control of my power? And when am I going to turn? Will it hurt? Do I have to stay here? What about my house?"

Russ held up his hand to stop Bella's questions. He chuckled and shook his head.

"You're very inquisitive, aren't you, Anabella. I'll see what I can answer. Yes, your vision was meant to lead you to David all along. I helped by sending David on his mission to find you. I always believed you and David were destined to be mates, and that's why he anchored you. When the two of you mated and you became one of us, part of David's very essence transferred to you, helping you build a wall to protect yourself. With time and practice, I can help you control your wall, and you will finally be able to handle your gift and link to the Ancients.

"You should start to feel the change coming on soon. It will hurt the first time and will continue to feel a little uncomfortable the next few times after that. At the full moon, the urge to shift to your wolf form will be at its strongest. We try to stay on the compound during that time so it's safer for everyone. As for your housing question, that's between you and David. I hope you will discuss it with me before any decision is made, though. With that, I'll leave the

two of you to get settled. After dinner tonight, we'll talk some more and see if we can figure out how to stop Bastian. I'm going to have to bring the rest of the pack up to speed as well, because time is running out."

Russ left, and David stood up, helping Bella off the couch.

"Come on, Bella, I'll show you to our room. We have a few hours before dinner." He wiggled his eyebrows and led Bella out of the den and up the stairs.

She gave a little nervous giggle and followed him to his room.

* * * *

Bella would follow David anywhere, and her heart skipped a beat as she realised how much he meant to her. So much had happened, it felt like a lifetime had passed between the two of them, not just a day.

They reached David's room at the top of the stairs just as a door opened down the hall, revealing the biggest guy Bella had ever seen. He had muscles from head to foot. This man's face looked rugged and handsome in a different way than David's.

David had stopped as well and growled low in his throat as the fellow came closer.

"Calm down, Sparky. I'm going downstairs. I'm not here to take your woman."

David continued to rumble until Bella stepped closer and wrapped her arms around his back, hugging him tight. He shook his head and looked at the man, then he pulled Bella around until she settled in front of him. He snuggled her closer. His arms provided her safety.

"Max, this is Bella, my mate." It came out as more of a snarl than spoken words.

Bella wondered what was wrong with David. She leaned back into him, offering what comfort she could.

Max nodded his head towards Bella but didn't approach her. She thought it a little weird the man didn't offer his hand by way of greeting, but Max just walked around them, keeping his distance as he continued towards the stairs.

"See you two at dinner." Max turned around and gave Bella a wink before loping down the steps.

David bellowed again, pulled Bella inside his room and shut the door. He pushed her against the wall and put his hands under her shirt to stroke her breasts. He went straight for her nipples, pinching and pulling as he attacked her neck, licking his mark.

Bella groaned low in her throat at the sensations he caused. He growled and nibbled at the spot. She felt his teeth brushing against her throat as he bit her, making her moan again. A rush of lust flowed through her body, and her panties dampened.

She reached for David's shirt and ripped it off him, she couldn't get to his skin fast enough. She felt this savage need to be one with him. He must have felt the same way, because he ripped her shirt open to get better access to her breasts. She shrugged out of the garment, letting it drift to the floor behind her. This wasn't going to be gentle, but Bella didn't need gentle. She needed David, and she needed him now.

She groaned again when she felt David's wet mouth pulling on her nipple. He suckled one breast while kneading the other, as if he couldn't get enough of her. She reached for his pants and fumbled with his snap and zipper, then sighed when they gave way under her hands.

She pushed them down, and he helped by wiggling out of them. He stepped free and shoved Bella's skirt down her legs. Both naked, now, David lifted her up. She wrapped her legs around his waist as he impaled her with his shaft. They both groaned at the same time. She felt full and wonderful. She held on as he pounded into her, hard and fast, riding to meet him with each thrust. She couldn't get enough of this man. He pulsed and throbbed inside her, his cock seeming to grow with each thrust. But she still needed something more.

"Faster, David...more...I need...more, more David, harder...now, now."

David granted her wish, and her head hit the wall behind her with the force of his movement.

"*David!*" She reached the edge, and he pushed her over with his next thrust as he screamed her name. He rested his head on her heaving chest, and they both panted, out of breath.

Bella was awed by the emotion that washed over her. In this moment, she belonged to David and he to her.

"Seeing Max look at you made me lose control. I needed to mark you as mine. It's the wolf in me. You're *mine*, Bella, and I want everyone to know it," he ended with a growl.

“Shhh, David. It’s okay. Don’t apologise.” Bella untangled her legs from his waist, and he helped her rest her feet on the floor. She pushed him back towards the bed until his knees hit the edge, then gave him a little shove so he fell.

“When’s dinner? Do we have time for a nap before we go down?”

“It won’t be for a little while, sweets. We have time. Come here and close your eyes.”

Bella did just that.

As she drifted into sleep, one of her life dreams came to her, and she wasn’t prepared for what she saw.

Chapter Five

"Boss, they made it to the compound before I could intercept them. What do you want me to do now?" Richard pulled up outside the pack house and watched the front door. He saw a flutter out of the corner of his eye and turned. Russ, the pack alpha, stared out at him from a ground floor window. Richard forced himself to pay attention to the man on the other end of the phone.

"Return here, and we'll plan the next move. Russ has the dwelling blocked from me with some sort of magic. We're going to have to work out a way to destroy the shield so we can get in there and torch the place. I want them all trapped in there and dead. We're going to have to hit the main residence and all the smaller ones on the land at once, and that's going to take something powerful. I might have to call on Dmitri."

Richard shivered at the sound of Dmitri's name. Something about the man caused the hair on the back of his neck to stand on end. No one really knew the man's age, but Richard knew he'd been around for centuries. His power surpassed anything Richard could command. Dmitri radiated strength, and it rolled off him, drawing lesser magic users to him.

"I'll be there shortly, boss." Richard shut his mobile and headed for home.

Dmitri wasn't someone to call on lightly. Most of the people on Mr. Donavan's staff were scared of Richard, but Dmitri petrified them. Dmitri had his own beef with the wolves, and usually, Mr. Donavan wouldn't think of calling on him. But since his daughter's conversion and his break with the Ancients, Mr. Donavan had changed, and he expected his entire staff to adapt with him.

The ones who balked lay six feet under, most by Richard's hand. Richard already had a dark mark on his soul and would follow Mr. Donavan anywhere. He'd been on the verge of death, and Mr. Donavan had saved him, making him into the monster others ran from. Richard didn't want to disappoint Mr. Donavan, but he had a bad feeling about messing with the pack. The Ancients protected them, and Richard didn't want to tangle with them, but he would if that was what the boss wanted.

Richard returned to Mr. Donavan.

* * * *

"Bella...wake up, Bella. It's a dream, just a dream."

Bella thrashed about like something chased her. Her screaming tapered off as she bolted upright in bed. Tears streamed down her cheeks.

David brushed them away and gathered her into his arms. "Shhh, sweets, it's okay. I'm here for you, baby. Can you tell me about it?"

She tried to get a hold of herself. Thankfully, David held her. Usually, she only had herself for comfort when the visions hit. She leaned into him and let him hold her for a couple of minutes before telling him about her dream. They all had to know.

"We sat down for dinner. A big group of us, but I only recognised you, Russ and Max. One minute we were eating, the next we were screaming. The cries... Oh God, David. The intensity of the smoke burnt my eyes, and I shrieked. I-I couldn't stop the fire, and you burned in front of me. I wailed louder, then I felt the flames singe my skin and...then I woke up. David, it feels like that second outcome Russ foresaw is inevitable."

She rested her head in the crook of his shoulder as he stroked her back. She tried to take deep, calming breaths, but she could still smell the horror from her dream.

"We can beat this. Bella, we *will* beat this. I want forever with you. A few days isn't enough, and I'm not letting you go, now. We need to tell Russ about your nightmare, then we'll figure out what we need to do to stop your dream from becoming real."

"I know Russ wants us to meet for dinner so he can tell the pack about the threat, but maybe we shouldn't have the dinners for a while. That could be how we stop the fires."

"Russ would never agree to that, babe. He wouldn't want the threat to cause us to change our behaviour, because that would be giving in, and that's one thing a wolf doesn't do—give in."

Bella felt a cramp work its way from her belly down to her legs. She gasped and tightened her hold on David.

"Bella, what is it? You're not going to faint again, are you?"

She shook her head. The cramp took her breath away. Her legs burnt, fire licking its way up and down, but this didn't come from her dream. It felt different, something didn't feel right. She looked wildly towards David.

"What's happening to me?"

Another cramp stabbed her arms, locking them around David in an odd kind of embrace.

"You're going to change, aren't you? It's time. We need to get you outside. Fast." He wrapped a blanket around her, pulled his pants on and picked her up. He rushed down the stairs.

Bella gasped in pain. The burning took over her whole body. She ached all over and could feel the cramping sensation in every bone. The pain wouldn't let up, and she needed to pass out, to seek the oblivion that waited for her on the other side. It couldn't happen fast enough. She felt the sensation of slipping under, heeding the call of the darkness, when fresh air brushed against her.

David tried to get her attention, but she couldn't focus. He grabbed her face between his hands, forcing her to look at him. He said her name, but she still couldn't make out his words.

Suddenly, a feeling of warmth flooded her body. A sense of peace settled over her. The agony existed, but something pushed it to the back of her mind. She stared at David with awe, wondering how he eased her pain with his touch. She closed her eyes for a second to help focus and, when she opened them again, David looked down at her.

"Sweets, you *have* to listen to me. Can you hear me? Baby...are you listening?"

Bella gave a little nod.

"You can't fight this. The more you fight, the more you're going to hurt. I need you to focus on me. Are you focussing? Pay attention, because I'm going to shift, baby, and I need all of your attention on me. Sometimes it helps if you can see how the change goes for someone else."

A huge wolf slipped into her field of vision, close to the two of them. Bella shrank back, but a thought came into her head.

"It's me, Bella. It's Russ. I'm here to help make your first time easier. I know it hurts, but hopefully, we can get you changed quickly. Listen to what David tells you –"

Bella interrupted Russ by gently caressing his mind. She felt like a tiny butterfly asking for entrance.

"But...the pain is almost gone. I feel it, but it's like it has been pushed back."

Bella could sense Russ sending a thought to David. She briefly wondered if they knew she could hear them.

"You're completely connected with her. You need to pull back. You can't take on her pain. This has never happened before, and we don't know what the consequences could be for either of you. Pull back, now!"

Russ' voice echoed in her head, and she wondered if it did the same for David.

"I can't pull back, Russ, because I don't know what's going on. I can feel her in my head, but I'm not doing anything. I'm going to try something and see if it works."

Bella felt Russ leave her thoughts, and David appeared stronger in her head. She saw the figure of herself and watched as she changed. It looked so easy when David showed it to her, but she had no idea how she could manage it. Focussing on the image David showed her seemed to help. She felt a shift and concentrated harder.

Focus, focus, focus.

She closed her eyes and let herself go. When she next opened them, everything seemed crisp. The pain had disappeared. She went to stand and noticed her form had changed.

Panic surged through her. Whimpering, she backed away from the two wolves in front of her. In her panic, she searched for David, but she couldn't see him anywhere. She put her muzzle in the air to sniff for him, letting her wolf take over. Her nose led her to the beast in front of her. Confusion raged through her, until she remembered David could shift, too. He must have changed when she did. Calm settled over her. He looked magnificent in his wolf form, huge with black fur and eyes.

Wait...I'm thinking...I'm still me.

Bella heard a chuckle in her head.

"Of course you're still you, Bella. We may be wolves, but we have human souls. Why don't we go for a run, and you can test out your new legs."

Bella went over to nuzzle David, glad they could communicate while in wolf form. She heard a bark and glanced over to see the animal that was Russ. He barked again and ran off. Turning her attention back to David, Bella continued to nuzzle him. Her life had changed so much in such a short time, she had to keep reminding herself this was really happening to her.

"Stop thinking, Bella. Feel. Let's run." David raced off into the wood.

Bella chased after him, feeling free for the first time in her life.

* * * *

David led Bella to a creek on the outskirts of the pack property, a beautiful, secluded spot where they could be alone. He stopped and turned, waiting for her to catch up. She looked as beautiful in wolf form as she did in human form, sleek and perfect with fur red like a fox. Nobody could mistake her for an ordinary wolf.

When Bella was close enough to touch, he turned back to human form. She stopped and cocked her head as if asking, 'what are you doing?'

David ran his hands along her flanks.

"It's time to try to change back. It won't be as painful as shifting into your wolf. Picture yourself in your true form. See yourself becoming human."

"But I feel so free, David. I don't know if I want to change back."

David took Bella's muzzle in his hands, forcing her to look at him.

"Bella, you will always be free with me no matter what form you're in. Don't you understand we're two parts of a whole? Together, we can do anything. I will always be here to protect you."

Bella transformed as if she had been doing it all her life and lay beside David. Pride at his mate rushed over him as she turned to wrap her arms around him and snuggled close.

"I'd almost lost hope, David. I didn't think I would ever be close to another human again. Sometimes, I would cry myself to sleep, playing the 'what if' game. What if I were normal? What if my parents hadn't died? What if I could have saved them? What if I never found anyone of my own? What if I could never touch another person again? What if—"

"Shhh, sweets. You don't have to worry about that any more. We're your family, now."

He lifted her face to his own and lightly brushed his lips over hers. She opened to allow him access. He swept his tongue over her mouth before plunging inside, his tongue duelling with hers.

Bella moved her hands down his body, reaching for his hot, throbbing cock. He cupped her breasts, tugging and pinching her rosy red nipples until she moaned. He wanted to thrust inside her more than anything, but he wanted to go slowly.

He released her lips and nibbled at her neck, sucking and licking his way to her breast. He had to taste her. He licked around her nipple before sucking it deep into his mouth. She threw her head back and moaned once again.

A noise from the distance wove its way into David's play. He stopped to get a better idea of where the sound came from.

"David...wha—"

"Shhh. I heard something," David whispered as he sat up and placed himself between Bella and the forest.

She pressed herself to his back.

"Change, Bella. *Now!* Go back to the house. I'll meet you there as soon as I can." He rushed into the woods to face the danger head on.

Chapter Six

Bella heard the panic in David's voice and rushed to change. It went smoother this time with only a twinge or two.

She didn't want to leave him, but she trusted him with her life and didn't want to waste any time that could cause him harm. She needed to return and warn Russ--though of what, she didn't know. She made it back to the compound in record time.

Bella searched for Russ with her mind, but she felt some sort of block. She guessed she would have to get close enough for him to see her, and that might be problematic, considering she couldn't open the door in wolf form. She really didn't want to walk into the house wearing nothing, but she didn't have another option. She focussed like David had taught her and quickly resumed her human form.

She went to open the door when the knob flew out of her hand. Her face flamed red when she saw Max standing there. His eyes roamed over her body, resting on her breasts. Her nipples pebbled, and she didn't know whether the cold or his stare caused it.

"Where's Sparky? He shouldn't leave you outside this way. It's not safe to roam around here naked. Someone might get hurt." Max spoke to her chest. Never once did his gaze travel to her eyes.

Bella cleared her throat, hoping to direct his attention to her face. She needed to get over her discomfort so she could help David. "David heard something in the woods. He stayed there to investigate on his own, and I'm worried."

Max didn't say a word. He turned around and walked back into the house, taking off his shirt and tossing it back to Bella as he strode towards Russ' office.

"Put this on, and we'll go talk to Russ."

Bella didn't complain. She put the shirt on as fast as she could.

Max didn't even bother with knocking on the closed door. He threw it open, and on the other side, Russ stood with a man who looked like an ebony god. They had their heads

together and seemed to be in the middle of a serious discussion. Russ glanced up with an annoyed look on his face until his gaze travelled past Max to Bella.

“What’s happened?”

A racket sounded behind Bella, and Max drew her into the office, stepping behind her, putting himself in the path of whatever charged up the hallway. David appeared, and he didn’t look happy as he strode through the house wearing only his pants. He must have found his clothes outside on the way in. Bella breathed a sigh of relief, so happy that David hadn’t been hurt.

Then she heard the growl. At first, she didn’t understand what had him upset, until she saw David throw himself at Max. She started to rush forward, but she felt a hand on her arm.

“You’d best stay out of it. You have Max’s scent from his shirt all over you, and David has to assert his authority. Your getting in the middle is not a good idea. Go upstairs and take a shower. Make sure you leave Max’s shirt behind, or this will only get worse.”

“But...it’s only a shirt. I don’t understand what the big deal is. Would he rather I be standing here naked?”

“He would rather you not be covered in another man’s scent. It’s a wolf thing. You’d better get used to it and make sure you keep some clothes around so this doesn’t happen again.”

“But...I—”

“It will be okay. This is new to you, but you’ll get the hang of it. Now, go upstairs. There is another door over there. I’ll send David up after we’ve had a chat.”

During their conversation, David and Max had continued trading blows back and forth. Bella really didn’t want to leave, but Russ didn’t give her any choice in the matter, so she turned and went up to the room she shared with David.

* * * *

“Enough!”

Both men stopped fighting and turned to their alpha.

“David, explain yourself.”

“He touched her, and he —”

“Stop right there, David. We both know you wouldn’t have wanted Bella standing here naked. You sent her back in a panic, and Max happened on her. He offered his shirt. Do we need to continue this conversation, or are you going to tell us why you sent your mate back here alone?”

David looked at Max, and Max winked. David growled low in his throat and took a step towards him.

“That will be enough, Max. We’ll see you at dinner in half an hour.”

“Next time, you should aim a little lower, Sparky. You hit like a girl.” With a chuckle, Max walked out of the room, leaving a growling David behind.

“David.”

David couldn’t ignore the warning in Russ’ tone. He lowered his head and turned back towards him.

“Now, tell me what happened.”

“Bella and I had stopped by the creek, when I heard someone in the woods. I didn’t like the way it smelled, so I sent her back here and went to investigate. I couldn’t reach the person, but they were there—and then the scent disappeared. I can’t explain it, Russ. Someone or something watched us from the woods.”

“It had to be one of Bastian’s men or his new friend, Dmitri. Zareb and I were discussing the alliance between the two before this little drama. The only explanation I can come up with for the scent disappearing is Dmitri or one of the men being masked with magic. Zareb is more familiar with Dmitri than I am, but we need to talk about it and come up with a plan. We’re going to have to be more careful and stick close to the house. We’ll have a meeting before we eat. I’ll gather the others in the dining room. Why don’t you go upstairs and calm down? I’ll see you in a few. And David, leave the attitude. I know your mating is new, but we have enough to worry about without you attacking Max every few minutes.”

Russ turned back to Zareb, effectively dismissing David.

When David reached his room, he heard the shower running and saw Max's shirt on the floor. With a growl, he quickly threw the garment in the trash and went into the bathroom to claim Bella. He needed to finish what they'd started by the creek.

She gasped when he opened the curtain then grinned when she saw him standing there in all his glory, hard and wanting her. She stepped back, allowing him to enter.

He shoved her against the shower wall and grabbed her hips, lifting her. She wrapped her legs around his waist, and he entered her in one swift thrust. She moaned, and he slammed himself into her body, showing her no mercy, chanting, "Mine, mine, mine," with each thrust. He pounded faster and faster. When he sensed her need to come, he stopped, not allowing her climax.

"Not yet, my pretty." He leaned his forehead on hers to catch his breath and caressed her cheek.

She whimpered when he allowed himself to slip out of her, but he needed to show his dominance over her. He pushed on her shoulder, forcing her to kneel in the shower. He almost lost it when she blinked up at him, but his wolf demanded this. Another man had touched his woman, no matter how innocent or helpful the gesture had been.

"Suck me, Bella."

His inner beast howled when she followed his command and took him between her lips. She worked her magic, tightening her mouth around his cock. Her head bobbed between his legs in a frantic pace.

David couldn't take much more. He hauled her up his body and entered her again. There was no stopping him now. The need to release his seed inside her was strong. He thrust relentlessly, getting closer to the edge.

Bella howled her release at the same time as David once again cried out, "Mine!"

"I am yours. You know that, don't you, David? I became yours the first time I dreamed of you, and I was even more yours when you saved me from myself."

"I know, sweets. I lost control when Max got near you. Hell, I'd do the same with any man. All I want to do is claim you as mine for all to see. It's the animal in me."

"I like the animal in you. I like it even more when it's in me." Bella grinned up at him.

He grinned back and gave her a quick kiss on the lips. "We have to hurry. It's dinner time, and Russ wants to have a meeting to talk about what I saw in the woods."

"What did you see? I didn't hear anything. One minute we were playing, and the next, you get all serious. Is it bad?"

"I don't know, babe. I just don't know. I think it might be connected to your dreams, and we need to put a stop to whatever it is. Let's get going."

David turned off the water and opened the shower curtain. Bella stepped out, and he couldn't help himself, he slapped her on the ass as she left the shower.

"Hey!"

David grinned at her and climbed out behind her.

Bella turned back towards him. "David, I really don't want to keep wearing the same clothes. We're going to have to do something about my wardrobe. I still don't have a bra, and all I have here are this skirt and shirt."

"Here, wear your skirt, but take one of my shirts. That will have to do in the meantime, because I don't think we'll be headed into town anytime soon."

Bella smirked at David and took the shirt.

"What?" David asked with exasperation.

"You want me in your clothes because of Max. You know I'm not attracted to him and have eyes for only you, right?"

"I know here." David pointed at his head and then his heart. "But the wolf in me needs to claim you, and when another man has his scent on you, I go wild. I can't help who I am, Bella."

"I know, and I'm not asking you to be anything other than what you are. But I'm allowed to think it's a little funny. Well, except it looks like you're going to have a black eye in the morning. Was fighting Max worth it?"

"Yes." David pulled Bella close for a kiss, but a knock sounded at the door.

"We need to get downstairs, David. The meeting is about to start," a voice on the other side said.

"David?" Bella stopped him from opening the door.

"Yes, sweets?"

"Do you know the man Russ had in his office?"

"What man is that?"

"The one there when you came storming in looking for a fight. He looked bigger than life, but something about him is off. I don't think he's a wolf. I couldn't feel any thoughts, but his aura looked different."

"Oh, you must be talking about Zareb."

"Who's Zareb? That name sounds familiar."

"Come on, let's get to dinner." He took Bella's hand and led her out the door while talking.

"Zareb is the guy who helped us as we left Robbinsville. He's a magic user and helps out the pack when he can. He lives here on the grounds, but he only comes to the main house when Russ needs something. He's very powerful and old, no one knows how old. Zar keeps to himself for the most part. He showed up at the house one day saying Russ would need his help. Russ didn't turn him away, and he has been with us ever since."

They made their way to the dining room. When they reached it, David could feel Bella becoming overwhelmed. She started to pale, so he opened his mind fully to hers, trying to reach out and comfort her. Then he heard the voices in her head.

What happened to her shield? And how had she lived with this all those years, not being able to block out others?

Besides Zareb and the pack members, there were two humans at the table, and it was the thoughts of these two that echoed in his head. It almost became too much.

"Bella, listen to me, and I'll help you block them."

He forced the image of a wall into Bella's mind, making her focus on him and him alone. He felt a click, and he had Bella alone in her mind. Her knees buckled, and she almost fell to the floor, but he caught her and helped her to a chair. He noticed she had tears running down her face.

"What is it, what's wrong? It worked, didn't it? I thought I felt—"

Bella threw her arms around David, right there in front of everyone, and smacked a kiss to his lips. Then she leaned back, smiling through the tears.

"Oh, David, you've given me so much, and I don't think I've given you anything but trouble. You made a shield for me. In all these years, I've never been able to protect myself. And in a matter of minutes, you have me blocked. It's a miracle. *You're my miracle.*"

"Your shield from the hotel should have blocked the humans. We need to figure out what happened, but you should be able to block on your own, now."

A throat cleared, causing both David and Bella to glance around. David had forgotten the room full of people. Bella did that to him.

Russ stood at the head of the table, and Bella could tell he belonged there. Power, that was what she thought when she looked at Russ. It came off him in waves. If she had to describe him in one word, it would be 'strong'. She felt the need to submit to the alpha and kneel at his feet. She had to shake herself before she did that.

Russ started his meeting, and the urge passed.

"We've got a problem, and it isn't getting any better. One of Bastian's men has been spotted at the compound. We can't touch them without proof that Bastian is a threat, or *we* will become the threat, and the Ancients will take matters into their own hands. We—"

"How much more proof do the Ancients need?" growled a voice.

Bella looked around to see who had interrupted Russ, but she didn't have time to contemplate the man because Russ resumed speaking.

"The Ancients are blind when it comes to Bastian, Tobias, and you know that. He's one of theirs, and they don't want to believe he could have turned evil. We need proof he wants to harm our pack, and to do that, we need to catch one of Bastian's men on our property. If we can succeed, the Ancients will be more receptive to our fears."

"What if I talked to Daddy? Maybe I could get him to stop his plans." This came from a soft voice to Bella's left.

"Erin, I don't think that's a good idea. You're one of us, now, and I don't think your father would take kindly to you showing up. I don't want you hurt. We'll figure this out. For now, I want all of you to stay close to the compound until we get this fixed. Scott, Erin, I want the two of you back in the main house. We're more protected here, and I don't want your father to have any way to get to the two of you."

Scott growled low in his throat, and Bella saw Erin lay a hand on his leg to calm him. They talked quietly, and Bella couldn't hear what they said. She'd have to get used to not hearing people in her head.

"Let's eat, then we'll set up watches. Bella, David, I would like to see you in my office after dinner. Zareb and I have some plans, and I'd like to go over them with you. Scott, Erin, you will be needed, as well." Russ stopped talking, the meeting done for now.

Bella and David took their proper spots at the table, sitting next to Erin and Scott. Erin had tears in her eyes as she continued to talk quietly to Scott.

Bella looked around the room, trying to take everything in, and realised she belonged here with her new family. She would never have to dine alone again or worry about others invading her thoughts, all because of David. She had a warm feeling in her chest thinking about him and the change with which he'd gifted her.

Chapter Seven

After dinner, the couples headed into Russ' office.

"According to my vision, this compound is going to catch fire in two days time, and we need to find a way to prevent that from happening. Zareb has a couple of ideas that I would like you to listen to." Russ turned over the floor to the other man.

Zareb spoke softly, his unusual accent barely noticeable. "The magic around the compound is strong, but I think Bastian has a way around it. We could pour more magic into the protection field, but I think Bastian could break that, as well. We need something else, and I think we can get it with the four of you." Zareb looked at the two couples in the room. "Scott and Erin are the heart of the spell because of Erin's connection to Bastian. David and Bella are the strength of the spell because of the strong bond they have formed in such a short time. The magic in Bella is strong, and it has become stronger with David's help. I think I can teach Bella what she needs to know to stop Bastian."

Usually, Zareb sat in the corner and let Russ do the talking. It always struck David as odd how the big man could be so quiet, but Zareb had it down to an art form. And his accent, no one could place it. Of course, David knew the situation was serious, but he hadn't realised how serious until Zareb had started talking.

"I don't understand," Bella said. "I don't have any magic. I mean, I have dreams that come true, and I hear things, but I don't have magic."

"You do have magic, Bella," Zareb said, addressing her fears. "You've just never tapped into it. I can help with that if you let me. In fact, you have to let me, or we'll all die. It has been written, and it will happen if we don't do something to stop it. We have a great start because you are here. You're the strongest thing we have, because you're the only magical werewolf in the pack. Bastian wanted to eliminate you so we wouldn't have a chance. He sees things, as well. He has to know that with you here, his chances of success have been seriously limited. He must have foreseen your powers in our pack. You're the first, but you will not be the last. This pack is on the rise in power, and that can't make Bastian happy."

During Zareb's speech, Erin had turned to Scott and silently wept. David could hear her repeating, "This is all my fault."

Russ took over. "Hush, Erin, this is not your fault. This is your father's fault. He wants to be all powerful in the Ancients' eyes. That's why he turned. Power corrupts without balance. Your father lost his balance years ago when your mother died. Times are changing, and we have to be the ones that protect, now. Bastian's time is over, and the Ancients need to see that their son has been corrupted. It's our job to show them, and we will. We need to step forward so the corrupt don't overrun the human population, making them no more than slaves.

"Bella, you're a big part of that as is Max's future mate. I see enough to help, but I don't see the outcome, only the choices. And we have to hope I'm making the right one. Bella, I would like you and David to go with Zareb. He'll help you with the spells we'll need. Erin and Scott, I want you to stay behind."

* * * *

Sebastian was pacing in his office when Richard stepped inside.

"Mr. Donovan, I am at your service." Richard bowed slightly to his boss.

"Good, Richard, you're here. Dmitri should be also, momentarily. I had a dream last night, and things aren't looking good. They are falling into place, but not the way I need them to. Dmitri will be able to force the issue. He's going to break through before those animals know what hit them. We're moving on them tonight. We aren't waiting for what the Ancients foretold. The pack will be destroyed."

"Sir, what of your daughter?"

"I have no daughter. She is one of them, now, and dead to me. What she has become will die, and I hope her soul will reach her sweet mother so it can be cleansed of the animal stench that has betrayed me."

Richard realised he couldn't talk to Sebastian anymore. The man's mind must have fractured after the death of Erin's mother, Faith. Sebastian seemed to feel as if he'd been betrayed by the Ancients and, when Erin had fallen for a wolf, it must have been the last straw for him.

Richard started to doubt his boss. And Richard had a secret—his son lived at the pack house, and he needed to get to him before the fire hit. He had to find a way to get back to the compound before Dmitri could cause havoc.

“Sir, if I may, I’ll go get ready for tonight.”

“One more thing before you go, Richard.”

Richard never saw it coming. Sebastian plunged the knife into Richard’s chest before he could react. Richard looked down at the blade then back at Sebastian.

“Why?” Richard gasped as he fell to the floor.

“I saw, Richard. I saw you with that bitch in my dream. You slept with the devil, and they all must die, even your precious boy, Max. You thought I didn’t know, but you were wrong. I know everything, Richard, and I will be victorious in this.”

As Richard gasped his last breath, he focussed all his thoughts on his son, hoping he could get through the shields to warn him. Something tugged in his mind, and he hoped it was a connection with Max.

Sebastian leaned down and chanted something over Richard. The last thing Richard heard before the world went black was, “They’ll die.”

Across town, Max felt something sharp hit him in the head, and he crumpled to the floor of his room, clutching at the pain. Then a voice flowed over him. Max briefly wondered how someone had broken through the property barrier.

“Max, tonight, danger, sorry.” Then an image appeared of a beautiful woman...Max’s last thought before passing out...Valerie.

When Max came to, he realised the voiced had belonged to his father. He reached for him in his mind, but nothing remained of the man. *What the fuck am I supposed to do with that?* He didn’t know what the woman had to do with anything, but he didn’t have time to think about her right now.

Max hadn’t had much contact with his piece of shit father. He knew Richard worked for that asshole Sebastian, but contact had stopped all together when Sebastian broke his ties with the Ancients. Max felt little sympathy for his father. Richard had chosen his side.

Why the fuck did his father choose now, with his dying breath, to show up? Max needed to speak to Russ.

He was still cursing his father when he found Russ pacing his office. Why couldn't his father have contacted Zareb or Russ, for that matter?

Fuck.

"Russ, I've got news. My asshole of a father is dead and decided, at this late point in my life, he would use his last breath to warn *me*. Fuck. Bastian killed him, Russ, and he plans on torching us tonight, not in two days. Time has run out."

Max didn't bother telling Russ about the last part of the vision.

"We need to gather everyone and get most of them out of here in case we fail." Russ strode from the office.

Max followed to help warn the others. What he really wanted was to go out and have a drink. He didn't need this shit.

* * * *

"I don't know about this, Zareb. I've never felt any power before. Are you sure?"

"It's there, Bella. I feel it waiting to break free. We need to get you to feel it, too. Maybe it would help if you connected with David. David, open up to Bella. Let her in. Bella, open your mind and reach for David. Can you feel him? You might have to do most of the work, David. She still doesn't have the control. You're going to have to reach and then anchor."

Bella felt David in her head and did what had come to feel natural to her. She opened her mind and let him in. "We're connected."

"David, stay there, and Bella, focus on me and the words I'm saying. Repeat them out loud and in your mind. *"Ou volke, kom na my en vestig hier. Open my tot die groter benodig, so Ek kan help daardie Ek beskerm."*

"I don't understand them. How am I supposed to feel them and say them?"

"I'm saying, 'Ancients, come to me and settle here. Open me to the greater need, so I can help those I protect'. It is more effective in Afrikaans, so repeat my words, but you can think them in English if you need to. This is so we can get in touch with your powers and

open you up to the spell we need to create. Once you're ready, we'll start the spell. You're powerful, you just need to believe."

Russ entered. "I hate to interrupt, but we've had some news come to light that you need to know. The attack will happen tonight. We can't waste any time. I hate to rush you, Bella, but it's now or never."

"Die kragte wat benodig sy hulp. Dit geskrywe wees af met Bella so ons kan help ons familie om te hou die dag. Sorry, I wanted to say a quick prayer to the Ancients, and I tend to do that in Afrikaans. It's a powerful language for me."

"I'll leave you to it, Zareb, but time is running out." Russ strode from the room.

Bella heard him give a little prayer, himself.

She had to connect with her magic, or they would all die. She focussed on David and could feel his comforting presence in her mind. He didn't push, but he was there, and that helped.

She closed her eyes and called for her power. She didn't use Zareb's words because they didn't belong to her. Instead, she chanted, *"Come to me, be with me, open to me."* Over and over, she repeated those words.

Then she felt the power, blossoming, opening like a flower. She could tell David felt it, too, because his encouragement flowed through their link. Her eyes popped open with happiness.

Then she lost it.

But she'd felt it, if only for a brief moment, and she knew she could do it again. She turned to David and threw her arms around him with a happy laugh.

"I did it! Did you feel it?"

"Yes, sweets, I felt it. I'm so proud of you! Can you try again?"

Bella closed her eyes and reached for the power she'd never known she possessed. Everything had changed in such a short time. She couldn't lose her new family, not now. She'd just found them.

Chapter Eight

David and Bella adjourned to their bedroom for a brief rest before the evening activities began. They needed to prepare themselves for the battle about to come.

"Could you hold me for a minute, David? It's been a rough day, and it's only going to get rougher."

"Sure, babe. Let's lie down, and I'll hold you. We need to relax." David led Bella to the bed and wrapped her in his arms. She snuggled into him, and it felt as if she had been there forever.

He had been lost in thought for some time when he felt tiny kisses on his neck. Then Bella's tongue began to lick and nibble him.

"Hey, I thought we needed a nap."

"Resting is overrated." Bella sighed as she continued to tease him.

He helped her out of her shirt so he could feel her breasts in his hands. He loved touching her and couldn't get enough of her. A low growl sounded in his throat, and he could hear Bella almost purring as he caressed her and pinched her nipples. He couldn't take it anymore. He needed to taste her.

He brought her breast to his mouth so he could suckle her. She threw her head back and squirmed, showing him she needed more. Abandoning his neck, she focussed on his pants.

He did what he could to help. He broke away to take care of his clothes for her, watching as she rushed to shed her skirt so she could get naked for him. He wanted this fast and hot, because this could be the last time he got a taste of her.

With that in mind, once his clothes littered the floor he let her push him to his back and watched her make her way to his pulsing cock. He tangled his hands in her hair as she licked him from root to tip. She rolled his balls gently in her hands right before she put the head of his cock into her warm, inviting mouth, gently sucking. He moaned low in his throat, loving the feel of her tongue and hands. His hips thrust in time with the bobbing of her head.

"Bella, stop...Bella, no...Yesssss...oh, yess...I mean, no. Stop."

He dragged her up his body and crushed his mouth to hers in a rough kiss. He could taste himself on her, and he swore he got harder. He flipped their positions so she lay under him. He played homage to her breasts, licking at each nipple, bringing them to hard points.

David thought he wanted this hard and fast, but he needed a taste of her first. He kissed his way down her body until he stopped at her very core. He almost came without any stimulation, just her scent alone made him hang at the edge of climax. His tongue stroked her clit, and she withed beneath him. David couldn't get enough of her. He felt her tense under him and didn't stop until he tasted her orgasm. She came against his lips, and he had to get inside. He made his way back up her body and slid home, right where he belonged and never wanted to leave. Thrusting hard, he showed her no mercy. Their bodies slammed together in perfect rhythm, faster and faster, until he screamed his release. They broke apart, panting and exhausted from their play.

"That was —"

"Wonderful. You're perfect, Bella, everything I could ever want, and I'm not going to lose you."

He drifted to sleep, content to hold her close in his arms.

Someone knocked, rousing David.

"Rise and shine, lovebirds. It's time to get cracking. That means keep your hands to yourself, Sparky, and let's go!" Max's gruff voice came through the door.

Bella chuckled. "Why does he call you Sparky?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Of course!"

"One night we took a run in the woods, and I was struck by lightning. I've been 'Sparky' to him since then. For some reason, he thinks it's hilarious. I, on the other hand, ignore the big freak."

"Awww, David, don't be that way. You're lucky you're alive!"

"It takes a lot to bring down a werewolf. Of course, my hair stood on end for weeks."

Bella covered her mouth to stop her laughter.

"It's not funny, Bella."

She couldn't stop her amusement from bubbling up, so David did the only thing he could. He tickled her. He realised that he loved to hear her laugh and wanted more.

"Stop...David. Stop, please." She gasped for breath as another pounding sounded on the door.

Max's voice came through again. "Knock it off, you two, and get downstairs."

"Uh oh, we're in trouble now," Bella said with a giggle.

The two got up and dressed. Once in the kitchen, the seriousness of the situation sank back in. The reprieve had been nice, but now they needed to get to work.

Erin and Scott sat at the table. Erin had been crying again, and it didn't surprise David because she did have to go against her father. He didn't know what the ritual would consist of, but he had prepared himself for the worst.

At least he thought so, until Zareb came strolling in with two needles in his hands.

"What are those for?" Bella asked nervously.

David reached for her hand and waited for the answer.

"We'll need a small amount of your and Erin's blood for the spell to work. Erin's, because it is her father trying to break in, and yours, Bella, because of you and your babies' magical abilities."

"Mine and...wait, what did you say? Did you just say 'babies'? That isn't what he said." She looked over at David. "He didn't say that, did he?"

"Umm...Zareb, how do you know that?" David asked.

"Why do you think Bella is so important? There is always a bigger picture, and that's why she's so dangerous to Bastian and Dmitri. Your babies will be alpha and beta of a new pack run side by side with Max's child and Russ' child. It has all been seen. The Ancients know this, but they tend to stay out of the mortal realm as much as possible.

"Russ and Max don't know about their part in this, and they aren't to know, yet. Russ might have some idea of your role, but he doesn't fully know about his. You'd better believe that Bastian and Dmitri know, though. The children of all of you will be the downfall of Dmitri and his kind, and he and his followers will do anything possible to make sure the next generation is never born. Erin and Scott are important because they will play a big role in the

children's upbringing due to the friendship that will form between Erin and Bella as a result of their pregnancies."

This time, Erin gasped.

"Zareb...maybe we'd better get on with this. And you should stop telling us about what is going to happen because, if we don't stop Bastian and Dmitri, none of it will." Actually, David realised he just didn't want to hear anymore. In fact, he liked it better when Zareb didn't talk.

"That's true. There are many possible outcomes, depending on what happens today. There is always another road that can be chosen."

"David, do you think it's true? Do you think I'm pregnant? I don't know if I'm ready for that, yet."

"Shh, let's not worry about it right now. We'll take it one step at a time. You heard Zareb. There's more than one possibility. Right now, he might see your pregnancy, but he doesn't have a timeframe. What he sees could be today or a year from now. That's the problem with visions. You should know that."

* * * *

David's logic calmed Bella, because she did know firsthand that visions played out in their own time. She could see Scott calming Erin, as well. She went to stand by the other woman to tell her what David had shared and took Erin's hand in hers, giving it a squeeze. Already, she could sense the foreseen bond between them beginning.

"Let's get started, you two."

Zareb came towards the two women with his needles ready to draw the blood he needed for the spell.

Bella held out her arm and turned her head. She really didn't want to watch.

Zareb took the blood from her and put it in the pot he had on the stove. He added some other things Bella couldn't identify—and really didn't want to. He chanted, but Bella couldn't understand the Afrikaans.

He turned towards Bella and held out his hand. "I need your power. Make yourself available to me, and let me tap into your source. Open to David, first, so the three of us can pour our power into my spell. They are coming and soon. We need to finish this before they break through."

Zareb began chanting again, and Bella began one of her own.

"Release the powers, so I can protect my new family. Please, allow me the use of my magic to help those I already have let into my heart." She felt the familiar presence of David in her head as she allowed Zareb to tap into her power.

She placed her hand in Zareb's and focussed herself on his spell. She could sense the old and powerful magic that filled the man, something she'd never experienced before. A glimpse filled her vision of an old village and men screaming in pain before Zareb blocked her from his head. She knew what she had seen was important, but she couldn't put her finger on why.

Now, though, she had to concentrate on the job at hand. She put all of her energy into keeping her powers available for Zareb's use.

Zareb stopped chanting. "It's done."

At that moment, the lights to the compound went out.

"It's begun. They have broken through the original protective spell, and the fires will start soon if we can't find Dmitri and Bastian to stop them."

"I think there is something I could try, but I don't know if it will work," Bella said.

"Give it a try, Bella. I don't think it could hurt."

She turned to Erin. "I'll need your help."

"Anything. I don't want my father hurting anybody."

"Give me your hands, Erin, and think of your father. I'm going to try to find him through you. I don't know if this will work because I'm new to all this, but it's worth a try."

Both women closed their eyes to concentrate. The men in the room waited in silence.

Bella felt her way into Erin's mind. Usually, she couldn't stop the thoughts, but now she had to push to get them. One gentle nudge was all it took, though, and she was in.

She could see Erin's dad, and he didn't look like a monster. She took the images from Erin's head and focussed her thoughts outside the compound.

Suddenly, she sensed Bastian.

"He's here at the compound, standing outside the gates. He wants to be here to see the downfall."

Bella stretched herself beyond Erin and into Bastian, but he pushed her out with a hard shove. She released Erin and grabbed her own head, the intensity of Bastian's rejection almost too much to bear.

David went to her and pulled her into his arms.

She told him what had happened then added, "There is another, darker presence with him, and I think this other being holds all the power. I believe Bastian is nothing but a puppet in this whole thing. I didn't get much, but the feeling of evil is there."

"You did really well, sweets. We'll end this, now. Let's go tell Russ what we know and stop this before it even begins."

They didn't have far to go. When they reached Russ, David filled him in. "And I bet it's Dmitri out there with him. She seems to think Dmitri is behind the whole thing, and I think she might be right, Russ."

"Those two would want to be close to the havoc they are about to wreck," Russ replied.

"The spell is complete. We need to release it so we can prevent them from starting the fires. We need to hurry because the shields are down." Zareb maintained a laid back demeanour as if they had all the time in the world.

Some might be calmed by Zareb's voice and actions, but something seemed off about him. Bella wished she could pinpoint it.

The backup generator chose that moment to kick on.

Russ faced them all. "Let's get going."

Erin, Scott, David, Bella and Zareb headed to Russ' office. Bella noticed Erin holding a hand to her head, so she went to her to see if she could help.

"Erin, is something wrong?"

"I...I feel strange. Something isn't right. What...um...Bella... No, I won't. Don't do this. No, Bella... Run! Get away from me. I can't... Nooo!"

Bella looked down as a knife appeared as if by magic in Erin's hand. The woman darted straight for her. Everything moved in slow motion as if they were all stuck in mud.

Two screams echoed in the hallway. They blended so well, David couldn't tell who cried out the loudest. Bella clutched a bloody wound in her chest, and Erin stood over her with a reddened knife in her hands. David dropped to his knees beside Bella and cradled her against his body while Scott grabbed Erin, pulling her away from Bella's fallen form. He took the knife away from his mate.

"Somebody tell me what the hell just happened here!"

They looked up at Russ.

"I'm not completely sure," David managed. "One minute we're walking down the hall towards your office, and the next, Erin is stabbing Bella with a knife. They both screamed, then you walked in."

Erin sobbed in Scott's arms.

"Erin, I need you to calm down and tell me what happened. Why did you stab Bella?"

Erin didn't have a chance to answer. The front door swung open, revealing Bastian.

Bella moaned on the floor and screamed again, this time with one hand clutched to her head and one to her chest wound.

"I'm going to destroy you all," Bastian rasped.

Bastian moved towards Bella, and David heard the man chanting. There was no way he could get to Bastian in his human form. He shifted and charged. He needed to protect Bella at all costs.

David halted in midair as he slammed against an invisible wall. Whimpering, he fell to the ground.

Bella could be heard over the roar in his ears. She chanted back, but David couldn't make out the words. He raised his head enough to see Bastian stumble. Seeing his chance, David crawled on his belly to stay under the radar and reached Bastian's ankle. He sunk his canines in the meaty flesh of the man's leg.

The man staggered again and fell to the floor. David moved up Bastian's body until he had his teeth wrapped around Bastian's throat.

"David, no!"

He heard Bella, but he needed to hurt this man.

Bastian tried to speak, but a bright light encompassed the room. David released the man and shifted back to human form. Russ knelt down of his own accord as did Erin and Scott. Bella had stopped screaming and crying. David remained silent.

The feeling of peace settled into the room, and a voice spoke.

"We've been watching you, Sebastian, and hoped you would have a change of heart. But we see now things have gone beyond our control.

We are sorry for the trials we have put you through, Russell, but we needed to see how strong and loyal your pack is. More trials are coming your way. We will need you in the coming months to rid us of this force creeping over the Earth. Your people must drive the evil back, and your will must be strong because we are going to need you on the front lines of this fight. Some of the keys to winning are right here in your pack.

Zareb, my son, is aware of some, and you should talk to him about what is to happen to help you formulate your plan. He has answers to questions you might not even have, yet. Ask him about your history. Let him tell you the things you will need to know in order to end the domination of the evil before it even starts. Don't worry about Sebastian. He will be taken care of, as well as Anabella.

Take comfort, David. All will be well. Your path is set, and within your mate, you will find the strength you need to continue this fight.

Erin, be at ease, child. Your father compelled you to act. Blood tie magic is strong, and Anabella will forgive you. Your foretold kinship has not been lost, but one sacrifice must be made tonight. Anabella, you will be healed of your mortal wound, but the babe foretold to be yours must come to rest with us until the time is right and you are healed.

Worry not, David and Anabella. The time will be right soon for your children, because you and your family play a big role in our future."

The light left the room as quickly as it had appeared, and it took with it the voice—and Bastian.

Max strolled into the room. "What did Sparky do, now?"

A chuckle drifted up from the floor, and Bella spoke, "Well that was anti-climactic."

"How can you call being stabbed then healed 'anti-climactic'?" David helped Bella to her feet.

Erin wasted no time ripping herself from Scott's arms and throwing herself at Bella. "I'm so sorry, Bella. I can't...I just..."

Bella wrapped her arms around her. "Shhh, Erin. It's okay. It is. I know you wouldn't have stabbed me if some force hadn't made you. It isn't your fault your father went a little crazy. Shhh, please, it's okay. I'll be fine."

Scott went to Erin and gently pulled her away.

"Let's go home, honey. Everything will be fine, now, and you can talk to Bella tomorrow." He led her from the house.

"Well, this has been a fucking freak fest, and I need a drink," Max said. "The danger is over right? Time for the fun to start!" He went for the door.

Bella called out, "Watch out for the brunette at the end of the bar." And she winked at him.

Max gave her a puzzled look and left.

"What was that all about?" David asked.

"During all the confusion, the Ancients gave me a small vision involving Max and his mate," Bella responded with a grin. "It should get interesting around here, real soon. I can't wait to meet Valerie."

David shook his head.

"Russ, shouldn't we talk about what happened and figure out our next move? The Ancients made it sound like a war is coming, and I don't think we're ready for that. We don't know what we're up against, and we need to train, to be prepared for anything."

"You worry too much, David. The time will come when we have to talk of war, but let's enjoy this small victory before we dive headlong into the coming problems. Go enjoy Bella, and we'll talk more later. Maybe tomorrow you can pick out your house."

"Zareb...we'll be talking soon. It sounds as if you know more than you have ever let on." Russ left them and headed back to his office.

"He's right, you know," David said. "Let's focus on now."

Bella took his hand and led him back to their room.

Epilogue

Two Days Later

Zareb smiled to himself and turned towards his own home. He knew things would become interesting, soon. He wished the Ancients wouldn't have outed him so soon, but it had been a while since he'd had a confrontation with his children, and they needed to hear the story of how they had come to be and why Dmitri was more than an evil presence to deal with.

The time would come, and they would be ready. He would let them relax for now, but in a couple of days, it would all start up again, and their fate would be determined by the dreams of people from the past.

He opened his mind to listen in on his newest child.

Bella woke with a start. She'd had a dream, again, but this one made her smile. Later, the bad dreams might begin again, but she would have support from now on. Her new family. She grinned every time she thought about them. She knew rough times waited for them—they all did— but she couldn't help being happy with the present. Snuggling back into David, she gave a small sigh and drifted off to sleep, hoping to see her future family again. Maybe she would get a glimpse of her children, this time.

As she drifted off, she heard a loud bang, and she thought she heard Max shouting. Oh well, they would be in their new home, tomorrow.

Bella went to sleep with a smile on her face for the first time in years.

About the Author

Jambrea wanted to be the youngest romance author published, but life impeded the dreams. She put her writing aside and went to college briefly, then enlisted in the Air Force. After serving in the military, she returned home to Indiana to start her family. A few years later, she discovered Yahoo groups and book reviews. There was no turning back. She was bit by the writing bug.

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BOUND TO HER

Sascha Illyvich

Dedication

Morgan, Kaitlyn, my assistant, Sevendust, and special thanks to my editor at Total E-bound for letting this come in late.

Chapter One

Steadying himself against the railing, Luka surveyed the room. A few paddles had fallen on the floor from the door slamming shut. A rose-coloured flogger hung from the back of it and swung back and forth.

The woman who'd stormed out hadn't even bothered to apologise for what she'd done or had been trying to do.

"Fuck!" Luka yelled. Pounding his fist on the railing in front of him, he steadied himself. The broad he'd just let go hadn't been able to get him off. She wasn't his mate – nor a very good submissive, either.

Too many damn bitches trying to top from the bottom.

Never try to top a wolf from the bottom. It was a dangerous thing to do, unless you wanted to be his dinner.

Worse yet, this partner was human.

Clutching a singletail with one hand, he lifted his free one to touch the gold, diamond-shaped pendant that swung against his sweat-covered chest. It hadn't so much as warmed when he'd brought her into this room and stripped her.

She was hot, too. Pert tits that thrust out, long, curly hair that swayed past her ass when she tilted her head back and gave him a glance at her exposed curves. And the trail of her slender neck had made him hard.

But her appearance did nothing for the pendant that was supposed to bind him to a woman.

Sighing again, he hung the singletail back on one of the tacks from the toy wall. Heading towards the exit of this room, he decided going upstairs for a drink was the best course of action.

Oh, and he'd probably have to have Tiffany come over and clean up the room. His occasional submissive-in-training hadn't been over in probably six weeks, now, and the house was becoming a mess.

He'd sent her away in hopes that another female wouldn't smell her and become insanely jealous.

Snorting, he headed upstairs and into the kitchen. Setting his hands on his hips, he pondered what to drink.

Glancing at his wet bar, he mentally perused what he had on hand. Vodka? No, too cold for now. Scotch? He wasn't in the mood for a cigar.

Bourbon? Nodding, he walked into the kitchen and retrieved a glass from the bar, filled it with two ice cubes and poured himself a drink.

Bringing the liquid up to his lips, he inhaled the charred American oak aroma. He took a sip and pondered his next move. He only had a few days left before the moon cycle came full circle and Diana chose a mate for him.

He didn't want her doing that.

Despite the fact all wolves belonged to Diana, they were still sovereign. At least as Northern California's pack Alpha, that was his stance.

The fact was that if Diana chose his mate, he'd be relegated to being the pack beta. Leaders moved before it was time, she said. Not when the time was up.

Taking a larger sip of bourbon, he let the alcohol slide down his throat and warm him. It was winter outside, and regardless of the fact he'd been born a wolf, the creature comforts of humans still amused him.

Setting his glass down on the marble countertop, he picked up the phone and called for Tiffany to come over. The conversation was brief. He spoke, she listened.

He spoke more. She agreed and happily scheduled time to come over.

She was the perfect submissive, it seemed.

Except the necklace he wore didn't respond to her presence, either. Could it be because she was human?

He shook his head. That couldn't be it. The necklace warmed around certain humans, but even the pack's elder magicians couldn't figure out why.

The dame who'd just left had tried to top him, which was amusing. But he was good enough to recognise when a sub was trying to control things from the bottom, a trait many humans had that annoyed him.

A few minutes and two bourbons later, his doorbell rang with the grandeur of a wealthy man—by growling.

Luka threw on the shirt he'd left on the countertop, walked through his enormous living room and reached for the front door. When he opened it, he saw Tiffany standing in a large overcoat with her eyes lowered. Hair had fallen in front of her face

He reached to move strands of hair behind her ear. "Come in, honey. And no, I don't need a submissive right now. I need my friend."

Tiffany straightened, looking at him with a deep kindness.

Luka caught a reflection of movement in her pale blue eyes, just to her left.

He cocked a brow. "What's this?"

Heat visibly crept up Tiffany's face. "My sister. She wanted to meet a real wolf. She's never seen one and I-I thought you'd be okay with this." Tiffany took a tentative step back as though in fear.

Luka shrugged. "Let's see her." Crossing his arms over his chest, he waited for Tiffany's sister to appear.

The other woman came into sight. She was a bit taller than Tiffany, probably five foot six, Luka guessed. Her complexion reminded him of mocha, rich and heady in taste. Her auburn hair flowed in long rivulets down her face and stopped just short of her hips. She brushed a thick cord of hair back and revealed plump breasts that begged to be teased and taken into a watering mouth.

Bedroom brown eyes sparkled with something more than interest, but Luka couldn't place the emotion.

It smelled of lust. Hot and tangy.

But he couldn't be certain.

She stepped forward and slanted her mouth. "You're a real wolf, eh?"

He nodded. "What's your name, kid?"

Stepping in front of her sister, the other woman extended a hand. "I'm Michele. Pleased to meet you. But so far, aside from a scrumptious chest and washboard abs, I fail to see how you differ from any human."

Luka's chest warmed. *The pendant!* He adjusted the collar of his shirt and peered down to see the thing glowing. Heat that spread throughout his entire being radiated from the diamond-shaped stone. Magick seemed to swirl around the pendant in colourful light that penetrated his clothes.

Michele's eyes widened at the sight, and her sensual mouth opened. She stepped back carefully.

Tiffany reappeared and ran a hand through her hair. Tossing her head back, she looked up at Luka. "Something the matter, my lord?"

Michele reached out and teasingly tugged strands of Tiffany's hair. "Why call him that?"

Luka scoffed. "Because, little girl, she's my submissive. Much of the time, anyway."

Tiffany blushed.

Her sister poked her in the ribs.

Giggling, Tiffany stepped closer to Luka.

He reached out for her, pulled her into his arms and cuddled her. "All the time she's my confidante."

Michele snorted. "Submission is for the weak."

Luka cocked a brow. "Really, now?"

Michele nodded. "Ever seen a submissive leader?"

He smirked. "That's the point. They're not usually leaders. But yes, I have."

Michele stepped forward, forcing her chest outward to emphasise her size over Tiffany's. "Do tell."

Luka licked his lips. She was giving him quite the show of cleavage. He recognized the trick of pushing her chest out to appear more dominant.

The pendant hanging beneath his clothes had heated up so much that his skin grew hot. He pulled it out and dropped it, letting it dangle on the outside of his form-fitting shirt.

Michele eyed it with curiosity. "What's that thing?"

Luka flashed a fang. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

Tiffany wrapped her arms around him. She stood up on tiptoes and whispered. "I told you my sister was special."

He nodded. If the pendant was glowing and reacting to Michele, that meant something was up. Was she his chosen mate according to the magick of the pack's pendant?

Luka shrugged. He'd have to do more research, first. "What brings your sister along with you, aside from her curiosity to meet a flesh and blood wolf?"

"I wanted to see who my sister was hanging out with. She *needs* to be in school and work, not surrounded by rogues." Michele crossed her arms over her chest and threw her head back, exposing the line of her neck. Dark skin begged for a touch, just a taste.

Luka contained himself. Just because the pendant was responding to her presence, it didn't necessarily mean anything.

The fact that his cock had stood at attention the entire time, however, was a different story.

Shrugging it off, he waved Michele inside while escorting Tiffany with his arm around her. "She's safe. I make sure she gets her studies done. As for work, that's not my problem."

Michele caught Luka by the arm and spun him around to face her. "What do you mean, 'that's not your problem'? If she's got duties and responsibilities to other commitments, then she should tend to those first and not some asshole who is forcing her —"

The pendant grew even hotter against his skin.

Luka held up a hand and pressed two fingers against Michele's soft mouth. Her lips were plump, juicy just like he'd figured. She was aroused, he could smell it. Her hair covered her breasts, but her top was stretched tightly enough that even with her curls, he could detect her nipples becoming tiny buds.

What he wouldn't give to suckle them while he drove himself inside her.

But, she was anti logic, it seemed. "First off," he pulled his fingers back, "she's not in any danger. I'm plenty well-to-do as you can probably see. Even you're not blind."

Michele made an undignified noise. "Money isn't everything."

Luka snorted. "No, it's not. But in case you haven't been looking, her studies are fine. Now, what can I do for you?"

"Tell me why you wanted my sister to fuck you."

Luka gasped. While he'd trained Tiffany, they'd never had any sort of contact more intimate than when he'd hugged her earlier. He just didn't view her that way.

Michele, on the other hand...

He licked his lips. "I've never had relations with your sister."

Michele shoved a hand forward, pressing it against Luka's chest.

He laughed. "You think you could actually shove me?"

Michele dropped down to one knee and threw a leg out in a sweeping motion.

Luka stood solid where he was, the hit connecting with enough force to annoy him. As he glanced down at Michele, the wild sweep of her hair spread out over her back made him think of how lovely she'd look taking his cock in her mouth.

Still, he managed restraint. "If you'll get up and knock off the silly nonsense, I'll be happy to answer any questions you have about my relationship with your sister."

Looking defeated, Michele stood and brushed stray hairs from her face. She smirked. "You're strong. You're a wolf, huh?"

He grimaced. "Wanna see me get furry and fang-like?"

Michele set a hand on her hip and tilted her head. "I've no interest in furies. They sicken me on a regular basis, actually."

Luka snorted. "Bad break-up with one?"

Tiffany swatted Luka on the shoulder and glared at him.

He shrugged his shoulders. "What? She came into my house and —"

Tiffany glared harder.

Luka huffed. "Fine. Look, it's really simple. Your sister and I have nothing going on between us, but for whatever reason, she feels I'm a safe haven. Turns out she's a really good person I can talk to and trust almost implicitly. Satisfied?"

Michele frowned. "That's all? What's with the submission thing? Kinky people are sick and often fucked up in the head."

Luka felt his blood beginning to boil. How dare she come into his house and insult what she didn't understand? "You don't know what you're talking about, obviously. Nor do you know shit about the lupine culture. Clearly, you're a damn fool. I should just shove your sister aside and devour you." He let the arousal mix with the heat in his gaze and reach his eyes.

Michele turned away in disgust.

"Fine. Whatever. I don't care. At any rate, I have business with your sister. So you're free to make yourself at home. I'll make you a drink or there's food in the fridge if you're hungry."

Michele turned to face him. "Steak?"

Luka grinned slowly, letting his fangs show. "Yeah, actually."

The woman snorted.

Gripping Luka's shoulder, Tiffany started laughing.

He looked down at her and smirked. "What did I ever do to you, little girl?"

She stopped laughing long enough to meet his gaze. She couldn't help but laugh again. "Nothing, master. Just the interaction between you two is amusing."

Michele snorted. "'Master' my ass."

Without missing a beat, Luka turned his gaze upon Michele's and caught her stare. "I intend to."

She scoffed and left for the kitchen.

Tiffany's laughter died down. She narrowed her eyes and lowered her chin. "I take it you felt the obvious?"

He pulled her towards his den. Once inside the room, he shut the door. "She won't bother us in here, will she?"

Tiffany took a seat on the leather couch and crossed her legs just as she'd been taught so if she were nude, Luka could still stare at her shaved pussy. True, they hadn't slept together, but that didn't mean he didn't get to take his pleasure from viewing her lovely figure.

"No." She straightened against the back of the couch. "She won't. I didn't bring her here on purpose. She swore she needed to come along, though. And you did feel the effects of the pendant, right?"

Luka walked to a wooden cabinet and opened it. Retrieving two glasses, he set them down on the desk before pouring two shots of bourbon into them. Handing one to Tiffany, he smirked and sipped his.

She lifted her glass and took a sip. Coughing at the first swallow, she patted her chest before she set the drink down on the arm of the couch. "Yeah, I'm not much of a drinker, remember?"

Feeling embarrassed, Luka grabbed the pitcher of fresh water and poured a splash into her glass. "Sorry. It's just that you spend so much time around here normally that I forget you're human and not a big hard liquor fan."

She smiled and set her hand on his. "It's okay." She swirled the ice around and took another sip apparently without any trouble, this time.

Luka poured himself another round and sat down on the leather chair across from her. Patting his thigh, he beckoned her to come towards him.

She rose daintily, as she had been taught, graceful in her every movement. She walked towards him, drink in hand, then settled on his lap and snuggled against him. "What's the problem, baby?"

Drawing her close, Luka buried his head in her thick mane. He didn't speak, using a mental link to convey feelings to her that she'd understand better than if he spoke the emotions.

She straightened. "It's that time, isn't it?"

He nodded.

She stared into his eyes and waited for a beat.

His shoulders rose and fell. He reclined against the back of the chair and wrapped his arms around her waist. "If I don't find a mate, I'm okay with that. But the pack I built would be taken from me, and for what?"

Her eyes widened, revealing pale blue irises so fair they could have almost been white. "Would they really take this pack from you?"

"Yeah," he nodded. "We all answer to Diana, but not everyone sees her as the ruler of our kind. There is a faction down south that has a leader primed in the event I can't find a mate in the next few days. They're betting against me so they can turn the state of California into a hunting ground for wolves."

Tiffany's mouth twitched. "If it weren't for wolves like you, the humans out here would be extinct."

"Exactly."

The two sat in silence for a few moments, wrapped in each other's arms. Luka knew Tiffany understood with clarity what it meant to have wolves hunting humans. The state of California had developed a higher rate of wolves to humans after it was revealed the current governor was lupine.

The governor had also indicated he had a strong distrust of humans.

Luka had worked tirelessly to ensure their safety by meeting other pack leaders in the area and forming an alliance. All of them agreed he needed a mate to help balance things out.

"When your pack was caught eating the remains of Alex, a Mexican citizen with a rap sheet, we could understand. But when we found other wolves slaughtering illegal immigrants at the border, we could no longer look the other way. Either we're pro human or anti human. So," Lajon's voice rang out in Luka's head, "we're giving you this necklace. You have one year to find your mate."

Luka recalled with clarity the effect the necklace had on him. Lajon was a stronger, older wolf who had seen myriad things in his lifetime. Tall, dark and wise, he was a force to be reckoned with.

The door to Luka's office slammed open.

Tiffany stiffened against Luka.

His grasp around her tightened. The pendant began glowing against his skin. The scents of rose and honey drifted through the air, mixed with cayenne pepper.

"You!" Michele glared and pointed a finger at Luka.

Chapter Two

Luka recognised the instant anger in her face, the scowl. "Why didn't you tell me your sister was nosy?"

Tiffany snorted. Sliding off Luka's lap, she walked towards Michele. "Calm down, sis. It's not what it looks like."

"Bullshit. We're going. Now." Reaching for Tiffany, Michele couldn't react fast enough before Luka stood in front of her.

Luka looked down at Michele, felt the heat radiate off her body. She wasn't quite human. Could she be... No, that wouldn't make sense. "Think she's going somewhere?"

She glowered, her lip turning upwards in a snarl. She stepped back and set her hands on her hips, a move that pushed out her breasts.

Goddamnit if he didn't want to just fuck her right then and there. Still, he regained his composure despite the hard-on that was raging, now. His nerves fought to maintain control over his body and use the natural mating instinct that seemed to kick in about the same time the pendant responded to her. Inhaling, counting to five, exhaling, he closed and opened his eyes. She wasn't a wolf. He could break her.

"Yes. She's coming with me. I'm taking her." Michele tried to sidestep Luka and reach around for her sister.

Tiffany swatted her hand away. "No, Chele. I'm staying here. He called me over and —"

Michele's tone grew louder. "And what? Wanted a quick fuck? Was that post coital cuddling I saw from the door?"

Luka had had enough. He closed the short distance between himself and Michele. "And what? You didn't see this." He bent down and pressed his mouth to hers while gripping her shoulders.

Michele gasped and turned her head away.

Luka's strength overpowered her and forced her mouth back to his. Her lips were plump, juicy just as he'd expected earlier. His tongue pushed past them and explored the taste of her sensuality that begged to be kissed again and again.

Though she struggled against him, her body moulded to his while her mouth acquiesced with each stroke of his tongue. Her breasts pressed against his chest.

She moaned into his mouth.

The sound reverberated throughout his body, hardening him further. The pendant grew hotter against his skin. Brushing it aside so it landed and rested on his back didn't help, but Michele's mouth was hotter than hell so he could bear a little more pain.

She bit at his lip, nibbling and suckling his tongue when he thrust it between her lips again.

She drew a deep breath as if inhaling his scent, then she closed her eyes and gripped his shoulders.

A cough from behind them broke the moment.

Luka pulled away gently, smiling and baring fangs. He turned to face Tiffany.

She didn't look entirely amused.

"Tiffany, I'm—"

She shook her head. "Skip it, Luka. I don't mind. Just not in front of me, okay?"

He shrugged.

Michele made a sound of disgust. "You don't have to worry. That was a one time thing."

"I doubt it," Luka scoffed as he turned back to Michele. "In fact, judging by the way this pendant reacts to your presence, I'd say it's better if we repeat this then take it further."

Michele stiffened, yet her eyes betrayed the expression she obviously tried so hard to conceal. "I don't think so."

Luka tilted his head. "Ever hear the expression 'your eyes betray your body'? Besides, I can smell your arousal." He licked his lip. "Tastes like honey."

Tiffany snickered behind him.

Glaring, Michele stood with her arms folded over her chest. Her skin had a flushed look that worsened when both sets of eyes stared at her. "What?"

Taking a step forward, Tiffany reached out for her sister. "We need to sit down and talk. I think you need to be brought into the loop."

Michele put her hands up. "Whoa, what loop? I don't think I need to be brought into anything."

Luka looked at Tiffany and nodded. "Yeah, the pendant responded to her unlike any other woman I've ever been with. The delectable kiss should be repeated and taken further to prove a point."

Tiffany nodded.

Michele stepped back, keeping her hands up defensively. Her mouth dropped open.

Luka smiled at the sensual display of how her lips formed a perfect O when she shook her head in defiance. Something tugged low in his belly. He reached for the pendant and stepped closer to her.

It lit up. It was just a simple design, really. A rough-cut stone that resembled a wolf's head was encased in a golden diamond and hung on a chord that dangled just over his chest. He held it closer to Michele, and all three watched colourful sparklies float around it. "Well, it's glowing. If that isn't proof, I'm not sure what is."

Tiffany scratched her chin. "I don't know. Did Lajon tell you anything after he gave it to you?"

Luka shook his head. "Nope. Not a damn thing. He tossed it to me and said 'wear this'. Then he walked away and did that disappearing thing he always does."

Tiffany's voice rose enthusiastically. "That's such a cool trick!"

Luka narrowed his gaze on her. "Yeah, but it doesn't help us, now."

"Well." Michele coughed and directed their attention on her. "It doesn't mean anything to me. I'm not part of this weird wolf shit you and my sister are involved in. I want no part of it, ever. I can't afford to have my life upset by —"

Luka growled. "Prophecy set in stone thousands of years before you were born, little girl."

Michele's mouth opened. Her jaw ticked, and her eyes widened. "No. Not me. None of this makes sense."

"That's because you need to be briefed and caught up to speed." Luka stepped closer to her, so close that even if he wasn't lupine, he could have smelled the heat pooling between her legs. Or the fragrant aroma of her hair when the heater kicked in, as it had a moment ago.

Eyes widening, revealing fear so deep it was palpable to anyone around, Michele stuttered, "I don't...I-I don't want this!"

Luka took another step closer. "You and I need to talk." He tried to keep his voice calm despite the storm building inside him at the fact the woman who was probably his mate was resisting him and going to cause the death of millions of humans with her reluctance.

"No. We don't." Michele reached for the doorknob and pushed it open while keeping her gaze locked on his.

Luka held out his hands with his palms facing up and offered a smile. "I smell your fear. Let me help alleviate it, please?"

The colour drained from her face. "No. I'm sorry, I can't." She turned on her heels and ran out the door, into the other room.

Tiffany started after her.

Luka set a hand across her chest.

She looked back at him with a worried look on her face.

Luka sighed and shrugged. "I guess this is the way the game is played."

Tiffany put an arm around Luka's waist. "Yeah. You should know some things about her before we continue trying to figure this out. Do you need tea?"

Glad to see her resume her submissive role, he nodded. "Please make us a pot. I do need to know more about her."

"Oh, and don't worry." Tiffany glanced over her shoulder. "She can't leave unless she takes my car. She doesn't drive, so unless she wants to create a situation where you have to bail her out of jail, she'll stay in the house for the time being."

He offered her a feigned smile. "Good to know."

Tiffany scurried out of the room and headed into the kitchen.

Luka walked over to his chair and sank down. How the hell had he been placed in this predicament? He was one of the strongest wolves in the area, the uniting force behind protecting the human population and trying to live in harmony with them, and without a mate.

The latter part he could fathom. It was in his nature to seek out females in heat, and Michele definitely was in heat. He could smell her arousal when she walked into the room, could still taste the lingering scent on his tongue. The sweet rose and honey aroma kept him hard.

Yeah, he'd meant to kiss her earlier, too.

No doubt she'd scoff at the fact they'd shared a kiss which she actually enjoyed, if her body's response was any indication.

A few minutes later, Tiffany appeared, carrying a tray with a pot and two tea cups. She set it down on his desk, poured a cup and handed it to him.

Luka took it and let the faint, smoky smell of green tea drift towards his nose. He kept an eye on Tiffany, watching her pour herself some before taking a seat on the leather chair across from him.

Leaning forward, Luka set the tea on a table beside him and clasped his hands together. "So, tell me about Michele."

Tiffany took a sip before setting her own cup down. She straightened her shoulders, ran a hand through her hair and sighed slowly. "Well, for starters, she's a different beast than I am. She's not human as you probably smelled. I don't know what she is. My senses aren't as acute as yours."

Luka's brows furrowed. "She's a wolf."

Tiffany leaned back in the chair and crossed her legs. "I thought so."

He nodded. "Then, why the aversion to wolves?"

"Ever since we were little, she's had a fear of them. I'm not sure why, honestly. She won't talk about it. It's much easier for her to cover up what she is and to mask her scent so no one will know. Up until I started dealing with you and took it upon myself to befriend you," she smirked, "I had a problem with wolves, too."

Luka made an indecent noise. "You sure never showed it."

Clasping her hands together, she began twirling her thumbs. Looking down, she paused then looked back at Luka. "We had an accident with wolves when we were younger. I don't remember the details, but I remember waking up one morning with an intense hatred for your kind. I vowed I'd find and destroy every last one of you if it was the last thing I did."

Luka crossed his feet and leaned back, listening.

"I don't know what or why, but my sister had joined me in the desire until one morning I found her in her bedroom covered in blood, devouring what looked like the neighbourhood thief."

An eyebrow rose, then lowered slowly. Luka became aware of the gentle slowness of her breathing.

"I asked her what happened, and she started crying. Said I'd think she was crazy."

His tone remained neutral. "A normal reaction."

She nodded. "Yeah, but this is my sister. Our parents weren't the best with us and left us to ourselves at a young age. After we moved in with an aunt, Michele started behaving oddly, even for a teenage girl. I kept close tabs on her the same way I do you." She smiled, her voice remaining soft and sweet. "Our aunt died, and by that time I was old enough to get a job, so I did. And supported us. But Michele couldn't handle a lot of what happened, so she kept to herself. Without the long bullshit story, I accepted her for what she was. She told me about that night and showed me how you transform. It looks very painful."

"Yeah." He nodded. "It is for new shifters. Who in your family has the lupine blood?"

Tiffany shrugged. "That's just it. I'd assume it was father, but I don't know. They both died before I could ask them."

He scoffed. "Figures. The genes can be carried by either parent, but it's usually the mother that has the dominant traits. If there's even an eighth of lupine in her blood, chances are the child will be born a shifter."

A loud crash that forced Luka out of his chair sounded from the kitchen.

Tiffany stood, too.

Luka waved a hand. "Stay here. Shut this door and lock it. I'll let you know in the usual way if it's okay."

She nodded and went behind the desk.

Luka smiled. "I smell trouble." He raised his nose to the air, stepped out of the office and shut the door behind him. He stopped.

Waited.

The panting, snarling sounds grew louder. Something glass crashed against the floor.

Setting a hand to his forehead, Luka sighed. "Oh, not my fucking Reidel wine glasses. You bastards."

He approached the kitchen, hands open and prepared for grappling. The snarling grew louder. When he walked through the doorway, he saw the two staring at each other.

One wolf was huge, with dark brown fur and a murderous glint in bright yellow eyes that would easily be seen in the darkness. Mud-covered paws mixed with flecks of sand left wolf prints on the floor.

His lip curled up in disgust. "Man, I just cleaned that fucking tile." Luka looked at the other wolf.

She was smaller in stature, but the murderous rage in her stance couldn't be missed. Her eyes were that soft brown that...

It clicked. "Michele?"

She moved to acknowledge him before she lunged forward at the intruder.

The other wolf jumped towards her, catching her by the throat.

They landed and rolled, slamming against the oak cabinets.

Luka wanted to stop this, stop the damage they were causing to his kitchen, but he needed to see if Michele was truly in any trouble. The other wolf outweighed her by a good one hundred pounds.

She kicked out with her hind legs, hitting him in the ribs and breaking the other wolf's grip on her.

Righting herself, she lunged for the weak point in his stomach and snapped her jaws down hard.

The other wolf yelped and kicked out in frustration before shoving her off with his weight.

She started snapping at him, barking and growling, jaws open.

He stood on all fours, backed up and leapt over her onto the sink. Glaring once at Luka, he turned and jumped through the broken window, making the hole even larger than it had been to begin with.

Michele just barely missed his tail when she landed on the counter.

Luka set a hand on his head and made a clicking noise. "Why the fuck did you two destroy my kitchen?"

He surveyed the mess, saw the collection of expensive Reidel glasses strewn about in shattered pieces by the wine rack. By the window, a pile of glass had been crushed under Michele's less than delicate footsteps.

She jumped off the counter and stood about three feet away with an expression in her eyes he couldn't read.

But the emotional scent, bitter and tart, was heavy enough for him to understand.

The wave of it all nearly knocked him off his feet.

He took a tentative step forward. "Why, Michele?"

She didn't respond.

Letting her catch her breath, he studied her. Her fur was a deep shade of midnight blue with an occasional silver streak running through it. The pendant on his chest had been glowing the entire time.

She sat down and tilted her head. He could tell her baser instincts were running her on autopilot, now.

Using the mental link all wolves had with each other, he kept his voice calm and steady to reassure her. *You're brave. Thank you. I recognised that wolf. He's from a rogue pack. He's been after me for a few weeks, now. How you're alive after a fight with him is amazing. Do you know that?*

Michele whimpered. She raised her neck slowly, jolting it when obvious pain shot through her.

You're hurt. We should take care of that. He extended a hand to her.

She let him. Another whimper came from her.

He stroked her fur, felt the blood coagulating around the deep wounds in her neck. She wouldn't die from the injury, but it was serious enough to cause her pain for a while. If left untreated, it could get infected. The wolf's natural abilities to heal could kick in, but by the way she sat there not calling her magick, Michele didn't seem interested in letting that happen.

"Let me." Luka closed his eyes, envisioning Michele naked, hair flowing around her waist, breasts bobbing with each step she took towards him. The vision continued with them embracing and her body glowing a silver colour that shimmered. Every muscle, fibre, tissue, ligament and bone would receive the Moon Mother's healing light and energy.

Luka opened his eyes and saw the response in Michele's.

Hers widened, and if wolves could shoot dirty looks mixed with intense lust, Michele would be the poster child.

A silver ball glowed brightly in and around his hands that was filled with the power of the Moon Mother and would heal Michele's internal wounds.

Then, in an instant, the silver ball had been absorbed into Michele's body.

The wound bubbled and oozed blood before clotting set in.

Tiffany, come here and bring a wet washcloth, towel and my black robe.

She couldn't respond on the mental pathway, but he knew she'd hear and follow orders. She was good like that.

Even though he'd healed the wound, something told him if he hadn't, and Michele didn't change, she'd be in worse shape than before. He couldn't stand the instant pain he felt when hurt pricked his heart from the fact he could lose his mate.

A moment later, Tiffany appeared with the requested items.

Luka took the washcloth and started patting down the dried blood, wiping away excess mess from her fur. "Can you transform back?"

Michele lifted her head, pleading with her eyes.

Kneeling down before her, he kept his voice steady and calm, putting in extra effort to reinforce tranquillity. "I could force the change. I am that powerful."

A moment later, a light flashed and enveloped Michele's body. In an instant, she lay on the floor, her body totally naked.

The sight of her heavy breasts caught his attention first. Luka's groin grew harder instantly. Letting his eyes roam down the length of her body, he couldn't help but love the long lines of her legs, the powerful curve of her ass. Sweeping his gaze back up towards her neck, he spotted the wounds made by the other wolf.

They had managed to stop bleeding long enough to start healing with the help of the magick.

Her skin was as opulent as he'd expected, full of rich colour that begged for powdered sugar.

He couldn't control the involuntary motion when he licked his lips.

She tilted her head and frowned. Her eyes narrowed, zeroing in on his groin. "Satisfied?"

Luka shook his head. Extending his hand, he leaned closer to her. "I'm sorry. Here, let me help you up."

"Are you okay?" Tiffany rushed to her sister's side. "What happened?" Worry wasn't hidden from her voice.

Michele stood, brushed herself off and quickly folded her arms over her chest in a smooth motion.

Luka licked his lip again. She truly was grace and beauty in one package.

Sighing heavily, Michele snatched the robe from Tiffany's hand. Throwing it on over her arms, she snuggled it tight around her body and belted it. "There, much better." She lifted her chin, and the sparkle of defiance returned to her eyes. "What? You act as though you haven't seen another wolf before. Get over it."

Chapter Three

Letting out a breath of relief, Luka smirked. "It's not that. I was checking to see if you were okay. What happened?"

Setting a hand on her voluptuous hip, Michele turned towards his liquor cabinet. Walking over to one of the open bottles of bourbon, she picked it up, took the top off and took a long sip, gulping down quite a large amount before returning the bottle to its former place. "Fucking sitting in the car waiting for my sister," she glared at Tiffany for emphasis, "and this asshole comes up to it, sniffs it then transforms. I'm not about to fear you assholes, so I shoved open the door and transformed, as well. We grappled and fought for a moment before he apparently realised whose house he was in front of. He said something about needing to kill you before the full moon in a few days. The rest you know."

A closer glance at her eyes revealed she was holding back information. Luka filed that away for later when they had more time.

"So, what's the deal, anyway? Why is someone slightly more psychotic after you?"

Resting against the table, Luka grinned. The unmistakable scent of arousal came from Michele, wafting towards his nose. "Because I'm the ruler of this territory."

Her eyes widened. She looked at Tiffany and groaned. "You've been serving the head of all of the packs in this area?"

Tiffany nodded. "Proudly for the last year."

Michele snorted. "He's still a loser."

Snickering, Luka kept his attention focused on Michele. "You want me. I can smell it. And according to the pendant, you and I need each other."

She made an unladylike noise. "What the pendant or anyone else says has no effect on me. I am not part of this territory."

A brow rose. "Do you live in this area with your sister?"

Michele turned her head away. "It doesn't matter. I don't want anything to do with wolf politics."

Luka stepped closer to Michele, keeping his eyes on her body. He watched how the ovals of her eyes narrowed with each step he took. He no longer needed the necklace to tell him what his heart already knew. Whether she wanted it or not was another matter, but he had to get her in his bed and at least make it appear to Lajon and the others he had a mate who would balance him.

He jeered. There was no way this young vixen could balance him. She was all aggression and attitude.

Still, he couldn't stop himself from cornering her.

She lifted her hands in front of her. "What are you doing?"

Catching them in his, he spoke with his voice dropping lower with each word. "What I need to do in order to make sure you're healing and will continue to live."

The panic in her voice caused it to squeak. "I'm fine, I swear it. See?" She pulled away the collar of the robe and bent her head to expose her neck.

A cough sounded behind them.

Luka glanced over his shoulder at Tiffany.

"I'm still here." She crossed her arms in front of her and tapped her foot.

Luka glared.

Tiffany smirked and wandered out of the kitchen.

The husky tone in Michele's voice couldn't be missed. "Goddamn it! Why did you have to send away the only thing keeping you safe?"

Returning his focus to Michele, he cocked an eyebrow. "Keeping me safe?" He stepped closer and was now mere inches from her. He reached out to touch her cheek with a tender hand. Her skin was soft, supple and smooth.

Her head jerked.

He caught her and forced her mouth to his in a heated kiss that started out hard, conquering, but eased to a softer pace with each taste of her.

Her mouth opened for him, letting his tongue slither in and out, around her lower lip.

Luka tasted her, picking up the bourbon spice along with her natural honey and rose, perfumed scents he could find himself easily intoxicated by if he didn't take some modicum of control.

She sucked in a breath and clutched his arms, pressing her body against his. "Damn you," she growled against his skin.

Chuckling into her flesh, he stepped back, taking her with him. "Damn me? What for?" He resumed his assault on her mouth with his.

She pulled from the kiss, running her hands up and down the expanse of his shoulders. "For making me want another wolf so badly. It's been so long..."

He captured her again, clutching a fistful of hair. Tugging her head back, he licked a trail down her jaw, swirling his tongue over the sensitive part of her neck.

She moaned, pulling him tighter against her.

His cock bobbed against her stomach, and despite the robe and his slacks, he could still feel her heat. "You know the rules of this game, then?"

She groaned. Her hands reached his ass, squeezing. "Yes."

Luka gripped her thighs, heaving her off the ground. "Yet you hate it and are still giving in."

Nodding, she said, "It's just sex." She locked her legs around his waist and reached between their bodies. "May I?"

He nodded, shaking against her. "It's more than that. You feel it, too, don't you?"

Another groan. Her hand reached the snap on his slacks, undoing it and unzipping him quickly. Her body pressed into his with deft movements that had her panting, begging for him.

The strength it took to hold her with one arm while she clutched onto him would amaze anyone. Grabbing himself with his other hand, he found her heat, intense enough to travel up the length of his cock before he'd even pressed it against her nether lips.

Michele tensed her thighs, pushing herself off him just slightly before slamming down on his cock.

Both of them shuddered and moaned into each other.

Luka positioned them so she was against the wall, wrapped around him still. The scent of lupine and rose carried through the air, wild and free.

Her wet pussy clenched him, welcoming him with a tightness that didn't want to let go.

He tangled one fist around her hair and suckled on her neck, tasting and biting the skin so sweet. "Goddamn, you're slick."

Michele bit into his shoulder and cried out. "You're well on your way to becoming that way too, bud."

Luka started bucking against her, using the wall and her round ass for momentum.

Each thrust made her breath catch. She squeezed her legs together around him and tossed her head against the wall.

Luka kept suckling on her neck, careful to avoid the wound on the other side. Hands on her plump ass squeezed her while he enjoyed the feel of her pussy caressing the length of his dick.

Her juices coated him, making her tight passage even wetter and his throbbing cock even harder. She burned him with her kisses, with the way her muscles clenched around his body.

They fit together perfectly.

Rhythmic movements had them slapping against each other with an almost trancelike sound with nails gripping, claws digging into flesh and teeth scraping against skin.

Each thrust upwards sent Michele's head lolling back and forth against his shoulder and the wall.

Luka maintained his pace, keeping in time with the way her body deliciously jerked against his, allowing him to drive himself in deeper and deeper with each thrust.

Her moans grew louder, her grip on him more desperate.

The familiar sensation of tightness started low in his balls. Luka slowed down, adjusting his angle to penetrate her with less intensity but more focus on her clit.

Strong thighs wrapped even tighter around his waist and seized him. "I don't want this."

He was panting, his heart racing, his breathing becoming laboured. "You need it."

Between deep breaths, Michele shook her head, her hair falling over her face to darken her features. "No. I can't be tied to another Alpha."

Luka reached between them and pinched a nipple taut.

Her head fell back against the wall. Her skin was sweat-covered and reddened. "No, please no, Luka!"

"You need to come." The demand in his voice couldn't be mistaken.

Michele growled but stopped when her breath caught in her throat. Panting, slamming onto him, she hurriedly picked up the pace.

Luka spoke in stuttered speech. "Orgasm. Is. Nnnear, isn't it?"

She didn't respond verbally. Her body bucked and tensed up around him, muscles clenching the base of his cock.

With each withdrawal, vice-like pressure rubbed him and pulled his own orgasm closer to the surface.

Tweaking her nipples again, he dipped his head down to her neck and flicked his tongue around her satiny skin, tasting the saltiness and earthy musk that had appeared during their fucking. It wouldn't take but one word and a call of the wolf's power to bind her to him.

Did he dare?

She wasn't in love with him. Didn't seem to want him. But her body certainly didn't reject his.

The pack, the greater good, needed this. Needed a leader with a mate. He'd just have to force her hand if the humans were to be saved.

"You love this?" He undulated his hips upwards, triggering her orgasm.

She cried aloud, begging him not to make her come.

It was too late. She threw her head back. With her mouth wide open, she yelled, screaming his name along with a number of obscenities while her body shook and soaked his cock with her juices.

He needed to bind her now but couldn't. Release hit him first, his balls drawing up against his body. Pumping, thrusting harder and deeper, he slammed himself into her, emptying his seed inside her and nearly smashing his fingers between the wall and her ass.

Groaning, squeezing his eyes tightly shut and coming in spurts, he filled her full and then some before he stopped and clutched her tightly to him.

She held onto him for balance, for dear life.

He heard her sob against him. Felt her warm tears against his exposed skin.

He pulled back from the wall and carried her to the counter where he set her down gently. He wasn't afraid he'd hurt her, she was a wolf. But her sobs threatened to break his heart.

She wasn't his, and he couldn't bring himself to bind her or break her free will, but he did need her submission. Lifting his head up, he brought a hand to her face. With his thumb, he smoothed away the tears falling steadily from her soft brown eyes. "What's wrong?"

Michele sniffled, looked up at him and smiled weakly. Running a hand through her hair, she moved it out of her face and tried her best to give him that defiant look he knew well.

He tilted her chin with his thumb. "Tell me, sweetheart."

Another sniffle was followed by another before she stopped and squared her shoulders. "Nothing."

Luka snorted. "I know better." He did, too, could sense the apprehension in her voice, feel the bitterness of some painful memories she didn't want to discuss. It chilled him to the bone.

She shook her head. "This can't work. I'm not in your rank, and I'm not interested in pack politics."

"It doesn't have to be about pack politics or rank. Look at me. I'm a fucking playboy, for goddess' sake! Or I was until they threw this damn necklace on me." He gestured with his hand at the pendant that somehow had come off and was now sitting on the table behind them. "I did not want this, did not want to be Alpha over this pack. But my family, those that raised me, were human, and rogue wolves killed them. The family I loved and had learned to respect, that taught me," his voice was shaking now, "how to live in harmony and be who I

am regardless," he felt the backs of his eyes start to burn with tears, "were slaughtered by rogues. Then Lajon found me. From then on, I didn't have a choice."

Her eyes widened at the horror of his words. "I was just going to tell you about my broken heart from the alpha of the rogue wolves, but wow. You just..." Her jaw dropped. She studied his face for a moment. Apparently she saw what she wanted because she looked away.

The impact of what she said hit him, but he kept on this tangent. She needed to hear him in hopes that he'd bring her around to him. They could discuss her falling in love with his brother later. "I could carry the hate around forever, you know. I could let it simmer and build within me and let the rage destroy me. Or I could do what I've done."

She scowled. "Which is what, exactly?"

He smiled softly. "Built a life and a family for myself and others. Your sister learned to serve me because, like most of us, she's kinky."

She leaned forward and set her hands on the counter's edge. Her eyes narrowed. "But she's human! She can't take the pain you can dish out."

"You'd be amazed, first off. Second, what kind of leader *is* my brother?"

Michele gasped. "Your b-b-brother?"

Turning around to face her from the side, he sighed. "Yeah. You thought you loved my brother. Didn't you? How did that work out? Is your sister bruised? Harmed or coerced into being here?"

Tiffany appeared a moment later, carrying a tray with three glasses of bourbon and the bottle. After setting it down on the table, she handed one glass to Luka, took one for herself and gave the last one to her sister. "Ahem, Luka." Her eyes darted downward, and she patted her stomach.

Following the motion of her eyes while taking the glass, heat crept up his neck. "I'm sorry!" He zipped himself up then helped cover Michele with the size of his body while she adjusted her robe.

"I don't have the senses you two do, being full-blooded human," she smirked, "but I'd appreciate it if you two remembered that humans embrace modesty. I'd expect you to remember," she glared at Luka.

He gave her a shrug that somehow seemed Gallic, saying so much with so little.

Tiffany groaned and took a sip of bourbon. "I take it you two are caught up on each other's wounds?"

He nodded. "Your sister was just telling me about my brother."

Michele snorted. "He is a typical male, stubborn, headstrong and dominating. Not at all like you."

Tiffany giggled. "She's got you, there."

"Hush, woman." He brought a hand to his head and closed his eyes. He hadn't seen his brother in months, but word must have gotten around that his time was drawing near to either have a mate or cede control of the pack.

Michele swirled her drink around before taking a sip. He assumed it was the heat from the alcohol that made her gasp and squint.

"There's no way I'm interested in dating another overbearing asshole."

He smiled. "Good. 'Cause I'm only an occasional asshole, according to my submissive."

Michele's eyes widened. "How is that so? You've subjugated my sister!"

Setting a hand on Tiffany's back, he rubbed her, needing the contact from someone familiar, safe.

She turned to him and smiled.

The physical connection between them wasn't hot like it had been with Michele, the two were so different it wasn't funny. Michele was a full wolf and Tiffany a full human. How could that have been?

He didn't have time to ponder it. "Tiffany isn't brutalised. I'm into the bondage part with other women who can take it. Tiffany realises her place in this world is with someone who loves her deeply, not unlike the way I care for her but differently. She is good at being submissive, good at handling my affairs as she has the last year or so. I've trained her to respect herself and pack law to a point. But," he looked at Tiffany, "what did I tell you?"

She smiled so brightly, it lit up her face. "Protect yourself, your loved ones, shoot to kill!"

Michele groaned. "You and your brother are almost alike."

Luka frowned. He growled out the one word. "How?"

Michele slid off the counter and smoothed out the robe. "He has the same attitude about people."

His mouth curled up. "Ugh. No. We share a similar belief, but I took the high road."

She pursed her lips together in a thin line. "Fine. I'll see it when I believe it. But," she let out a long, slow breath, "how do we proceed? You bound us."

His eyebrows rose. "I did no such thing."

Her shoulders tensed. She leaned against the countertop and sipped her bourbon then looked at him, her eyes staring directly at his. "I felt it."

He lifted his chin. Setting a hand on his hips, he took a step back and examined her. Her scent had changed from when he'd first met her. Now it smelled of roses and honey and sex, a pungent yet intoxicating aroma that caused his nostrils to flare. "I didn't bind you."

She lifted a hand behind her head. "You had to have. I feel...different."

Tiffany pulled out a broom and begun sweeping up the broken glass on the kitchen floor. She was managing to clear up much of the mess and restore some cleanliness to the kitchen. She looked up with a wry grin on her face and annoyance in her eyes that seeped out into the air in the scent of bitter peppers. "You two have issues to work out. I need to get busy. Get out of my kitchen."

Luka scowled but offered Michele his hand. "Still think she's being forced into this?"

Michele reached for his grasp and laughed, a light sound. "No, I suppose not. Where are we going?"

"My office. It's the one place she won't go without knocking if the door is shut, unlike other sexy women." He gave her a macho smile.

She swatted his shoulder. "Beast."

The two walked into the office. The door shut behind Luka with a soft click. He turned to face Michele.

She leaned back in the large leather chair behind his desk and closed her eyes. "What are we going to do?"

He shrugged. "Well, the necklace puts us together, obviously."

She spoke dryly. "Obviously."

He set a hand on his hip. "But you don't want this."

Chapter Four

Michele shook her head. "Not interested in wolf politics. Nor is saving the world my thing, either."

Lifting his foot onto the footrest, Luka leaned forward and set his chin in his hand. He continued swirling bourbon around in the glass.

"You drink a lot, huh?"

He nodded, eyes closed. "Helps me think to actually have something in my hand. I'm a little neurotic that way." Opening his eyes, he saw the faintest smile on her pretty mouth. He wanted to kiss her again. Needed to.

But fucking her wouldn't solve any problems other than the one in his pants.

"That's the second time in a week I've been challenged. The rogues don't want an open fight where they'll have to play fair or lose. They know I can beat my brother, always have been able to."

She leaned forward, tilting the chair with a creak. "I thought you said you were raised by humans."

"I was. But he wasn't. He found me by accident in a bar one night, and we started talking. It became clear our goals were different."

She nodded, keeping her focus on him.

He swore she licked her lips.

Hell, her taste was still on his tongue. "The matter at hand became the standard 'good versus evil and wolves are superior' discussion. We fought, he lost. Swore vengeance, yadda yadda."

She grinned. "Sounds like a wonderful brother. He and I dated briefly, but then as he rose through the ranks in pack politics, he wanted me to bend to his stupid will. I couldn't do it for much more than a few months."

He waved a hand dismissively. "Bet you liked that."

She dropped her chin and glared straight at him. "Oh, yes, I loved it. Not!"

He chuckled low and throaty. "You know, if the rogues get control of the packs up here, they'll instigate a policy of hunting humans."

Michele blinked and slumped back in the chair. "I know. That means —"

"People like your sister will be used for food and enslaved if the rogues get their way. An entire war will break out, and it'll be wolf against wolf. Do you want that?"

Michele rested her head against the back of the chair and stiffened. "No. No, I don't. I really just want this entire thing to go away!"

Pulling over his chair, Luka sat beside Michele at his desk. He thought if they were on the same side of the table, he could convince her to see his solution of binding her to him and joining him in the fight against those who would harm humanity, including her sister. "So, what about your family?"

Michele's head turned to the side. "I don't want to discuss them."

"They're not worth protecting?" The words left his mouth faster than he could stop them.

Michele spun and faced him, eyes wide. "I killed them accidentally, okay? *I'm* the one who killed them, couldn't control my powers. Couldn't control what I am. I fucking hate it and hate the wolves because of it!"

By now her chest rose and fell. The scent in the room matched her emotions, burnt matches and white pepper. She was definitely angry over a lot of things.

Luka leaned forward, cautiously extending a hand to her cheek. "I can help you heal if you'll let me."

She turned away.

Luka settled against the back of the chair, aware he should probably give her space and time to deal with the magnitude of everything he'd just said. But they only had less than a few days left before the pack meeting and he was either challenged anyway or forced out of Alpha by the elder council.

He cleared his throat and kept one hand on his thigh, the other holding his bourbon. "They'll vote on what to do if I don't have a mate. Chances are, the rogues will want me

defeated, my brother will want me dead. I stand a chance against him, but if I win, I'm still without a mate."

A tear escaped her eyes. She kept her gaze on his, though, searching.

"I don't like that we can't court like a normal couple. But you see how I treat your sister. You see how I've treated the others in this area. We're not stronger because we're a larger force, the rogues outnumber us two to one."

She crossed her legs. "Then why fight what seems like a losing battle?"

"Because it's not our strength in numbers, it's our belief in the system that gives us the ability to live in harmony with the humans as we go on mostly unseen. Our strength lies in our mercy. Our desire to do the right thing is letting us maintain the status quo."

She sighed. Smoothing the robe over her legs, she rocked back and forth. "What do we do?"

Luka couldn't keep his eyes off the line of exposed flesh, but forced himself to focus. "We have to bind to each other. I know —"

Her posture straightened. "No."

Setting down his drink, he rested his elbows on the desk, clasping his hands together. He met her stare, looking deep into those beautiful, brown eyes, searching for the hidden meaning. Alphas had to do those things, be perceptive enough to hear someone out and catch the meaning from what was not said.

She waited, took a breath.

The rise and fall of her chest beneath his black robe made his mouth water. He needed to make her understand just how important the binding was.

He leaned back in the chair, still keeping his focus on her. Picking up his drink again, he took a sip and let the warm liquid slide down his throat along with the scent of spice and smooth, charred oak. "Perhaps a night's sleep will help. You've had a rough day."

She rolled her eyes. "You're not hearing me. And I can't stay here."

His lips curled upwards in a smile. "You don't drive, do you?"

She twitched and narrowed her eyes. "What are you getting at?"

His smile widened. *Tiffany, come here, please. I need you to help me convince your sister to stay the night.*

A moment later, Tiffany appeared with a tray and three cups plus a pot of steaming tea.

"Smells like jasmine," he said.

Michele groaned. "My sister, submissive to a stubborn Alpha. Great."

Tiffany set the tray down on the corner of the desk and picked up one cup, filling it slowly before handing it on a saucer to Luka.

He took it and brought it to his lips, inhaling the rich aroma of his expensive tea. His nerves steadied just a bit from the calming fragrance. He could think this out.

Tiffany set out another cup and poured tea into it.

Michele reached for it but stopped. She glared at her sister then at Luka.

He took a sip. "What? You don't drink tea?"

She snorted. "I drink tea, you fool. What's in this?"

Luka glanced at Tiffany.

Tiffany poured tea for herself and leaned against the edge of the desk. She set a hand on her hip and smirked. "It's a nice jasmine tea from a local producer. Can't you smell it with your superior nose?"

Michele rolled her eyes.

Licking his lips, Luka took another sip before setting his cup on the saucer Tiffany had provided. Keeping his voice low, even, he clasped his hands together. "Just how in touch with the wolf are you, Michele?"

Her eyes widened. "It's none of your business."

An eyebrow rose. "So you're a typical denial case, then. I see. We have a much bigger problem on our hands if you won't embrace what you are to the fullest extent. I realised when you didn't speak back to me on the mental pathway that something was wrong. Just wasn't sure what it was."

"For your information," she leaned forward with a glint of annoyance in her eyes, giving him an excellent view of her cleavage, "I don't need to waste time on learning how to be a wolf. It's what I am, and I accept me just fine."

Luka set a hand on her thigh.

Startled, she jumped back, slamming against the chair so it squeaked.

"Nervous much?" Tiffany snickered.

The glare in Michele's eyes could have killed God right then. "What is it with you people? I'm fine the way I am, and I don't need to stay here and think about anything. I'll protect my sister from the rogues and kill your brother if he tries to come near her."

Tiffany came to Michele's side and squatted beside her. Looking up into her eyes, she spoke, keeping her voice soft and steady. "Sweetie, you're not even hearing him, are you?"

Her eyes widened. "You don't know what he's asking of me!" Michele clenched her fists together and pursed her lips into a thin line.

"Oh, sweetie, I do." Tiffany stroked her sister's thigh.

Luka needed to ramp up the persuasive power here. Wolves as a rule couldn't manipulate the will of others, but many humans thought they could. Wolves weren't witches, just beings the Moon Mother had blessed with a dual nature.

Pushing back the chair, he stood in a swift motion that made Michele gasp. Keeping a fixed gaze on her eyes, he spoke softly. "Michele, I am pack Alpha here, and as law is mine to set, I'm declaring you mine. You can take up any grievances with the Council at the meeting in a few days. Otherwise," he leaned forward and set a hand on her thigh opposite Tiffany's, "by that which is given to us —"

"No!" Michele stood and shoved the chair out of the way before trying to get around her sister.

Tiffany gripped her sister's thigh and held on tightly.

Luka caught Michele and pushed her to the couch.

The reflection in Michele's eyes showed him the nature of his sorrow at having to be so rough with her, but this was a necessity.

"I don't want this!" Michele kicked and struggled against Luka and Tiffany, but it was no use. She was trapped against the wall, now.

Gripping her shoulders, he held her firmly in place, careful not to bruise her despite her healing powers. His heart lurched in his throat when he saw the horrified expression she

wore. "Damnit, we don't have time for your wants and needs. There are others out there who will die if I lose the pack. *Do you want that blood on your hands?*"

"No. But I don't want the blood of an asshole alpha on them, either! I don't want to be controlled or manipulated. Everything else in my life has been taken from me, including my sister!" She glowered at Tiffany for emphasis. "You took her!"

"No, sis." Tiffany let go and backed off, softening her expression. "I left because I saw what Luka was trying to do. He's trying to protect the humans, work for the greater good by serving the needs of the many."

Michele was screaming, now, her voice a mixture of anguish and pain that wrapped around Luka's heart. "You can't! It's impossible! I tried just helping mom and dad, and look what happened. I killed them! I fucking killed our parents, Tiffany!"

Luka steadied himself and brought a hand carefully to her face to wipe away the tears that started falling in a steady stream.

At the softness of his touch, she gasped and stopped talking, sniffing still.

"Young and old, wolves are the same everywhere, Michele. You can't change what you are. The only way," he lowered his voice a notch with each word, "is to embrace it openly and learn to control it so mistakes happen less and less. You're not alone here, I promise."

She tried to glare with tears in her eyes. It was visibly apparent that it was difficult. "But you'll try to control me! You'll try to make me bend to your every whim, and I don't want that!"

"You *say* you don't want that," he moved closer, using his body and gentle strokes to her face to arouse her, "but I know what you really need. I can guide you and not hurt you."

She turned her chin up.

He moved in for a chaste kiss. Once their lips met, he realised he couldn't have just a taste. Her sheer beauty had started hardening him earlier, but he'd had the jasmine tea to distract him.

Pulling back from her, he tilted his head slightly and smiled. Her honey and rose scent mixed with lust stirred his cock to life, full and throbbing and in need of a warm, soft place.

Michele's eyes darted from right to left before locking onto his. Her mouth hung open, forming a perfect O.

He saw his opportunity. Swooping in, he became aware of her body beneath his, hands wrapping around his broad shoulders. Fingernails dug in.

He kissed her, capturing her tongue and stroking it, letting her explore him.

She moaned, tilting her hips into him. "I can't stop this reaction to you," she growled.

"Most women are drawn to me because I'm an alpha." He nipped her lower lip, letting her savour his mouth.

She growled again, this time a low, throaty sound, before biting his mouth. "I could care less that you're alpha. You're a damned bastard for making me want you!" Her hands roamed up and down his sides before reaching for his pants.

The door shut behind them with a barely audible click. *Thank you, Tiffany. You're free for the rest of the afternoon if you'd like. Take my car out for a spin but be careful.*

He returned his attention to Michele and her lovely mouth.

She pushed back and let the robe fall open.

He caught the expression on her face, the way she'd pressed her plump lips together.

Her nostrils flared.

He grinned. "You want me because you believe I'm the one who can help you and keep your sister safe."

She started to speak but stopped short.

He caught the front of the robe and tugged it further down her body until it stopped at the knot and hung open like a banana peel. "Goddess, you're beautiful."

Her voice trembled. "I don't want to posture with you."

His hands caught her breasts, full and round and soft. He lowered his mouth to one, taking the puckered nipple between his lips. "You don't have to submit everything. You only have to believe in me." He murmured the words into her heated skin, tasting her.

She shuddered beneath him, tangling her hands in his hair and maintaining contact. "I want to – oh, Goddess!"

He spread his hands open, fingers wide, and slipped them underneath the robe to touch her bare thighs. Smooth skin, strong muscles and her heat made his knees weak.

She arched her hips towards him.

Two fingers slid inside her heat.

Her muscles clenched around him.

She was velvety slickness, a fire burning his hand. Working his fingers in and out slowly, he brushed his knuckles over her clit.

She gasped.

Still suckling her breast, he swirled his tongue around the nipple, flicking it.

Her grip on his head tightened. Her lungs filled with air, released it, her chest heaving in his mouth.

Luka turned his wrist for comfort and began working her faster with his fingers, keeping his palm against her clit.

Michele started to sweat, panting, gasping and clutching his head for dear life. The beginning of the orgasm noticeably started building, low in her belly.

Popping her breast out of his mouth, Luka trailed his tongue down her stomach. Using his free hand, he spread her thighs apart. "Open for me, baby."

The wolf inside him was as hungry with desire as was the man. The two smelled her, both wolf and woman, impatiently wanting inside of her to claim her as theirs.

Luka tamped down his arousal. Still, his cock was throbbing painfully against his trousers.

Widening her stance for him, she used one hand to move the robe out of the way.

Pressing his mouth against her pussy, he snaked his tongue upwards.

She gripped his shoulders for purchase.

He flicked his tongue over her clit.

She shivered against him, bucking her hips into his mouth.

Luka took one thigh and set it over his shoulder and did the same with the other so she was straddling his mouth and being held against the wall. Cupping her ass with his hands, he leaned forward and inhaled the scent of sex, spicy now.

Michele shifted before a groan slipped past her lips. "I don't know what you're doing..."

His tongue delved past her folds, licking, swirling and exploring her delicately, tasting tangy love juices.

Her hips writhed against him, her fingers tightening against his shoulders. Her nails dug into his skin.

The tiny pinpricks jolted his body with pain he could ignore. Luka found her swollen clit and drew it into his mouth, scraping his teeth against the bud before sucking more.

Her hips worked into a rhythm with his tongue that was almost mesmerising in itself.

Luka licked and sucked, drawing moans and gasps from her while bringing her closer to release. "Beg me for release," he murmured against her swollen, juice-covered lips.

"No," she steadied herself against him.

He shoved his tongue into her.

Squeezing him with her thighs, she cried out.

Slowly, Luka pulled back, kissing her lips before working his way up her belly.

He stopped and looked up into glossed over eyes. "I'm convincing you this is good for you. Release. Beg for it, please?"

Her head turned to one side, swishing the myriad of curls over her breasts.

Luka caught a handful of hair and tugged gently.

With her mouth open, she remained silent, panting.

The strain on his shoulders wasn't so bad that he might drop her, but he decided on setting her down again.

She stumbled backwards, her hands landing flat against the wall. She looked down at him.

Their eyes met.

His voice was a whisper. "I only want to please you, Michele."

Her eyes started to change colour, going from the soft chocolate brown to something more intense. The beast inside her had woken up and was ready to play.

She took a careful step forward.

Chapter Five

Luka stood in one swift motion.

Michele cocked an eyebrow. Reaching for him, she jerked him closer, tugging him by his pants. Wrapping a hand around his head, she pulled his mouth to hers.

He eagerly went, feeling the possessive manner in which she kissed him.

He'd let her conquer if it meant the safety of not only his pack and humanity, but his heart as well. He knew he could trust her. But did she trust herself?

Her hands fumbled impatiently with the zipper. "Damnit, why did you have to wear these?" She barked the words out before yanking the pants apart, tearing the fabric. Clutching his hips, she pulled him towards her.

Their mouths met.

Her tongue thrust past his lips, hurriedly sweeping around the inside of every crevice of his mouth before she pulled back. "In me," she demanded with a desperate urgency.

Luka took his cock in hand and positioned himself at her entrance. She was slick from his tongue, her juices. Heat poured off her in waves that made him want to speed up, but the alpha in him knew better. "You'll have to beg."

She cried out in frustration. Her eyes shot angry daggers at him that would kill if it weren't for the obvious arousal in them. She slapped his ass. "No. Fuck me."

He chuckled, that throaty rumble of his chest that made women swoon.

A hand landed on his chest, gripping the shirt.

She pulled him to her and shoved her hand between them, gripping his erection. "A lady never begs."

His snicker was cut off when she sealed her lips over his and shoved her tongue inside his mouth again.

She had what it took to be his mate, an insatiable hunger and a desire to control, not be controlled. His heart swelled. Mates knew each other, even if they denied what they were.

Michele tugged him.

The feel of her hands on his slick cock made him groan, but he held his ground. "Beg, my love."

"Fuck me!" She yelled the words tersely and yanked him closer.

He hated making her beg right now. Each and every nerve in his body recognised her for who she was, what she was. But he had to hear her say the words that would signify her desire, her heart's truth.

He spoke through gritted teeth with his fists clenched. "Beg me, please. It's humbling."

"Fuck," she cried out, "Please. Fine! Just get your cock in me, dammit, Luka!"

His lips curved upward in a smile. Taking her hand in his, he pulled her fingers off his cock and interlocked them with hers. "Anything for you, Michele. Just ask."

In one swift motion, he pushed her back against the wall and slid inside her heat, both of them groaning in pleasure at the contact.

She burned him, her scorching pussy set his body racing. "Please let me bind us." He thrust in and out, in and out. "Please, my love."

She buried her head in his shoulder and murmured something incoherent.

He thrust into her, and the strength of her thighs wrapped around him, squeezing his cock.

Leaning her back against the wall, he pounded into her with a passionate fury unmatched by anything he'd ever felt before. No woman had ever captured his attention or been so hot as Michele was now. "Please let me bind us, be my Alpha queen."

She bit his shoulder. "Fine, damnit! Bind me to you, make me your Alpha bitch, and let's get this over with!" Her nails dug into his flesh, scoring his back through the shirt.

A scream tore from his mouth from the pain, but he ignored it and started speaking the ritual words in their tongue. A mixture of Latin and something else, a darker language that when translated made sense only to those who had been blessed by the Moon Mother.

Sparkles surrounded them.

Luka fucked her harder, deeper and faster. His hands settled on her curved ass, fingers clenching into strong, feminine muscle.

She yelled his name, bit into his shoulder again, dragging her teeth over his flesh. Inhaling, panting, her body covered in sweat, she moved with his rhythm to a heightened completion.

"I love this." He groaned the words out, thrusting faster, faster still, until his balls drew tightly against his body. He slowed his pace, feeling the build up, the tension inside his stomach that signalled the approach of release

She needed to come.

Undulating his hips, he brushed his pelvic bone against her clit, tearing a scream from her.

Fingers gripped his hair, tugging hard on it.

Luka slowed himself down more, wanting to torture her endlessly.

She had other ideas. Squeezing her muscles together, she milked his cock, pulling his orgasm from him.

Wild spurts shot into her, his cock pulsating deep within her.

The movement was enough to set her off. She screamed his name again. "Oh Goddess, Luka. Goddammit!" Her entire body shook against his, breasts crushing against his chest.

Luka buried his mouth in her hair, enjoying the feel of her sweat-soaked skin against his mouth. Nuzzling, fucking her harder, he pumped until he'd spent himself.

The tremors continued rolling on for what seemed like forever, until at last she stopped shuddering. Her body quaked in tiny spasms against his for a few moments afterwards.

Walking them both to the couch, Luka sat down with her still clutching his body with her thighs. He ran a hand through her hair, smoothing it over her cold skin. "I love this."

The sparkles disappeared, but he felt renewed, powerful. Even now, the anger and vehemence he'd felt before she arrived were gone, replaced by something deeper, darker and mightier. That same force also calmed him, now.

She pulled herself from him and looked into his eyes, the intensity of her stare still arousing him.

"How do you feel?"

She let out a breath with a whoosh and sighed. "Tired, but like a million bucks. It's like there's calmness, stillness inside of me, now."

He nodded. "That's part of the binding ritual. It instills that tranquil feeling that lets us be Alpha and not Alpha, at the same time, for a better understanding."

"What's going to change, now?"

He shook his head. "Nothing. In a few days, you'll appear beside me. We're equals, okay?"

Her lip twitched. "I've heard that line before."

Luka chortled. "I'm not my brother."

Michele tried to stop the grin that curled her pout upwards. "So I've noticed."

He wiggled an eyebrow. "Seriously, you won't change. I don't go into this without you being an equal. I don't need you to love me." He left out the unspoken word, hoping she'd let it go.

"Yet."

He cringed but threw his arm over the back of the couch and touched her shoulder. She still had the robe on but had adjusted it to cover herself. He could smell his scent on her.

Her lip curled. "What? You were thinking it."

Slouching forward, he patted her thigh before sitting straight. He met her stare. "Yeah, I was. The pack and your sister are the most important things to me. Both have given me a renewed desire to live for the greater good, but even your sister has pressed me to find someone."

Michele chuckled. "Yeah, she would. She's like that."

Dropping his head back against the wall and the top of the leather couch, he sighed. "True. I've gotten the sense she wants a family from me."

Turning to face him, Michele tucked a leg underneath her.

He licked his lips at the sight of exposed flesh.

Slapping his thigh, she snickered. "Pervert."

Luka gave her a wide grin.

"Anyway," Michele brushed wisps of hair out of her face, "Tiffany has longed for a family forever. I hated and still don't approve of her submission to you, but it makes sense, I suppose. She embraced what I was before I did. She just did it."

He nodded. "I know. She's taken great care of me and my business and if I could, I'd reward her somehow."

"I feel the same way." Michele looked deep into his eyes, appearing to search for something.

He caught her chin in the palm of his hand, stroked her flesh lightly. "What are you searching for?"

"Comfort," she mouthed the word so only someone with a wolf's hearing would hear it.

Luka leaned forward. "Maybe love becomes part of that."

Michele inclined her head. "Perhaps."

Extending his hand around her other shoulder, he pulled her to him so she shifted against his body. Sitting in his lap now with his arms around her, she snuggled in closer.

She turned her face upwards. "You're really nothing like your brother if this is how you behave all the time."

"I don't like to rule with an iron fist. Much better for everyone involved if the humans think we're legend, the wolves think we're a gift, and nobody gets an over inflated ego."

She nuzzled him with her head.

"So, you're staying the night?"

Crossing her arms over her chest, she took his hands in hers. "Yeah," she yawned. "I guess."

"Will you help me?" The lump in his throat was harder to swallow than he'd thought.

The question hung in the air between them in a deafening silence that became palpable.

Reaching out, she stroked his chin with her fingernails.

The movement sent a frisson of excitement and pleasure through his body.

"Maybe. We'll see. Let's take this easy, okay? I need to find my centre."

He nodded and stroked her belly with his hands. "Least you admit what you need."

“Hey,” she chuckled, “if I’m nothing else, I’m direct!”

Her smile warmed his heart. She was definitely different than her sister, comforting with more fire than Tiffany. His fingers found hers, lacing together while she leaned back against him. “True. Let’s get some dinner and then sleep.”

She nodded. “Who cooks, here?”

“Most of the time,” he nuzzled her neck with his cheek, “I do. Your sister has a life outside of being my submissive, and I vowed not to interfere. She said it was no problem, but after learning of her resentment, I really feel bad.”

Her voice remained calm. “Good Alphas understand the balance in all things, huh?”

He nodded. Her scent was killing him. The wolf could go again. For that matter, so could the human. “Don’t get me wrong, I do love your sister as I previously stated. But she’s meant for something deeper, better than what I could give her.”

Michele nodded.

Her smile reached his heart.

* * * *

The mood around the house was sombre the day of the big meeting. All the wolves were set to gather at the Coliseum on the east side of Oakland.

The previous two days had been filled with lovemaking, going over protocol and grooming of both the wolf and the human by Tiffany.

Luka could sense Michele’s discomfort at having her sister bathe her in wolf form and decided to groom her in her human form himself to save face. Besides, as much as he loved Tiffany, he felt the help should understand their place.

Michele still hadn’t reciprocated his love, but she hadn’t refused it, either. This was a good sign.

When it was time, the three piled into the car and began the long drive from Marin to Oakland. Luka kept a hand on Michele’s thigh while Tiffany sat in the back and stroked his shoulders.

Tiffany coughed. "I can feel it from here, your anticipation that Lajon won't believe this is real."

I hate that I cannot mask my feelings from you, little one. It means your sister can definitely feel me in spades.

Tiffany stroked his hair.

The motion settled him down, somewhat.

Michele held his hand in hers, keeping a death grip on it. She'd sworn she had no desire to deal with wolf politics and become part of a broken, outdated system, but Luka had managed to convince her that the two of them could change things.

His breathing picked up with each mile they passed. "This will be okay. It has to be. I need to remain in control of the pack."

Michele's fingers began circling his palm.

Her movement connected him to her on a deeper level that slowed his heart rate. "Thank you, my mate."

Keeping his eyes on the road, Luka steered them towards Oakland and through the ghetto until they arrived in the parking lot of the Coliseum. Stopping his car up front, he pulled the keys from the ignition and let out a breath he hadn't realised he'd been holding.

He and Michele looked at each other, and he saw the trepidation in her eyes. He had to keep it together, had to be certain of his next several movements much the way a chess player had to remain six moves ahead of his opponent.

Closing his eyes for a moment, Luka let out a long sigh then looked back at Michele. "My brother will be here, and he'll probably not be entirely thrilled to see either of us."

Michele smirked. "I know. It wouldn't surprise me if he pulled some shit based on our past relationship."

Inhaling slowly, Luka steadied his nerves and tried to keep his energy use at a minimum. It did no good to show off how nervous he was in front of thousands of wolves who were counting on him to lead them into balance and harmony because of his newfound mate.

Michele rubbed his chest with a hand. "You'll do fine."

She sounded confident even though he could smell the half truth.

She was just as scared as he was.

He swallowed hard and kept his expression neutral.

Jared would be there with the rest of the Rogues from Southern California, and they'd all be ready to start a coup if word got out that Luka hadn't been honest about his mate.

Dressed in black slacks, a dark shirt to match the colour of his eyes, his longish hair flowing behind him, he remained steady when he stood.

Dressed in a long, flowing, grey dress that set off her eyes, Michele had curled her hair and left it hanging down so it bounced with each step she took. A lighter shade of red lipstick gave her mouth even more appeal and brought out her natural skin tones. Steel toed boots complimented the outfit.

Tiffany was dressed as a typical human, blue jeans and a pink dress shirt that fanned out around her hips. Her hair had been left down so she'd fit in with Prince Luka and the idea that he'd chosen a very feminine mate.

Michele opened her door and walked around to his side with Tiffany falling in behind them. The cloak Luka wore blew in the wind, wrapping around his body.

The scents in the air were mixed, with wolf and gasoline the most prominent. The area itself was the less desirable part of town, known for having a higher population of renters and lower class humans.

The stench of the poor hung in the air heavily amongst the many eighteen-wheel trucks and industrial vehicles that drove through town. Luka looked up at the sky. There wasn't a single cloud.

He prayed silently for this experience to go smoothly, for them to accept Michele as his mate and for her to eventually fall in love with him. She deserved to have a family that would support her in everything she did, and he'd be proud to be part of that.

The various wolves standing guard at the gateway parted for him and his small entourage, keeping their heads bowed. Some of them greeted him with tiny smiles. Most kept their expressions neutral.

Michele kept pace with Luka, her soft hand in his.

Tiffany remained close behind the two for her own protection despite the obvious posturing.

Luka smelled the sour milk scent of Tiffany's fear and wished he didn't have to bring her to this meeting. Didn't like the idea she was as involved as she was, but she *was* his submissive.

Pack law currently respected human submissives the same way vampires stereotypically had them, as property. But many in Luka's camp knew he had feelings for Tiffany, had valued her more as a friend than as food. Many of those wolves turned up their noses at her presence.

The three stopped at the edge of the ramp just before two dark-skinned men dressed in form fitting jeans and long sleeved T-shirts intercepted them. "Prince Luka," the one on the left said in a gruff voice. "The one who serves you cannot go past this point."

Luka raised an eyebrow. "You dare challenge me now?"

The other guard stepped forward, crossing his powerful arms over a massive chest. His hair hid the expression in his eyes.

Raising his power, Luka felt energy flowing throughout his body, feeding his nerves, his muscles. His eyes must be glowing by now, and he could feel his fangs extending from his jaws. The scent of damp earth and sour milk grew stronger with his enhanced senses.

The guard took a step back, uncrossing his arms. His voice seemed squeaky with each word he spoke. "We don't mean any disrespect, your lordship. But elder Lajon declared the humans must remain behind the guarded rails."

Luka nodded. Turning his head, he looked around at the seats which were filling up while wolves piled in and around the stadium. Seeing the large crowd gathering upset his stomach, but he held himself together like a true leader.

"You should go find a seat over there." He pointed to a nearly empty row that would normally be behind first base.

Tiffany nodded and made her way through the crowd towards the area Luka indicated.

Michele tugged his arm.

He glanced at her. Seeing the quizzical expression on her face, he said nothing. Facing the guards again, he took a step closer. "Where are we to go?"

The air around them grew thicker. "Over there, towards the dais, my prince."

Luka nodded. Pulling Michele with him, he headed towards the large, white and grey dais sitting in the middle of the field.

Being led out there with three guards on each side, Luka and Michele walked carefully, cautiously. There were plenty of friends here, but more enemies.

Michele gave him a sideways glance.

Trust me. She'll be safer there. That's all my immediate pack, and they'll fight for her if something goes wrong.

Michele nodded. She let out a breath and clutched his hand tighter. Her voice dropped from its normal tone. "You speak as though this could go wrong."

He nodded. "Jared is not the kindest of rulers, as you know. Lajon will be here after we're seated to test us."

Michele's grip tightened on his hand. "Test us?"

He took his seat. Luka's head didn't move, but his eyes scanned the entire crowd. Wolves were on all sides of him, many of the rogues at his back, poised to jump. There was a palpable tension in the air so thick it could be cut with a knife.

From the bullpen on his left, a crowd had gathered. Many more from the various packs had shown up to greet him and see him pass his test.

"You didn't mention a test, Luka." Michele took her seat beside him.

He twitched. "I didn't?"

She shook her head.

"Shit." He managed to keep that one word spoken in a mutter.

Nails dug into his flesh.

He bit back a groan. *Cool it. It won't be bad or hard. You don't have to know pack history or shit like that.*

The pressure on his hand eased.

It's more performance art.

The sound of teeth clenching made Luka turn to his lover and mate. He knew what to expect. And he knew Michele wouldn't go for it if she had to perform anything overly sexual

in public. Still, he had no idea what Lajon would ask of him, if anything. The man was unpredictable.

The remainder of the seats filled, with Alphas down front and their packs behind them in various sections according to region.

Luka didn't like having the rogues behind him. He'd spotted some of the more prominent troublemakers taking seats near the dais. *We're surrounded by enemies, it seems.*

Michele nodded.

He heard her swallow.

He leant over and kissed her cheek.

Can you fight?

The feminine voice floated over his mind like sweet candy. Jerking his head towards Michele, he started to speak, but responded on the mental pathway instead. *Yeah. When did you learn to speak on this channel?*

She giggled. *I've been with you for a couple of days. I was bound to pick up a few tricks.*

His eyes narrowed on her, especially the way the dress clung to her ample breasts. Licking his lips, he kept his physical responses non-evident. *I'm glad. I feel my brother's energy.*

Michele's breath caught in her throat.

Did she have unresolved feelings for him?

You know I hate him, right?

He nodded. *Glad.*

The noise in the stadium grew very loud and raucous then died quickly when the doors that led from one of the locker rooms swung open.

A thick cloud of smoke billowed out from the entrance, and a large figure appeared, walking confidently towards the dais.

The smoke cleared enough for human eyes to make out the figure.

"Lajon," Luka whispered.

The man stood tall. His large dreads framed a face that looked rough, raw, making him seem even darker, meaner. He wore a vest and jeans with boots that stopped at his knees. Rich, dark chocolate skin was exposed, showing others his well-defined body.

"That's Lajon?" Michele tried to keep a whispered tone.

Luka felt a chill race through his system, knew his mate felt it, too. Her hand was shivering in his.

Still, he sat straight in the chair and kept his gaze locked with Lajon's.

Luka and Michele stood to deafening silence from the crowd. Movement behind Luka made him wary. The Rogues were planning something.

Lajon stopped just before the steps of the dais. "I see you found a mate."

Luka reached into his pocket and pulled out the glowing necklace. Setting it around his neck, he nodded.

Turning to face the crowd, Lajon spread his arms wide. His booming voice echoed in the large stadium. "My fellow wolves, our uniting leader, Luka, has found a mate. She is his true one, set from eternity to love him and help him achieve his goals of keeping balance. As it was written, we gained a leader who believed in equality amongst those who inhabit this planet. Yet he lacked balance in his personal life. Even taking a beautiful human girl for a submissive did not help fulfil the prophecy, as he only gave a part of his heart."

Luka swallowed hard and glanced in Tiffany's direction.

Her understanding gaze seemed to make it better.

"Yet the necklace glows brightly for the woman standing beside him, does it not?"

"How accurate is that thing? Where did the magick used to make it come from?" a lone voice called out from the centre of left field.

Luka's stare moved. It was a young pup. Dressed sloppily, it appeared as though the punk had no idea about protocol.

Lajon turned towards the kid.

The pup dropped to the ground.

Clearing his throat, Lajon spoke with his deep voice. "Do any of you question what I have given our prince?"

Michele gasped.

Even Luka felt the awesome power of Lajon's spiritual bitchslap. His skin warmed.

Lajon turned back to the crowd. "He is not dead, just taking a much needed sleep while the adults conduct business." He turned to glare at Luka and Michele. "As you both know, we require proof of your mating to assure us this isn't a bullshit deal. Do you have proof?"

Michele and Luka turned towards each other. She shrugged.

Luka had no clue what he could show as proof. Looking deep into Michele's eyes, he saw her sympathy, compassion and the heart of who she was, echoing loudly even in the questioning gaze she gave.

"I could offer her my blood as proof, Elder, but that is all we have."

Lajon walked closer, keeping a steady eye on the two of them, his nostrils flaring. He said nothing else.

Extending a hand, a white ball of light formed in his palm and grew in size until it was about the size of a beach ball. "You two will touch this light together. That shall be enough for me."

The white ball of light? This was the test for them? A smile formed at Luka's mouth.

He turned to face Michele. Taking her hand in his, he started towards Lajon.

She followed, locking their fingers together.

"This ball of light will seek out and embrace your true feelings. If you are not a mated pair, Luka will die, and control of the pack will be ceded to someone who can maintain control until we find a suitable Alpha."

Stiffening, Luka swallowed harder when he heard Michele whimper. He knew he loved her, knew she was his mate. But her doubts could kill him.

She tugged his hand in hers. "We have to do this, Luka. I don't..."

"My blood will not be on your hands, Michele. If I die today, it's my fault, and I'll accept responsibility." Facing forward, he gave her a nod of confidence. Extending a hand towards the ball, he waited for Michele to do the same.

Letting her outstretched arm brush against his, she found their fingers and clasped them together again.

He couldn't read her thoughts, she had apparently picked up shielding, too. This was his life on the line, and she chose to keep her thoughts to herself. Fine. Besides, she was probably just as afraid as he was.

Still, he straightened his shoulders and waited a beat. Something hissed in the air.

Before he could react, Michele yanked back their hands and dropped to the ground.

Lajon leapt away from the two of them.

"What the—" Luka felt the swipe of claws over his skin before a huge, furry body flew past him and pinned another wolf to the ground.

Jaws snapping, Michele the wolf was thrown from the creature she'd landed on top of.

Luka didn't like where this was going. Dropping his human form, he became a wolf instantly. Bones snapped and reformed with renewed strength while his senses heightened even more than from the power surge earlier. Snarling, Luka turned towards the other wolf.

The glint in the attacker's eyes spelled a murderous rage. His grey fur was matted but still held a regal appearance. Lime green eyes glowed while blood dripped from his incisors. *You dare sully this moment with a common whore?*

Luka didn't respond. His mate lay beside him, bleeding. He couldn't spread his energy too thin by trying to heal her while fighting off Jared. They weren't evenly matched. Luka was still the stronger wolf—but not by much.

Keeping an eye on Jared, Luka backed up. Where had Lajon disappeared to? Why hadn't he interfered?

You must figure this one out. The rich voice boomed inside his head.

Luka scoffed. *I will not kill my own brother.*

Jared growled and righted himself. Pawing the ground, he charged forward, leaping into the air with jaws open.

Dodging the attack, Luka spun around to face his opponent.

Jared landed and growled louder.

Some of the crowd moved to secure the area. Others moved for what Luka could only guess were nefarious reasons.

They're waiting for me to take you down, dear brother.

Luka padded towards Michele. *You called my mate a whore. You disrespected the elder.*

Jared snickered. *And got away with both. These pathetic humans you strive to protect are so weak, they've made you lose your judgement on what is right and wrong. Now you die.* He charged again towards Luka.

Luka sidestepped him and kicked out at his brother with a hind foot, catching him in the flank and knocking him to the ground. Seeing his chance, Luka pounced on top of Jared.

If wolves could sneer, that would have been the expression Jared held right then.

Luka let the power in him build up until it was a swirling mass of blackness that was hell bent on satisfying the blood lust.

Jared's muzzle opened, his tongue lolling out. The human in him awoke with fear.

The wolf panicked.

Luka set a paw on Jared's chest. *I should kill you.*

Michele stood and made her way towards Luka and Jared. *You sicken me, Jared.*

Jared lost the ability to maintain his wolf form, and a human materialised beneath Luka's powerful paw. His expression remained the same, wide-eyed, mouth hanging open and quivering. "That power...that awesome power to kill...where did it come from?"

A noise drew their attention away from the conflict at hand. All three of them stared at Lajon in wolf shape, in awe of the power glowing around him.

"You two are a mated pair, I can tell. Her leaping to save your life is not something she would have done had she not been your mate."

Michele snorted and snuffled.

"Jared, you are a disgrace and shall be removed from your position in the Rogues. I will find a suitable replacement."

Jared's trembling didn't stop.

Luka knew the blood lust was riding high in his mind and in his body, but he still couldn't kill his own brother.

Lajon stepped closer. "Luka, do you accept her as your mate?"

Luka nodded.

"Kiss her." It was a command.

Michele and Luka returned to human form, both naked. Luka took one last glance at Jared before climbing off the other man.

The terror never left Jared's eyes.

Luka walked towards Michele and gasped at the sight of blood covering her skin. He readied a hand with healing energy while still diverting a part of his attention to Jared in case his brother had one of those crazy moments where he decided to get the last word.

It never came. What met Luka instead was the soft caress of lips, the sway of feminine hips and a pair of hands that wrapped around his neck, pulling him to her.

He tasted her softly, letting her control the kiss. She slipped her tongue between his lips, arching her hips upwards against his. Pressing her mouth to his, she nibbled his bottom lip.

His body moulded to hers, thighs parting so he could slide the head of his erection against her. He wanted, needed her. A hand snaked around her waist to catch the area where she'd been wounded.

She sucked at his tongue, stroking it with her own.

He inhaled her scent, the rose and honey coming through loud and clear along with her lupine, earthy aroma.

After what seemed like forever, the two parted and stood, gazing into each other's eyes.

Luka scratched his head. "What made you jump in front of me?"

"Silly," she giggled. "I knew I loved you when I thought about your life ending."

The smile that curled his lips upward reached his heart. This was what he'd wanted all his life. The gaze in her eyes matched his perfectly. "I can't live without you, sweet mate."

"Nor I, you." She kissed him again.

And again he fell into her spell, aware she'd bound them together with a different sort of magick.

About the Author

With a total of 11 novels out and more on the way, Sascha Illyvich writes paranormal erotic romances, erotica in many genres and an occasional contemporary erotic romance. In addition to writing, Sascha is a reviewer for Coffee Time Romance, radio spokesperson for the online radio station Radio Dentata and workshop host.

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