



## **Animal Instinct Men of Alaska – Book 2 By Paige Tyler**

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### **Chapter 1**

Why did married people seem to have an uncontrollable urge to play matchmaker with every single guy they knew? Cell phone to his ear, Luke McCall leaned back in his chair and propped the heel of his well-worn Timberland boot up on the edge of his desk as he considered that. He supposed his brother, Hunter, and new sister-in-law, Eliza, were just trying to be helpful. More likely, though, it was just another case of Hunter thinking that he knew exactly what Luke needed. Hunter had only been born about two minutes before Luke, but that didn't stop him from playing the older brother card whenever he thought he should. Like now, when Hunter was trying to hook him up with one of Eliza's friends. What even made Hunter think he was looking to get involved with anyone right now?

Luke supposed he probably shouldn't be too hard on his brother. Now that Hunter had Eliza in his life, it made sense that his twin would want Luke to find happiness with a mate, too. But finding happiness was a tall order. Hell, just going out with a woman was hard enough in his situation. If anyone should know that, it was his brother. Dating was tough for any guy, but when that guy was a werewolf like he was, it added a whole new meaning to the word "complicated." It was difficult to get close to a woman when he was keeping a secret that big. Most women intuitively picked up on the fact that he was hiding something, and were quick to bail on the relationship.

Of course, since Eliza was a werewolf, too, Hunter didn't have that problem. Though Luke was happy for his brother, it was hard not to be a little jealous at the same time. Hunter had literally hit the jackpot with Eliza. Not only was she beautiful, sexy, and thrilled about living in Alaska, but she hadn't freaked out when she found out he was a werewolf. And to top it all off, she had completely embraced becoming a werewolf when she'd gotten bitten herself. A woman like that didn't come along very often. She was definitely one of a kind. Which meant that Luke wasn't likely to find anyone like that anytime soon.

"So, can I tell Eliza that you're coming up this weekend?" Hunter asked, interrupting his thoughts.

Damn, his brother was persistent. "How 'bout I think about it and give you a call later in the week?"

"Eliza's friend is going to be bummed if you don't come up," Hunter told him. "She really wants to meet you. Eliza has told her a lot about you."

Luke's mouth quirked. "Well, at least she knows what I look like. Like I said, I'll call you later in the week."

"I'm going to hold you to that," his brother said.

Luke shook his head as he flipped his cell phone closed and shoved it in the pocket of his jeans. Even if he hadn't wanted to avoid the whole blind date thing like the plague, he wasn't sure he should be going to Fairbanks for the weekend anyway. He'd only moved back to Anchorage a couple of weeks ago and he was still trying to make a good impression on his new boss. That meant coming in on the weekend to get extra work done.

Getting to his feet, Luke picked up his backpack from the floor, grabbed his laptop and handheld radio from the desk, then headed for the door. "I'm going up to Chugach," he told the gray-haired secretary as he passed her desk.

Madge looked up from what she was doing to give him a smile and a nod. She had probably heard everything he'd said on the phone, and was even now thinking about setting him up with one of her unmarried daughters; she just had that look in her eye.

Luke hurried out the door before Madge could say anything. Outside, he took in his

surroundings as he made his way over to where his Mercury Mariner was parked. Built on a strip of coastal lowlands at the base of the Chugach Mountains, Anchorage was one of the most beautiful cities he'd ever seen. Of course, since he'd grown up there, Luke supposed he was a little biased. But that didn't mean it wasn't true. While Anchorage was more populated than other parts of Alaska, there were so many parks and so much untouched wilderness around that it seemed less citified somehow. In a way, with its cultural influences and trendy shops, it reminded him a lot of Seattle. Though he'd enjoyed living in the Pacific Northwest for the past four years, he had definitely missed Alaska, so it was no surprise that he'd fallen in love with the place all over again when he'd come up for his brother's wedding. A few days after being back, he'd applied for a job with the Alaskan Department of Fish and Game. Luckily, they had been looking for a biologist at the time, so they'd hired him right away.

The population studies on gray wolves that he was currently conducting had him spending most of his time either in Chugach State Park or the Kenai Wildlife Refuge. He'd never been one for sitting behind a desk all day, so that was more than fine with him. Any job that involved getting his boots muddy was a great job as far as he was concerned.

Less than an hour later, Luke was pulling into the parking area on Crow Creek Road. Grabbing his pack from the seat beside him, he threw it over his shoulder. Though it was still fairly warm, he could feel that fall was right around the corner. Temperatures would start to drop sharply in the next several weeks as the abbreviated autumn turned into the true Alaskan winter. He was looking forward to it. When it was warm, Alaska was beautiful, but once the snow began to fall, the state became truly spectacular.

Luke cinched the straps of the backpack more tightly across his chest as he headed up Crow Pass Trail into the forest. He planned on looking for wolf tracks along one of the major streams near the trail, hoping that would give him some information on the size of the pack that was living in the area. The moment he passed underneath the first huge alpine spruce, he took a deep breath. God, he loved the smell of the forest. In fact, he loved everything about the forest—the wind in the trees, the sound of animals scurrying in the underbrush, the solitude. With its five point four million acres, Chugach Forest was a complete wilderness area. He could walk all day and not see another person. That kind of freedom made him look forward to getting his work done quickly, so that he could stash his pack in a tree, change into a wolf, and go for a run.

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Heidi Gibson couldn't help but smile as she slowed her car to a stop and patiently waited for the trio of Dall sheep to cross Seward Highway. They paused in the middle of the road to regard her with a bored expression for a moment before finally going on their way. Finding wildlife on a major highway back home in Denver wasn't a common occurrence, so Heidi had been disconcerted to see moose, bears, and sheep frequently sharing the roads with cars here in Alaska. But after being in Anchorage for the past two months, she was used to seeing them.

She sighed as she started down the road again. It was difficult to believe she'd been up in

Alaska that long. She had come up to Anchorage to get inspiration for some new watercolor paintings and had originally only intended to stay for a couple of weeks, but one look at the gorgeous mountain backdrop and lush arctic landscape, and she'd fallen in love with the area. It was the perfect place for an artist like her to go for inspiration. And she'd certainly been inspired. Not only had she finished dozens of paintings, but she'd taken hundreds of photographs that she could work from when she got back home. In fact, she was going hiking in Chugach State Park that afternoon to take some more. She was eager to get as many pictures as she could before she left the next week.

On the way to the park, Heidi made a quick stop at the ranger station in Girdwood. Even though she carried a small radio with her, she liked to check in with the park rangers to see if there was any news she should know about. As a woman out hiking by herself, she always wanted to have the latest information on any possible dangers, of both the wildlife variety and the human sort. She also liked to let the rangers know where she was going and when she expected to be back. That way, if something happened, there would be someone to know she was missing.

As she got out of the car and walked over to the small building, she waved to several rangers as they walked through the parking lot. She knew almost all the rangers who worked in the park, and was friends with most of them. But as she opened the door, she found herself hoping that Ryan Ackerman, one of the rangers, would be out patrolling the trails today.

Ryan had been one of the first people she'd met when she had arrived in Anchorage. Nice, in a shy kind of way, he had given her some great information on where to find the most scenic views around Anchorage, as well as which places to avoid. She had appreciated his help, and had even stopped by to show him one of her paintings. So, when he had asked her out to lunch a few weeks ago, she had just accepted without thinking. Though it had been fun, she'd immediately realized Ryan was interested in more than the food at the diner they'd gone to. She, on the other hand, wasn't. Besides the fact that she was only in town for a little while, and therefore not looking to get involved with anyone, there just weren't any sparks where Ryan was concerned. He simply wasn't her type.

Unfortunately, Ryan hadn't picked up on that vibe, though, and had asked her to go out to dinner with him several times since then. He was never pushy or anything, but Heidi knew that if she agreed, he would read something more into it than there was, so she had politely declined his offers.

When she walked into the building and saw the female ranger at the front counter, Heidi was thinking she might actually luck out and avoid running into Ryan altogether, but then he stepped out from the back. He was flipping through a guide book and didn't see her at first, but he looked up the minute she walked over to the counter.

"Heidi!" he said, giving her a grin. "I was just thinking about you."

Great. She pasted a smile on her face. "Really?"

He set the book down on the counter. “Yeah. I was going to give you a call and ask if you wanted to get together this weekend. Maybe go to the Market, then dinner and a movie, or something.”

At the expectant look in his hazel eyes, Heidi felt her resolve start to slip. With his dirty blond hair and average looks, he wasn’t the most handsome guy she’d ever seen, but he was always so dang nice. Maybe she should just go out with him. But then she reminded herself how desperate he had gotten after a simple lunch date. She didn’t want to think how he would act after dinner and a movie. Fortunately, she didn’t have to make up a reason to turn him down this time.

She gave him a rueful smile. “I’d really like to, Ryan, but I can’t. I’m going back to Denver next week and I have a ton of things to do before I leave.”

He looked dismayed at that. “Already?”

She nodded. “I know. It feels like I just got here.”

He regarded her in silence for a moment, absently fanning the pages of the guidebook with his thumb. “Maybe we could go out to dinner before you leave, then?”

Heidi let out a regretful sigh. “I’d love to, but I can’t,” she said. “I have a load of packing to do. I have to get all my paintings boxed up and shipped.”

Ryan said nothing, and she could see his Adam’s apple bob up and down as he swallowed.

As the silence stretched out between them, Heidi reached up to tuck some long, blond hair that had escaped from its ponytail behind her ear. “Anyway, I just stopped by to let you know that I’m going hiking on Crow Pass this afternoon,” she said. “Any warnings I should know about?”

Ryan didn’t answer right away, and when he finally did, it was with a distracted, “Um, no, not that I know about. Are you doing some painting?”

Heidi shook her head. “Just taking some more pictures.”

He nodded, but made no comment.

She sighed. “Okay, then. I’ll try to get back up here before I leave, but if I don’t, it was really great meeting you.”

“Yeah. You too,” he said.

Giving him a smile and a wave, she started for the door, but his voice stopped her.

“Heidi.”

She turned back to the counter to find Ryan looking at her with those puppy-dog eyes of his.

“Are you sure I can’t take you out to dinner?” he asked. “We could go after you come back from your hike. I get off work at five.”

Heidi almost groaned. *Sheesh, he didn’t give up, did he?* “I’m sorry, but I can’t,” she said. Then, before he could reply, she added, “I’d better go. I want to get back before it gets dark. See ya.”

Afraid that he might actually throw himself at her feet and beg her to go to dinner with him if she didn’t hurry up and get out of there, Heidi practically ran out the door. To her relief, the ranger didn’t follow, but a quick glance over her shoulder showed him still standing at the counter, a crestfallen look on his face. *Dammit.* Maybe she should have agreed to go to dinner with him just to be nice. She was leaving in a few days anyway, so where was the harm in it? Suddenly, an image popped into her head of Ryan Ackerman showing up on her doorstep in Denver saying that he’d moved there to be with her. *Okay, on second thought, maybe it is better to nip things in the bud right now.*

Getting back in her car, she started the engine and pulled out of the parking lot. The access point for Crow Pass Trail wasn’t that far from the ranger station and within ten minutes, Heidi was hoisting her pack on her shoulder and heading off into the woods.

Since she wasn’t looking for anything in particular to photograph, Heidi snapped pictures of everything from the beautiful purple fireweed flowers growing on the hillsides, to cascading waterfalls. She was glad she had a digital camera. There were so many beautiful things to take pictures of that she would have run out of film a long time ago. With a digital, she could take as many shots as she wanted.

An hour later, she was just taking a few shots of a huge alpine spruce tree when she heard a rustle in the bushes to her left. Thinking it was probably just a rabbit, she didn’t pay any attention. But as the rustling got louder, she realized that whatever it was, it was bigger than a rabbit. Not only that, but it seemed to be circling around behind her.

Forgetting about the spruce tree for the moment, Heidi slowly turned to survey the woods surrounding her. The forest was so thick here that it almost blocked out the sun, making it hard to see. But abruptly, she caught sight of something moving between the trees. Though she couldn’t make out exactly what it was, she knew it was big. *What is it? A bear, maybe?* That thought made her stomach lurch. There were a lot of bears in Chugach, but she had never actually come face to face with one, and she didn’t want to now. They were really cute in the zoo, but out here by herself, more than an hour down the trail, they were just plain frightening. She tightened her grip on the digital camera and searched the forest, straining to catch another glimpse of whatever it was, but she didn’t see anything. Well, just because she didn’t see the animal, didn’t mean it wasn’t still out there.

Forcing herself to breathe evenly, Heidi put her camera back in her pack, then turned and calmly began to walk down the trail the way she had come. Behind her, she could hear the sounds of rustling again. *Oh God.* It was following her. She threw a quick glance over her shoulder, but still didn’t see anything. She could hear it, though. Heart hammering in her chest,

she turned around and started back down the trail again, this time at a fast walk. Though every instinct in her told her to run, she resisted the urge. All the guide books she'd read had said that running would only make a bear chase her. *But does that rule really even apply in this situation?* The thing was practically stalking her now. Surely, running wasn't going to hurt. If anything, it might actually save her life.

Heidi was still trying to decide if she should run or not when she suddenly heard a deep growl right behind her. Startled, she whirled around. Her eyes went wide. Standing in the middle of the trail was the biggest black wolf she'd ever seen. The thing was freaking huge. And it was eyeing her like she was its next meal!

Swallowing hard, Heidi slowly took a step back, then another. The wolf followed, slowly taking one step forward, then another. Terrified to turn her back on the animal, she began to backpedal. To her horror, the wolf kept coming toward her, quickening his pace to match hers. He was going to attack, she knew it!

With a muffled cry, Heidi dropped her pack, then turned and ran.

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Luke was counting wolf tracks near one of the streams when a woman's high-pitched scream suddenly echoed through the forest. He looked up with a frown. *What the hell...*

A second scream pierced the stillness of the forest, this one even more terrified. Forgetting all about the tracks, he tossed his spiral notebook on the ground beside his pack and took off running in the direction the sound had come from. Taking the trail would have been easier, but going through the forest was the more direct route, so he chose that way instead. Though he was used to running through wooded areas, doing it on two legs instead of four made negotiating the uneven terrain a little harder, but he paid little attention to it as he raced through the trees. That was when he heard the low, savage snarl of a wolf. He swore under his breath. Wolves didn't usually attack humans, but when they did, it was serious.

Just then, the breeze changed direction and brought with it an all too familiar scent. Luke skidded to a halt. It couldn't be. But there was no mistaking that deep, musky scent. It wasn't just a wolf, it was a werewolf.

Swearing under his breath, Luke forced his feet to move. As he sped through the forest, the other were's scent grew stronger the closer he got to the beast. God, he hoped he wasn't too late.

He burst onto the trail, expecting the worst, and was relieved to find that the girl was still alive. She was far from fine, though. While the werewolf hadn't killed her, he had bitten her at least once. She was lying on the ground, clutching her bloody thigh with one hand, her face contorted in pain as she warily eyed the beast circling her.

The pair was too intent on each other to notice him and Luke paused only long enough to grab

a thick branch before racing toward them. Gripping the branch tightly, he brought it down hard on the werewolf's back. Though the makeshift weapon had little effect on the were, it did startle the beast, and he jumped back from his prey with a snarl.

The girl looked just as startled to see Luke as the were had, but there was relief in her frightened blue eyes, too, and he tried to give her a reassuring look as he put himself between her and the huge beast. Pulling a knife from the sheath on his belt, Luke crouched down and let out a low growl of warning.

The werewolf regarded him in confusion for a moment, but then recognition shone in his light hazel eyes and he returned the growl with one of his own. The beast had picked up his scent. The were's gaze dropped to the knife, and Luke tightened his grip on the handle. In human form, Luke couldn't match the were in quickness, but he was still stronger than an ordinary man. And the long, hunting knife that Luke held could do some serious damage to the were. But even with Luke's strength and the knife, the werewolf still had the edge. The only question was, did the were know that? Luke would just have to bluff and find out.

Luke's gaze locked on the other werewolf. He bared his teeth and let out another growl, this one deeper and more menacing. The beast eyed him warily for a moment, but from the change in the were's stance, Luke knew he had won.

With a look that could only be described as hatred, the werewolf turned and bounded off into the trees.

Though Luke wanted to check on the girl, he waited until the were had completely disappeared into the forest before he turned to her. Some of her long, blond hair had come loose from its ponytail, and he had to fight the urge to reach out and brush it back from her tear-stained face. Despite the hand she had pressed to it, blood bubbled from the bite wound on her thigh and ran down her bare leg. When he'd first realized that the were had bitten her, he hadn't wanted to let himself consider what it meant. But now that the girl was out of danger, there was no avoiding the subject. She was going to be a werewolf now, and he didn't have a clue how to tell her. One thing he did know for sure, though, he had to get her out of there.

Shoving his knife back into its sheath, Luke took off the button-up shirt he was wearing over his T-shirt and crouching down beside her, pressed it to the bite on her thigh. The wound was pretty savage; the were had bitten her two or three times. Of course, the lacerations would close up before he even got her back to the parking area, but at least the shirt would hide them from her view. Even if the wounds themselves weren't fatal, he still had to be worried about the girl going into shock. The shirt should help with that. He wrapped the sleeves of the shirt tightly around her thigh and tied them securely.

Putting one arm around her, he slid the other beneath her legs and gently picked her up. "It's okay," he said as he got to his feet. "You're safe now."

She didn't reply, but simply rested her head against his chest and cried quietly in relief as he



started down the trail.

## Chapter 2

Heidi still couldn't quite believe that she was alive, but the intense, burning pain in her leg assured her that she was. When that wolf had sunk his teeth into her thigh, she'd been sure he was going to tear her to pieces. She had beaten at the animal with her fists as hard as she could, a move which had apparently surprised the wolf enough to get him to release her and back away. But from the way he had eyed her afterward, she knew she had only gained a momentary respite. As she had braced herself to fight him again, her rescuer had shown up out of nowhere and thrown himself between her and the beast. She had never seen anyone so brave. Standing up to a huge wolf with nothing but a small knife in his hand, had been insane. Unbelievably, it had worked, though, and the animal had run off.

Despite the pain that was throbbing through her entire leg, she knew how lucky she was. If the man carrying her hadn't gotten there when he did... She tightened her arms around his neck and pressed her face into his chest, forcing herself not to think about it. The T-shirt he wore was soft beneath her cheek, and she closed her eyes as she breathed in his masculine scent. He had gotten there in time, and that was all that mattered.

When she opened her eyes again, she was shocked to see that they were already in the parking area. Oh God, had she passed out? It seemed like only a few minutes since she'd gotten attacked and it should have taken at least an hour to get back to the car. He had been moving a lot faster than she ever could have on the trails, but it was still hard to believe that they were there already. Okay, so she must have passed out. That was no surprise, though, not with the pain she was in. But then her brow furrowed as she abruptly realized that her leg was no longer throbbing nearly as badly. In fact, it barely hurt at all. *That is a bad sign, isn't it?* Maybe she was going into shock. Or worse, bleeding to death.

Panicking at that thought, Heidi lifted her head from the man's chest to tell him that he'd better hurry and get her to a hospital when he surprised her by setting her down on her feet. She stood leaning against him, thinking that he had set her down so he could open the door to whatever it was he drove and get her inside. When he merely stood there gently holding onto her upper arms, she looked up at him in confusion. Maybe he had parked at the Eagle River entrance to the trail and didn't have his car there.

"M-my car is over that way," she said, gesturing with her head. "We can take mine to the hospital if yours isn't parked here."

But the man made no move to pick her up in his arms again, or even ask for her keys. "I know you're going to think I'm crazy when I tell you this, especially after what just happened, but you're not going to need to go to the hospital."

His voice was deep and velvety, and at any other time, she would have thought it sounded sexy

as hell, but right then all Heidi could do was stare up at him in amazement. “What are you talking about?” she demanded. “Of course, I have to go to the hospital. I’m bleeding to death!”

“Actually,” he said. “You’re not.”

Her brow furrowed. *What kind of idiot is he?* “Yes, I am!” she snapped. “Look at my leg.”

As she spoke, she took away the shirt he had given her so that he could see for himself, but when she looked down at her leg, all she could do was stare. He was right. She wasn’t bleeding anymore. She gently rubbed the shirt over the bite marks, bracing herself for pain that never came. As she wiped the blood away, she gasped. Where the skin had been ragged and raw from the wolf’s bite just minutes earlier, it was now jagged, pink scar tissue that looked days old.

She lifted her head to find her rescuer regarding her with the most unusual gold eyes. How had she not noticed the color before? Because she’d been too busy thinking about other things, like bleeding to death. She shook her head. “I...I don’t understand. I’m confused. I must be in shock,” she said. “I was just bitten by a wolf. How can I already have a scar?”

“Because you weren’t bitten by an ordinary wolf.”

She frowned at him. “What the heck does that mean?”

He was silent for a moment, as if he were trying to think of what he wanted to say. Finally, he ran his hand through his dark hair and let out a sigh. “Look, I know this is going to sound bizarre,” he said, “but you were bitten by a werewolf.”

Heidi stared at him incredulously. *A werewolf?* She must be hallucinating or something from all the blood she’d lost because there was no way she could have heard him right. “A what?”

“A werewolf,” he said again.

Heidi blinked. Okay, so she wasn’t hallucinating. He was just a raving lunatic. Which was really hard to believe, considering he looked so normal. Not to mention disappointing, since he was so dang gorgeous. She took a step back, then another, her hands out in front of her. “Listen, I don’t know what you’re on, but—”

He scowled. “I’m not on anything,” he said, taking a step toward her. “If you’d just give me a chance to explain—”

“I think you’ve explained yourself quite enough,” Heidi told him. She quickly glanced over her shoulder, then at him before she began backing toward her car. “Look, I’m really grateful for what you did back there, but I need to get to the hospital.”

Her rescuer followed. “Okay, if you insist on going to the hospital, I’ll take you,” he said. “But at least listen to what I have to say first.”

Right. Like she was going to go anywhere with him. She dug into the pocket of her khaki shorts for her car keys and pressed the unlock button on the keyless entry, wondering if she should hit the panic button, too. But who would hear it all the way out there?

“That’s okay,” she said as she opened the door. “I can drive myself.”

Heidi was half afraid that he would insist, and she was relieved when he nodded. “Okay,” he said. “But take my card.”

She stood there watching him as he reached into his back pocket for his wallet, wondering why she didn’t just get in her car and leave. He took a business card from his wallet and held it out to her.

“Take it,” he said.

She did, but only because she thought he might get upset, or even worse, follow her to the hospital if she didn’t.

“You’ve been bitten by a werewolf,” he continued, “which means you’re going to become one, too, and when your body starts changing, you’re going to need my help.”

Does he even know how crazy he sounds? *Probably not, or he wouldn’t be saying such bizarre things.* “I have to go,” she said, turning back to her car.

He caught her arm, his expression earnest. “There’s a full moon in a few days,” he told her. “You’ll need to call me before that.”

Right. Like she was ever going to call him. Shaking her head, Heidi got in the car and closed the door. Tossing the card on the seat beside her, she stuck the key in the ignition and started the engine. Afraid that he would try to stop her again, she quickly put the car in gear and pulled out of the parking space. As she sped out of the lot, she glanced in the rearview mirror. Her rescuer was still standing where she had left him. *God, what a psycho.* She was going to have to report him to the cops for sure.

Since the closest hospital in the area was in Anchorage, she had to drive all the way back to the city to get medical attention. She only hoped she didn’t have to wait long to see a doctor when she got there.

To Heidi’s relief, however, the moment she told the nurse at the desk that she had been attacked and bitten by a wolf, she was immediately rushed to a room. When the elderly doctor came in to examine her, though, the man took one look at the rapidly healing scar on her thigh and eyed her like she was insane.

“When did you say you were attacked?” he asked.

“I don’t know exactly,” she said. “An hour ago maybe?”

He frowned and adjusted his wire-rimmed glasses on his nose. "I don't know what you're trying to pull here, but this scar is at least two weeks old, Ms. Gibson."

"No, it isn't!" she protested. "I mean, I know it looks like that, but I swear to you, I just got bitten."

The man folded his arms and regarded her with a thoughtful expression. "Are you on any medication?"

Heidi's face colored. "No! Look, I was hiking up in Chugach State Park this afternoon and from out of nowhere, this huge wolf attacked me. I don't know why the bite healed up as fast as it did, but by the time the guy who rescued me carried me down to the parking area, the bleeding had stopped and the wound closed up."

"This man you say rescued you. Did he bring you here? I'd like to talk to him."

She shook her head. "No. He...I told him that I could drive myself."

The doctor sighed. "I don't doubt that you were attacked by an animal, Ms. Gibson. I just don't think it happened this afternoon. Now, it's possible you're still having some post-traumatic stress from the attack, making you feel like you're going through the episode over and over again. I'm going to prescribe some sedatives and have the nurse give you the name of a good therapist."

Heidi stared at him aghast. "I don't need sedatives and I certainly don't need a psychiatrist! What I need is a rabies shot!"

He gave her a placating smile. "I'm sure you think you do. But why don't we wait until you talk to the therapist, hmm? How does that sound?"

The doctor didn't believe her. *Then again, why should he?* If she were him, she wasn't sure she'd believe it herself. While her clothes were dirty from the tumble she'd taken when the wolf had jumped her, she had wiped off most of the blood from her leg with her rescuer's shirt long before she had gotten there. What was left didn't look much different than the dirt smudges. There wasn't any blood on her T-shirt or shorts, and the scar on her thigh clearly looked too old for the attack to have happened that afternoon. Maybe she should go out to her car and get the shirt with the blood all over it. Then again, maybe that wasn't a good idea. Considering how the old doctor was looking at her, he might think she should be committed for psychiatric evaluation for keeping an old, bloody shirt.

Heidi didn't hang around and wait for the nurse to give her the name of a therapist, but left the hospital as soon as the doctor walked out. When she got in her car, though, she didn't pull out of the parking lot right away, but sat there for a moment, trying to piece together what had happened up at Chugach State Park. As she replayed the wolf attack in her head, she traced the light pink scar on her thigh with her finger and couldn't suppress a little shiver. Was she going crazy? Had she somehow made the whole thing up? No, obviously she hadn't. She had a

scar to prove it. But how had it healed so quickly?

Maybe she had just been confused about how serious the attack had been. Maybe the wolf hadn't actually bitten her at all. Maybe he'd just scraped her skin with his teeth. That would explain why she didn't have an open wound.

That theory didn't explain all the blood, though. Her brow furrowed as she tried to think of something that made sense. Maybe the wolf was older than she had thought. Maybe his teeth were bad and his gums had started to bleed when he had tried to bite her. That would explain all the blood; it had been his, not hers.

Then why had the guy who'd come to her rescue made up that crazy story about werewolves? That was the easy part to explain. Because he was a complete nut job. He was so far off his rocker that he probably thought Bigfoot was real, too.

Happy to have a reasonable explanation for everything that had happened, Heidi started the car and pulled out onto the main road. Between having to fend off Ryan at the ranger station, that wolf up in the state park, the psycho guy who had thought she'd been bitten by a werewolf, and a doctor who thought she was crazy, she was exhausted. She would be glad to get back to her apartment.

She had stayed at a hotel for the first few days after arriving in Anchorage . But after realizing she wanted to stay longer, she had decided to rent a small, furnished one-bedroom apartment instead. Not only was it a better deal financially, but it also gave her a lot more space to work on her paintings without having to worry about the maids disturbing her stuff when they came in to clean.

Halfway to her apartment, Heidi groaned as she abruptly remembered that she had left her pack up in the state park. And her digital camera was in it, too. *Dammit*. Well, there was no way she was going back up there tonight. She wondered if she should call the ranger station at Girdwood and ask if someone could pick it up for her, but then decided against it. That would only mean she would have to explain why she had left it up there in the first place. On top of that, Ryan would probably volunteer to be the one to go get it for her, and she really didn't feel like dealing with him tonight. She would just get it tomorrow. If it wasn't there, she would check out the lost-and-found bin at the ranger station.

When she got to her apartment, Heidi decided that the first thing she needed was a hot shower. But on the way to the bedroom, her growling stomach made her take a quick detour into the kitchen to take out one of the Healthy Choice Café Steamers that were in the freezer and put it in the microwave to cook. As the aroma from the chicken and roasted red pepper sauce wafted through the partially open bathroom door a few minutes later, she found herself quickly rinsing off the soap so she could hurry back into the kitchen and eat.

After drying off, Heidi slipped into a short terrycloth robe, then went back into the combination kitchen/living room. Taking her dinner out of the microwave, she mixed the sauce with the

chicken and broccoli, then added a little parmesan cheese before grabbing a bottle of water from the fridge. Walking over to the couch, she sat down and turned on the television.

She had just finished eating when someone knocked on the door. Licking the last of the sauce off the fork, she set her plate down on the coffee table, then lowered the sound on the television before going to answer the door. Grasping the knob, she took a quick look through the peephole and smiled when she saw Sukie Teeland, her thirteen-year-old neighbor, standing there.

Heidi opened the door. "Hey, Sukie, come on in."

Half-Inuit, half-Irish, Sukie was a pretty, petite girl with long, black hair, big dark eyes, and a smattering of freckles across her nose. "I saw your car, so I wanted to come over and show you what I painted today," she said as she walked in. "You weren't eating dinner, were you?"

Heidi shook her head. "I just finished. You want something to drink?"

Sukie grinned. "Do you have any Frappuccinos?"

Heidi laughed as she walked over to the fridge. She should have guessed. Sukie was just as crazy about the Starbucks drinks as she was. "I think I just might." She took a bottle out of the fridge and handed it to the younger girl, then grabbed one for herself. "So, what did you paint?"

The younger girl flipped open the watercolor pad that Heidi had given her until she came to the page she wanted. "It's just a bunch of spruce trees," she said as she opened the bottle. "But I think I'm getting better at them."

Heidi pulled the pad closer so that she could look at the neat rows of trees Sukie had painted. Heidi had been teaching the young girl watercolor painting since she had first moved into the apartment. The girl was outgoing, enthusiastic, and eager to learn. She was talented, too. This was Sukie's first attempt at painting spruce trees without Heidi there to direct her, and she had done very well. Better than Heidi had been able to do at her age.

She smiled and gave the dark-haired girl a big hug. "These are great. Really expressive and loose."

Sukie beamed at the compliment. "Do you really think so?"

Heidi nodded. "Definitely!"

Sukie's smile broadened, only to disappear and be replaced by a frown a moment later. "I wish you weren't leaving."

Heidi felt a pang at the thought herself and gave the girl another hug. "I know. But I have to get back home. I can't stay up here forever."

The younger girl toyed absently with the label on the bottle. "You could. I heard my mom say that the art teacher at the high school is retiring after this year, and that if they don't find someone to take her place, they might have to drop the art classes totally." She looked up at Heidi expectantly. "Maybe you could stay and get a job teaching art there. And I'll be going to high school next year, so I could take your class."

Heidi couldn't help but smile. "I'm not a teacher, Sukie."

"Sure you are! You're teaching me and you're great at it." Sukie's eyes lit up as an idea came to her. "I could even have my mom talk to the principal for you."

Heidi laughed. Clearly, the teenage girl had this all figured out. "I appreciate it, Sukie. Really. But I've got to get back to Denver . That's my home." Heidi had come to think of Sukie as a younger sister, and the crestfallen expression on the girl's face made leaving that much harder. Heidi forced herself to smile. "We can email and IM all the time, though. And you can scan your drawings and watercolor paintings and send them to me."

"It's not the same," Sukie grumbled.

No, it isn't. "I know. But listen, I'm not leaving until next week, which means I can still give you a few more lessons. How does that sound?"

Sukie nodded, but Heidi could see that the girl was still upset about her leaving. Deciding to change the subject, Heidi asked Sukie if she wanted to see the new painting she had finished. The other girl immediately brightened at that, and they spent the next thirty minutes talking about what Heidi should name her latest watercolor. Since Heidi had already planned on giving the younger girl the painting as a gift, she secretly wanted Sukie to be the one to give it a name.

After Sukie left, Heidi considered packing up some of her paintings so that she could take them to the UPS store the next day, but decided she was too tired to bother with it. But while she might be ready to go to bed after the exhausting day she'd had, her stomach obviously wasn't. *Good heavens*. Her stomach let out a loud growl. She'd just had dinner a little while ago. There was no way she could be hungry. Her hollow belly clearly disagreed, however.

Opening the cabinet beside the fridge, Heidi stared at the contents inside for a moment before grabbing a box of shortbread cookies off the shelf. She took out one of the one hundred-calorie snack bags and ate while she flipped through the newest issue of *Cosmo* . Halfway through a sexy article entitled *Go Wild With Your Guy in the Great Outdoors* , she reached into the box for another bag of shortbread cookies only to find that it was empty. Frowning, she looked down at the counter and was startled to see five empty bags sitting on it. She had eaten every one of them. She cringed. She'd never binged like that before, not even back in college. The really strange thing was that she didn't even feel stuffed. In fact, she felt like she could eat five more bags. Maybe she'd better go to bed before she did.

Telling herself that she would work off the extra calories tomorrow, Heidi stuffed the empty

bags into the box and tossed it into the trash. She picked up the magazine she had been reading and after checking the door to make sure it was locked, shut off the lights and went into the bedroom.

\* \* \* \*

Luke swore under his breath as he watched the girl's car speed out of the parking lot. Okay, so maybe he shouldn't have come right out and mentioned the whole werewolf thing quite yet. It wasn't exactly like he could sneak up on the subject, though. The girl would obviously have figured out that something strange was going on when she saw the wound on her leg was already healing. She would have demanded answers. Even so, he should have handled it better. All he had done was make her think he was some kind of weirdo. He raked his hand through his dark hair and wondered if he should go after her, but then decided against it. Even though he really didn't want a doctor getting a close look at her, there wasn't anything he could do about it right now. If he showed up at the hospital, she would probably only make a scene and tell anyone who would listen that he was both a stalker and insane. That wouldn't help.

But if he didn't follow her, then how was he going to find her again? Dammit, why the hell hadn't he at least gotten her name? Or even her license plate number? He mentally kicked himself for being so stupid, but then realized that things probably weren't as bad as he was making them out to be. There wouldn't be a full moon for a couple of days, so he didn't have to worry about her turning right away. Between now and then, she was going to be experiencing a lot of strange things. If he was lucky, she would end up calling him looking for answers.

Luke hoped so, but he couldn't waste time worrying about that right now. He had to try and track down the werewolf that had bitten her. Turning, he headed into the forest.

While it would have been better to be in his wolf form if he came across the other were, Luke didn't want to risk leaving himself open to an attack in the time it would take him to turn. Luckily, his sense of smell was still exceptional even when he was in human form, so following the other werewolf's scent was easy enough.

Moving quickly, Luke got back to the site of the attack in half an hour. He picked up the werewolf's trail easily. Apparently, after Luke had chased him off, the were had gone even deeper into the forest. *No surprise there.* Pulling out his knife, Luke followed the scent.

The trail ran crazy for a few hundred yards, like the werewolf had been running without thought. But then the were started taking a more direct route, turning back toward the populated area of the park. He had crossed a few hiking paths and some fire roads before coming to a stop beside a set of tire tracks which led to the side of a restricted access park maintenance road. Luke stared down at the tire tracks left in the dirt road. From the looks of them, the guy had been driving a truck or an SUV.

His brow furrowed as he put away his knife. The other were was long gone. But what really bothered him was the fact that there was another werewolf in the Anchorage area in the first



place. It made sense that werewolves would more likely be drawn to the wilds of Alaska, but Luke hadn't picked up another were's scent the whole time he had been back in town. He was tempted to assume that the other werewolf was just passing through the area. His father had told him that some werewolves were nomadic like that, constantly moving from place to place, never living in one town or city for more than a few days. But the way the guy had staged his truck on a restricted road and gone out of his way to attack someone on a popular hiking trail made Luke think the were knew his way around the area. Which meant he might actually be a local.

Hoping that following the route the were had taken when he had first entered the forest would give him something more to go on, Luke headed in that direction. He was surprised to find that the werewolf hadn't meandered through the forest, like he would have done if he'd been out for a run, but had instead gone directly to the Crow Pass Trail. There, Luke discovered an area where the pine needles had been pushed aside to make a cozy hollow for the were to lie in. That was more than a little strange. Not only had the werewolf deliberately gone to an area where there were bound to be hikers, but he had then lain in wait, almost as if he had been planning on attacking the first hiker who came along. It didn't make sense.

Shaking his head, Luke headed back into the forest to collect his own gear when he noticed something on the ground. He frowned when he realized it was a backpack. Thinking it must belong to the girl he had rescued, he walked over and picked it up. Hoping there was some form of ID inside, he unzipped it, but all he found were a sketchbook and some pencils, a map of the trails, a couple bottles of water, a granola bar, a radio, and a digital camera.

As he slung it over his shoulder and continued into the forest, Luke wondered if he should call the ranger station in Girdwood and tell them that he'd found the pack, but decided against it. That would just raise questions. He would just have to wait until the girl called him.

When the full moon came, that girl was going to turn into a wolf. The first time a person changed into a werewolf was terrifying. It had been for him, even with everything his father had told him. If the girl went through it on her own, it would likely end badly for her. His father had told him horror stories of people dying in agony as they were trapped halfway between man and wolf, too terrified to let themselves go the rest of the way, but completely unable to figure out how to go back. Luke didn't want to think about anything like that happening to the beautiful girl he had rescued. He only hoped she would call him in time.

## Chapter 3

Heidi let out a husky moan and burrowed deeper into her pillow as the erotic images played through her mind. Still half asleep, she was only vaguely aware of what she was doing. But at the delicious little tingle between her legs, she squeezed her thighs together, trying to ease the ache there. That only seemed to heighten her arousal even more, however, and she rolled onto her back with another moan, this one even louder. *Oh God, what a dream.* Even now, she had an incredible urge to slide her hand between her legs and finish off what her sleepy imagination

had started.

In her dream, she had been on her hands and knees in the middle of the forest while some hot guy took her from behind. It had all been so vivid. Beneath her, the earth had been cool and damp, comfortable under her knees and soft under her fingers as she dug into it. The smell of the fir trees had seemed so real, she had almost thought she'd been outside. The breeze had blown across her naked sweat-soaked skin, making goose bumps chase all over her body. Never had she had a dream so realistic.

The guy's hands on her hips had been firm but gentle, pulling her back onto his perfect cock, burying it deep inside her with every thrust. His thick shaft had filled her, and it felt so damn good that she never wanted it to end.

With every thrust, his hips had smacked against her ass, making her feel as if he were spanking her at the same time he was pounding into her. She had cried out over and over again, her screams of ecstasy echoing through the forest. Just when it had seemed as if it couldn't get any better, her dream lover had slid his hand around to caress her throbbing clit with his fingers.

As he had pushed her closer and closer to climax, he leaned forward to kiss her neck, gently nipping her shoulder. The feel of his sharp teeth on her skin had driven her over the edge, wringing out one long orgasm after another. As he came inside her, she turned her head, wanting to see the identity of her extremely talented and well-endowed lover, only to discover that it was the guy who had saved her from the wolf the day before.

That was what had awakened her. But even though she had been shocked at the man's identity, there was no mistaking how aroused the dream had gotten her. Even now, she lay in bed panting for breath, her hand gently cupping her moist pussy, post-orgasmic quivers running through her body. She couldn't remember ever having a dream quite that vivid before...or that erotic. Sheesh, from the way her body was trembling, it was like she had actually had an orgasm during her dream. She slid her finger along the folds of her pussy to discover that she was soaking wet. If she hadn't had an orgasm, she had sure come close. That was definitely a first for her.

While the dream had been incredibly hot, she couldn't imagine why her mind had chosen that particular guy to play the role of her lover. Maybe because she had subconsciously found him so attractive. Her imagination had just naturally supplied all the extra erotic details, like the size and shape of his thick, hard shaft. She blushed as she remembered the way he had pumped that perfect cock of his in and out of her. Just thinking about it made her pussy start to throb with desire again.

She shook her head. Okay, no more erotic *Cosmo* articles for her before bed. That story about having sex outdoors must have been what prompted such a crazy dream. There was no other explanation.

Heidi's brow furrowed, a thought suddenly occurring to her. What if sex with some hot stranger

wasn't all her mind had made up? What if she had dreamed the whole wolf attack, too? That would certainly explain the surreal nature of everything that had happened.

Taking a deep breath, she pushed down the blanket and slowly drew up her leg. There, right where she remembered it was a barely discernable scar. She let her head fall back on the pillow with a groan. Okay, so that part hadn't been a dream.

She turned her head to look at the bedside clock and was shocked to see that it was four o'clock in the afternoon. *Yikes!* She had slept all night and more than half the day. She must have been more tired than she'd thought. So much for running all the errands she had wanted to take care of today.

Heidi pushed the blanket down the rest of the way and swung her legs out of bed, then padded into the adjoining bathroom. As she gazed at her reflection in the mirror, she automatically started to squint like she normally did so she could see better, only to realize that she could see herself clearly. Sheesh, she must have been so tired last night that she'd forgotten to take out her contact lenses.

Yawning, she unscrewed the tops off the plastic lens case and blinked in surprise when she saw her contact lenses inside. Okay, that was weird. She had worn glasses since she was ten years old, and now she suddenly didn't need them anymore? She turned on the tap and splashed cold water on her face, then looked at her reflection again. Still twenty-twenty vision. No need to put in her contacts today.

Deciding she would figure it out later, Heidi put on some make-up and brushed her long hair, then pulled on a T-shirt and a pair of khaki shorts. As she did, she eyed her long legs in the mirror and told herself that she should stop trying to figure out why that wolf's teeth hadn't done more damage and simply be thankful they hadn't. She wouldn't have wanted a nasty scar.

As she walked back into the bedroom, she realized that there was no way she would be able to get all her paintings packed up and taken to the UPS store today. But she could at least take the watercolor she was giving Sukie to the custom frame shop. After she had something to eat, though. She was starving. And she needed caffeine.

Going out to the kitchen, she grabbed a container of yogurt and a bottle of Starbucks Frappuccino from the fridge. Making quick work of both, she picked up her purse and the watercolor painting, then left.

There were several customers already at the frame shop when Heidi got there, so while she waited, she browsed through the selection of frames the store had and found one that complimented the painting perfectly. She had been a little afraid that the store might not be able to get it framed before she left, but the woman she spoke to assured her that it wouldn't be a problem.

As she was walking back to the parking lot a little while later, the smell of food wafted over

from the diner across the street and Heidi's stomach growled. God, she could really go for a burger. Despite the fact that she had a freezer full of Healthy Choice and Lean Cuisine entrees in her apartment that she needed to eat before she left, she found herself darting across the street to the diner instead. She really needed a burger all of a sudden.

Five minutes later, Heidi was sitting in a booth reading the menu. Or trying to, anyway. For some reason, her gaze kept straying to the food in front of the group of teens at the table beside hers. If the waitress didn't come over and take her order soon, she was afraid she might actually reach out and snatch a fry off one of their plates.

As if reading her mind, a smiling, gray-haired waitress appeared at Heidi's table just then. "What can I get for you, hon?" she asked as she set down a glass of water.

Heidi glanced down at the menu. "Um, one of your traditional cheeseburgers." Her stomach growled again. "On second thought," she said, looking up at the woman, "make that a big Alaskan cheeseburger."

The waitress took in Heidi's slender figure over the rim of her glasses. "That's a full one-pound burger, hon. Are you sure you wouldn't rather have the traditional?"

Heidi felt herself flush and she reached up to tuck her hair behind her ear as she gave the woman an embarrassed smile. "I, um, wasn't going to eat all of it right now. I thought I'd take the rest home and have it later."

That seemed to satisfy the waitress because she crossed out the word "traditional" on her order pad and wrote "Alaskan" instead. "Fries okay with that?"

Heidi nodded. "Yes, please." She handed the menu to the woman. "Oh, and while you're at it, can you bring me a chocolate milkshake, too?"

That got her another odd look from the waitress, and Heidi covered her embarrassment by taking a sip of water. She didn't normally eat so much, but for some reason, she was famished. And the picture of that milkshake had looked so good on the menu. Fortunately, the waitress brought over the chocolate milkshake right away, so Heidi sipped on that while she waited for her cheeseburger to arrive. She hadn't had a milkshake since she was a kid, and this one was so thick and creamy and delicious that she closed her eyes and let out a little sigh of pleasure. If she had known this place made shakes this good, she would have come here a couple of times a week.

Heidi was halfway done with her milkshake when the waitress brought over the cheeseburger she had ordered. It was so big that it took up almost the entire plate, and Heidi's mouth watered at the sight of it.

The woman set a Styrofoam take-out container on the table. "I brought this for whatever you don't finish."

Heidi smiled and thanked the waitress. Reaching for the bottle of ketchup, she poured a generous amount on her fries, then topped the burger with some before cutting it in half. Picking up half, she bit into it with a moan. She'd had some tasty cheeseburgers before, but this one was heavenly.

As she ate, it occurred to Heidi that the customers in the diner seemed to be talking louder than normal. In fact, she could hear their conversations as clearly as if she were sitting with them. Someone should tell them that it was rude to talk so loud in such a small diner. *Didn't they care that everyone could hear what they were saying?* She tried to tune them out, but that was easier said than done. Between the guy in the corner trying to convince the girl he was with to go back to his apartment with him, and the two guys up at the counter calmly discussing how frequently they cheated on their wives, it was sort of difficult not to eavesdrop.

But then it hit her. The guy in the corner booth trying to get the woman to sleep with him was actually leaning over and whispering. She looked around again. Obviously, no one else could hear them talking but her. *What the heck?* She'd woken up that afternoon and didn't need to put in her contacts, and now she could hear someone whispering across a crowded diner. What was happening to her?

Heidi spent the rest of her meal trying to come up with an answer to that, but couldn't think of any logical explanation. Of course, it was hard to think when she was being bombarded with a dozen different conversations at once. Finishing her milkshake, she picked up the straw and popped the end in her mouth to lick off the last little bit of ice cream. That was when she heard something that made her frown.

"I got something for her to wrap those lips around."

A snicker met the man's lewd words and Heidi looked up to find two men watching her from another booth on the other side of the diner. One was heavysset with a full beard that covered half of his face, while the other was tall and lanky. They weren't talking about her, were they?

"Oh yeah," the heavier man agreed in a gruff voice. "Just look at the way she's licking that straw. I've got a boner just watching her."

Heidi eyes went wide. *Ewww!* They were talking about her. Her face coloring, she hurriedly took the straw out of her mouth and put it back in the glass.

"Looks like you didn't need that take-out box after all."

Heidi lifted her head to see the gray-haired waitress standing beside the table regarding her with a mix of amazement and admiration. She hadn't even realized that the woman was there. "What?" she said. "Oh, no I didn't. I was hungrier than I thought, I guess."

She really had intended to take half of the cheeseburger home, but it had tasted so good that before she knew it, she had eaten all of it.

The waitress laughed. "I guess so. Can I get you something else? We got a fresh apple pie that just came out of the oven."

The thought of eating anything else after the huge meal she'd just had probably should have made her feel ill, but Heidi was surprised to find herself actually considering having a piece of pie. *Yikes!* If she kept eating like this, she wasn't going to fit in her clothes.

She gave the older woman a smile. "I'm good, thanks."

The waitress tore the top sheet of paper off her order pad and set it down on the table. "Just bring this up to the register whenever you're done then. Nice waiting on you, hon. Have a good night."

As the woman made her way over to another table, Heidi's gaze strayed to the booth with the two sleazy men again. To her relief, they were gone.

Picking up the bill, Heidi grabbed her purse from the seat beside her and weaved her way through the tables to the cash register. After paying for her meal, she left the diner and walked across the street to the parking lot where she had left her car. Though the sun had all but disappeared from the sky, she couldn't help but notice that it didn't seem dark at all. Even so, she found herself automatically quickening her step just the same.

As she neared her car, Heidi took the keys from her purse and pressed the unlock button, only to stop and whirl around when she heard the sounds of footsteps behind her. The hair on the back of her neck rose as she recognized the two men from the diner. She didn't know why, but it just seemed like they were going to be trouble.

"Now, where's a pretty girl like you going in such a hurry?" the heavyset man asked.

Heidi took a nervous step back. Not only was the parking lot on a side street where it wasn't easily visible, but it was deserted, too. That was a dangerous combination for a woman by herself.

She tightened her grip on her shoulder bag and took another step back. "I-I have to be getting home. My...my boyfriend's waiting for me."

Heidi had hoped the mention of a boyfriend would deter them, but the men merely exchanged a look and kept walking toward her.

"Boyfriend, huh?" the lanky one said. "What kind of boyfriend lets a girl like you have dinner at some diner by herself?"

Heidi swallowed hard. "I-I have to go."

Turning, she hurried to her car, only to let out a startled cry when a rough hand on her back shoved her against it. Her heart started to race and she would have screamed except for the

grimy hand that slipped over her mouth.

The heavy man pressed himself against her back, pinning her against the car. His free hand began to roam down her body. "What's your hurry, darlin'? I know you just ate a lot of meat, but I got some more for you."

He smelled of sweat and fish, and the stench was almost enough to make Heidi gag. Oh God, what was she going to do?

Suddenly, the man squeezed her ass. Instinctively, she shoved herself back from the car and spun around, intent on knocking his hand away. He was so big that she didn't think it would do much good, but to her surprise, the man went flying backward when her arm connected with his shoulder. He landed on the hard pavement with a thud. Both men looked at her in confusion for a moment before the man on the ground began to push himself into a sitting position. He was clutching his arm, a grimace on his face.

The second man eyed her coldly. "You like it rough, bitch? That's good. I like it rough, too."

Adrenaline shot through Heidi as the tall, lanky man started toward her. Heart hammering in her chest, she whirled around and grabbed the door handle, yanking it open. Jumping in the car, she locked the door with one hand and stuck the key in the ignition with the other, then sped out of the parking lot as fast as she could, swerving to avoid the lanky man as he tried to jump in front of her.

Heidi gripped the steering wheel tightly unable to believe what had just happened. She had been really lucky to get away from those creeps. She didn't even want to think about what they had intended to do to her. She had just been fortunate that the guy had fallen down when she'd surprised him by fighting back.

She ran a hand through her long hair and glanced in the rearview mirror again, only to let out a groan when she saw the flashing lights of a police car behind her. Hoping he just wanted to go around her, she slowed and pulled over. To her chagrin, he pulled up behind her. *Great.* With a sigh, she rolled down her window and turned off the car, then waited. A moment later, a uniformed police officer appeared at her side.

"License and registration," he said, shining a flashlight in the car.

Heidi dug in her purse for her wallet, then handed both documents to him. "Was I speeding, Officer?"

He glanced up from her license to look at her. Tall, with blond hair, he had a neatly kept mustache and serious blue eyes. "No. But you were driving without your lights."

Her brow furrowed. "I was?"

He regarded her silently for a moment before leaning closer. "Have you been drinking tonight,

ma'am?"

"Drinking? No, of course not." She sighed. "Some guys were bothering me back by the diner and I guess I was in such a hurry to get away from them that I must have just forgotten to turn on my lights."

His eyes narrowed as he considered her story. After a moment, he gave her a nod and handed her license and registration back. "Okay, I don't smell any alcohol. Would you like to file a report about those men bothering you at the diner? Did they assault you?"

She shook her head. "No. It didn't get that far. I just want to go home."

He nodded. "That's up to you. But remember to turn on your lights."

Heidi breathed a sigh of relief as he walked away. Starting the car, she turned on the headlights and slowly eased out onto the road. She had almost told the cop that she hadn't turned on her lights because it just didn't seem that dark, but had stopped herself just in time. He really would have thought she had been drinking then. She looked out the car window, wondering if it was so bright because the moon was almost full. But as she gazed up at it, she discovered that the moon was completely covered by clouds. Okay, so it wasn't the moon.

By the time she got back to her apartment ten minutes later, her mind was going a hundred miles an hour. First the thing with the contact lenses, then being able to hear every whisper spoken in the diner, and now seeing so good in the dark that she didn't need to turn on her headlights. This just wasn't possible. Maybe she was going insane.

Needing something to occupy herself, she changed into a pair of cotton shorts and a tank top and went to work packing up some of her paintings. However, that kind of work didn't exactly require all of her attention and it wasn't long before she was once again thinking about all the strange things that had been happening since she had been attacked by that wolf the other day.

Tossing the roll of packing tape down on the floor beside the boxes, Heidi got to her feet and walked across her small living room to step out onto the tiny balcony. Putting her hands on the railing, she looked out at the darkened woods behind the apartment building. From where she was standing, she could see the outline of every tree and bush as if it were daytime. She could even see a small animal moving in the undergrowth. She stared at it for a few moments, trying to figure out what it was, before deciding it was a rabbit.

How was it possible for her to see a small rabbit in the darkened woods from where she was standing? She gazed up at the three-quarter moon that had come free from the cloud cover. She wanted to think it was giving off enough light to allow her to see so well, but she knew that wasn't it. Her brow furrowed as she suddenly remembered what the gorgeous whacko who had come to her rescue had said. According to him, she would turn into a werewolf when the moon was full. She wrapped her arms around herself and let out a shiver. She had never heard



anything so ridiculous in her life. There were no such things as werewolves and she sure as hell wasn't turning into one!

Chiding herself for being so impressionable, Heidi forced her attention away from the moon to gaze out at the woods again. It seemed noisier than it had the other nights she had come out onto the balcony. It was like she could hear every sound in the forest. The air was filled with so many smells, too. She inhaled deeply, taking it all in. It was difficult to discern what all of them were as they assaulted her senses. She could identify the smell of the trees, of course, and she decided that another particular smell was probably the rabbit. At least, it sure seemed to be coming from that direction. She was just telling herself how silly it was for her to think she could identify what a rabbit smelled like when she abruptly got a whiff of something that made her frown. Though she couldn't put a name to the scent, it was disturbingly familiar. She took a step closer to the railing and searched the darkness, but she didn't see anything. Whatever it was, though, it was making the hair stand up on the back of her neck.

Suddenly uneasy, Heidi turned and went back inside. Making sure the sliding door was locked, she pulled the drapes closed, then went into the kitchen to make some tea. Though she knew she should probably go back to packing her paintings, she found herself curling up on the couch with her laptop and a fleece throw instead. She just didn't feel like working any more right now.

She slowly sipped her tea while she browsed the Internet. After making the rounds of the usual websites and blogs she liked to visit, she went to Google and on impulse, typed in "werewolf," then clicked on the "search" button. She was a little surprised at how many websites were dedicated to the subject. Apparently, the golden-eyed hunk she had met in Chugach State Park wasn't the only one obsessed with the fictional beasts.

Clicking on the first link, Heidi let her gaze run over the website's homepage. In one corner, it featured a graphic of a frightening-looking werewolf, its hands curled and saliva dripping from its long, white fangs. Though the creature was a little crudely drawn, it was still suitably scary, and she quickly scrolled down the page.

As it turned out, the website was extremely detailed, covering everything from the history of werewolves to supposedly real-life accounts of actual encounters with them. Whoever ran the site must be a real whack job. Shaking her head in amazement, Heidi clicked the back button on her browser until she came to the Google results page again. She scrolled down the links until she came to one called *Diary of a Werewolf*. Intrigued despite herself, she clicked on it.

From the title, Heidi had thought it might be a short story someone had written, and she was surprised to discover that it was an actual diary kept by a man who believed he had been turned into a werewolf. He had come across a huge wolf while out hiking in Canada and had been bitten. Though the wound had burned unbearably at the time, it had magically healed within hours of the attack. At first, he hadn't known what to make of it, but then he had started experiencing strange things, like improved night vision and superior hearing, as well as an increased appetite and a craving for red meat.

Heidi stared at the screen. God, that sounded like her. Her hand tightened around the coffee mug. What was she thinking? Werewolves didn't exist.

Telling herself to stop being so foolish, Heidi shut her browser and closed her laptop then set it on the coffee table. Grabbing the remote for the TV, she switched it on and settled back against the cushions with the fleece throw again. She channel-surfed, watching bits and pieces of different shows for a while before coming across an old werewolf movie with Oliver Reed. She started to change it, but then stopped herself. Drawn to the subject more than she was willing to admit, she sat watching with rapt attention as the young man fought the curse of being a werewolf while trying to protect the woman he loved.

Heidi didn't see how the movie ended because she fell asleep. But in her dreams, the woman turned out to be a werewolf as well, and the two cursed creatures ran off into the forest to live happily ever after.

## Chapter 4

Heidi had another erotic dream that night, only this time it was even more vivid. She'd been in the forest making love to the gorgeous hunk who had rescued her from the wolf. But instead of being on her hands and knees like in the first dream, in this one, she had been on top, riding him. He was holding onto her hips, guiding her up and down with his strong hands while he gazed up at her with those incredible gold eyes.

She'd rested her hands against the hard wall of his chest, letting out a moan as she undulated against him. His cock was hot and hard inside her, and she couldn't seem to get enough of him.

She leaned forward to kiss him, her tongue doing a sensual little dance with his as she continued to move up and down on him. Taking his lower lip between her teeth, she gently suckled on it. He groaned, the sound low and sexy in her ear, and she gave his lip another tug before kissing her way along his square jaw and down his neck to lightly nip at his shoulder with her teeth. Her lover let out another groan and tightened his grip on her hips, driving himself up into her and urging her to ride him faster. She obeyed, as her orgasm coursed through her body. She buried her face in the curve of his neck and sank her teeth into his shoulder, reveling in the hoarse groans of pleasure coming from her man's throat.

Heidi awoke from her dream climax to find her hand between her legs, her fingers making little circles on her clit, driving her toward a real orgasm. Her whole body shuddered as wave after wave of pleasure rippled through her. She couldn't contain the moan that escaped her lips, and she didn't stop moving her hand until she had wrung every bit of ecstasy from her clit.

After her orgasm subsided, Heidi lay back on the couch and tried to catch her breath. *Dear God.* She had never experienced anything like that in her life. The dream had seemed so real. The strange thing was that it felt as if she were still in it. If she closed her eyes, she could feel his hands on her, smell his masculine scent. She closed her eyes and let herself get lost in thoughts

of what his body had felt like against hers.

She couldn't ever remember wanting a guy this much. If he knocked on her door right now, she wouldn't be able to keep herself from dragging him inside, throwing him up against the wall, and having her way with him. The image made her pussy spasm, and her face colored hotly. She wasn't a prude by any means, but this was totally out of character for her. What was it about him that had her acting so wild? Sure, he was tall, dark, and completely gorgeous, but was that enough to give her wet dreams at night? With the dry spell she'd had lately where men were concerned, maybe so.

A knock sounded on her door, interrupting her thoughts, and Heidi jerked upright on the couch, her pulse fluttering. *Oh God, it is him! Don't be ridiculous.* He didn't even know her name. How could he possibly know where she lived?

Deciding it was probably just Sukie, Heidi grabbed the remote from the coffee table and turned off the television, which she abruptly realized was still on from last night. Getting to her feet, she glanced at her watch and was stunned to see that it was almost four o'clock in the afternoon. She had slept the whole day again. What the heck was wrong with her?

In the small entryway, she stopped to check her reflection in the mirror, and made a face at herself. She looked like she'd just gotten out of bed. Or spent the better part of the day in it with some hot guy. Shaking her head at the thought, she quickly ran her fingers through her long hair, then straightened her tank top. Satisfied that she no longer looked like she had just rolled out of bed, she unlocked the door and pulled it open, only to blink in surprise when she saw two Anchorage police officers standing there.

"Heidi Gibson?" one of them asked. He was short and stocky, with dark hair that was graying at the temples.

She nodded. "Yes."

The two officers glanced at each other, then tried to look past her into the apartment.

"Are you the same Heidi Gibson that rents the blue Toyota Camry parked downstairs?" the dark-haired one asked.

"Yes." Her brow furrowed. "What's this about?"

"By any chance, do you let anyone else drive the car? Someone...bigger than you?"

She shook her head. "No, I'm the only one who drives it. Did someone do something to the car?" Oh no, she hadn't taken the extra insurance when she had rented the Toyota, and now she wondered if she were going to have to pay for the whole thing.

The cops exchanged another look, then shrugged.

"I'm Officer Bartell and this is Officer Kidd," the stocky officer said, gesturing toward the younger man standing beside him. "Could we come in? We need to ask you some questions."

Now she was really getting worried. She took a step back, opening the door wider. "Yes, of course."

Closing the door behind the two police officers, she turned to find them surveying her small apartment. "Can I get you anything?" she asked, trying to be polite despite how nervous she was.

At the question, both men turned their attention back to her.

Officer Kidd smiled. "We're good, thanks," he said. "Were you at the Kodiak Diner last night, Ms. Gibson?"

She frowned. "Yes. Why?"

The blond-haired cop exchanged looks once again with the other man. "Well, I'm not sure exactly how to put this, but a man by the name of Ethan Cooper says that he saw you at the diner, and that when he ran into you in the parking lot later, you...assaulted him."

"What?!" Heidi blinked in astonishment. Though she didn't recognize the man's name, she could only assume he was the guy who had tried to attack her.

"It sounded crazy to us, too, ma'am. You don't normally get guys up here in Alaska filing assault charges against women. But he filed a report, so we have to follow up on it," Officer Bartell said. "Especially since he was toting a broken arm and saying that you did it."

Heidi frowned again as the scene in the parking lot played through her head. She had been so frightened that she couldn't recall much, but she vaguely remembered the man she had shoved grimacing in pain when he had pushed himself up from the pavement. Surely, she couldn't have broken his arm, though.

"Ms. Gibson?" Officer Kidd prompted when she said nothing.

She swallowed hard. "I don't know what he told you, but I didn't assault him. And I certainly didn't break his arm. At least not intentionally." When both cops lifted a questioning brow at that, she hastily explained, "He and his friend were waiting for me when I came out of the diner. He shoved me against the car and tried to...grab me. All I did was try to push him away. He must have tripped over his own feet because he fell. I suppose he could have hurt his arm when he landed on it. But I sure didn't break it."

Officer Bartell was nodding his head. "Considering that this Cooper fella has more than a hundred pounds on you, your story sounds a lot more believable than his. I guess he thought you would report the attack and figured that since he had a busted arm, he'd file a complaint before you did. Which leads to my next question," he added, "do you want to press charges

against him and his friend for attacking you?”

Heidi shook her head. “No.”

“You sure about that?” Officer Kidd asked. “All the DA would have to do is get one look at you and one look at him, and the case will be closed before it can get started.”

She shook her head again. “I’m leaving Anchorage to go back to Denver next week. I’d just rather forget the whole thing.”

Both men looked like they were considering whether to try and change her mind, but then Officer Bartell nodded.

“Okay, then,” he said. “We’ll go back and tell the chief that Cooper is full of crap.” As he and the other officer made their way to the door, he added, “The DA isn’t going to be interested in filing charges against you, I can assure you. But if you change your mind about pressing charges against Cooper, just come down to the station.”

Thanking the men, Heidi closed the door behind them and leaned back against it, her mind awlirl. The whole time the cops had been talking to her, all she’d been able to think about was the fact that she had broken a man’s arm. Regardless of what he and his friend had intended, she hadn’t meant to actually hurt the man when she had shoved him away from her, and the idea that she had was upsetting.

She thought back to the horrible things she had read about werewolves on the Internet last night. Then there was the movie she’d seen. *Oh God*. What if she really were a werewolf? What if she turned into some vicious beast that attacked and killed people uncontrollably?

Heidi took a deep, cleansing breath and let it out slowly. Sheesh, she really needed to get a grip on herself. She was not a werewolf because werewolves didn’t exist. There had to be some other, more logical explanation for all the strange things that had been going on with her. Maybe it was like that doctor had suggested and she was experiencing some post-traumatic stress reaction from the wolf attack. She was simply feeding into it by thinking she was going to turn into a monster.

That has to be it. Heidi pushed away from the door and walked into the bedroom. What she needed was a shower and something to eat. She’d feel better after that. Stripping off her tank top and shorts, she tossed them in the small hamper beside the dresser before going into the bathroom. Turning on the shower, she adjusted it to the proper temperature, then stepped into the tub.

Heidi let out a sigh as the warm water flowed over her body. *God that feels good*. Though it was tempting to just stand underneath the spray for the rest of the afternoon, she forced herself to reach for the coconut-scented body wash. As she ran her soap-covered hands over her body, she couldn’t help but notice that the scar on her thigh had all but disappeared. If anyone saw it, they would assume it was years old. Heck, if she didn’t know better, she would think so, too.

After rinsing off, she got out of the shower and towed herself dry, then went into the bedroom to get dressed. She paired her usual khaki shorts with a dark blue T-shirt and large silver hoop earrings before slipping her feet into sandals. Krista, her roommate back in Denver, had laughed when Heidi had packed them, insisting that she would do better to bring a parka and mukluks. Krista had been wrong, though. The weather had been beautiful and warm the whole time Heidi had been there. Not that Krista knew anything about Alaska. She had also been positive that all Alaskan men were hot and hunky, too. She had definitely been wrong about that. While Heidi was sure there must be some around, she hadn't met any. Well, except for the guy who had rescued her from the wolf, and he turned out to be a nut job. Just her luck.

With a sigh, Heidi walked out of the bedroom. After going into the kitchen, she toasted two slices of bread and spread peanut butter on them, then poured a glass of skim milk. As she ate, she debated whether to go out to the ranger station in Girdwood and see if anyone had found her pack. Of course, going there would mean she'd have to see Ryan again, but since she wanted her pack, she supposed she didn't really have a choice.

Finishing her snack, Heidi rinsed the dishes and put them in the rack, then grabbed her purse and headed out the door. As she got in her car, she automatically reached over to put her purse on the seat beside her, only to pause when she saw the business card sitting there. Almost against her will, she reached out to pick it up.

Luke McCall

Wildlife Biologist

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Heidi lifted a brow. *Wildlife biologist, huh?* That took her by surprise. From the way he'd been going on about werewolves, she would have thought he was one of those crazy paranormal investigators or something. Her gaze went to the telephone numbers listed on the bottom of the card and she chewed on her lower lip, wondering if she should call him. *Right.* What exactly would she say? *Hi, it's the woman you saved from the wolf. I've been thinking about what you said and I've decided you're right. I think I am becoming a werewolf. Could you recommend a good psychiatrist?*

But even as Heidi shook her head at her own foolishness, she found herself taking her cell phone out of her purse and dialing Luke McCall's number. She had to talk to somebody or she was going to go crazy.

\* \* \* \*

Luke sat at his desk, his gaze fixed on the computer screen. He was supposed to be writing a report about the wolf population studies he'd been conducting up at Chugach, but he had been staring at the same word for half an hour, his mind elsewhere.

He had been so preoccupied with thoughts of the girl that he hadn't been able to get anything

done for the past two days. He'd hoped she would have called him already, but she hadn't. That was really starting to make him worry. The fact that she had been bitten so close to a full moon was bound to make things even more difficult for her. Her body would be working overtime trying to get ready for that first transformation. Because he and his brothers were born werewolves, the changes they had experienced, like heightened senses, an out-of-control appetite, and increased physical strength, had happened slowly. With the girl, though, they would be hitting her like water out of a fire hose. It had to be confusing for her. And frightening. Hell, he'd known what to expect and he had been freaked out by the whole thing. Being a genetic werewolf, he'd had his father to explain what was happening, not to mention help him through his first turn, but she wouldn't have anyone.

Dammit, he should never have let her go that day. But short of tying her up and tossing her in the back of his SUV, he wasn't sure how else he would have gotten her to listen to him. He didn't think that would have gone over real well.

His cell phone rang, interrupting his thoughts, and he swore under his breath as he pulled it out of his pocket. Damn, he hoped it wasn't Hunter calling to bug him about coming up to Fairbanks again. Not bothering to look at the call display, he flipped open the phone and held it to his ear.

"Yeah."

"Luke McCall?" a woman's soft voice asked.

He didn't recognize the voice. *Is it her?* "Yeah, that's me."

There was silence on the other end of the phone and for a moment, he thought the caller was about to hang up, but then she spoke again. "This is Heidi Gibson. The woman you saved from the wolf."

Luke sat up straighter in the chair, his hand tightening on the phone. *Thank God.* "I'm glad you called. I've been worried about you."

"I, um, was hoping we could talk," she said. "I'd rather not do it over the phone, though. Could we meet somewhere?"

"Sure. Where would you like to meet?"

She hesitated for a moment. "Um, there's a Starbucks in Key Bank Plaza . Can you be there in an hour?"

Considering the conversation they were going to be having, Luke would have preferred someplace a little more private, but he didn't want to scare her off again, so he nodded. "I'll be there."

Relief coursed through Luke as he snapped his phone closed and shoved it in his pocket. *Damn.* He'd been so worried about her that he hadn't even given any thought to what he would

actually say to her. Now he had an hour to come up with something that was both logical and persuasive, but wouldn't scare the hell out of the girl. And he had to do it while he finished writing his report.

He put the report together as quickly as he could. It certainly wasn't his best work, but it would have to do. He emailed it to his boss, then with a quick, "Have a good night," to Madge, he was out the door.

Ten minutes later, Luke walked past a group of elderly tourists taking pictures beside the unique-looking wildlife sculptures in Key Bank Plaza, Heidi Gibson's pack in his hand. Not knowing what else to do with it, he had kept the pack in his Mariner just in case. He had searched through the pack again when he'd gotten home that night, hoping he had missed something. He had even gone through every picture on her digital camera, thinking he might stumble across something that would tell him where she lived. It had taken a long time; she had taken a lot of pictures. But unfortunately, other than a few dozen pictures of a teenage girl, all the other photos had been typical tourist shots of Alaska. Next, he had gone through her sketchbook, but other than learning she was a very talented artist, he hadn't discovered anything useful. He had enjoyed looking at the sketches, though. She had definitely captured the essence of Alaska.

Heidi hadn't arrived at Starbucks yet, but then again, he was five minutes early. Spotting an empty table in the corner, Luke walked over and sat down. While he waited, he was tempted to reach into her pack and pull out her sketchbook so that he could flip through it again, but then decided against it. He didn't want her to find him pawing through her stuff when she walked in.

Sitting back in his chair, he anxiously drummed his fingers on the table while he waited. Every time the door opened, he expected it to be Heidi, but it was always someone else. He glanced at his watch and frowned when he saw that she was ten minutes late. *Has she changed her mind?* He didn't know what he would do if she had. He supposed he could try and call her back at the number that was now on his cell phone.

Just then, the door opened and she walked in.

Heidi stood in the doorway, looking around the coffee shop for him, and though Luke knew he should probably give her a wave, he couldn't seem to do anything but stare at her. The other time he'd seen her, he had been too preoccupied with first chasing off the wolf, then with trying to convince her that she was going to become a werewolf to pay much attention to her looks. But even as distracted as he'd been, he should have noticed how beautiful she was. She was a knockout.

Tall and slender with long, blond hair that hung down her back, Heidi Gibson had curves in all the right places, not to mention the shapeliest legs he'd ever seen. When she lifted her sunglasses to perch them on top of her head and looked his way, Luke got a chance to see those beautiful blue eyes of hers again. God, they were captivating.



Spotting him, Heidi tucked her hair behind her ear and slowly made her way over to his table. With all the people in Starbucks it had been difficult for him to pick out her scent when she'd been over by the door, but as she got closer, he could smell the light perfume she was wearing. Though the fragrance was sexy to be sure, it was nothing compared to the pheromones she was putting off. As a werewolf, scent was one of the first things he tended to notice about the opposite sex, and hers was completely intoxicating. Not to mention arousing as hell. It was unlike anything he'd ever smelled before. It must be all the changes she was going through.

He felt his jeans tighten in the crotch area and hoped that his hard-on wasn't too visible as he stood up to greet her.

"I was beginning to think you had changed your mind about coming," he said.

She gave him a sheepish look. "I almost did. I've been standing outside for fifteen minutes trying to decide if I should come in."

"Well, I'm glad you did." Luke gestured to the chair opposite his. "Have a seat and I'll get you something to drink. What would you like?"

She chewed on her lower lip and eyed the chair hesitantly, but then after a moment, she sat down. "A nonfat latte, please."

He smiled. "I'll be right back."

As Luke stood at the counter waiting for the nonfat latte and tall coffee he'd ordered, he couldn't keep his gaze from straying to Heidi. She had found her pack and was looking through it.

"A venti nonfat latte and a tall coffee!" the barista behind the counter called.

Thanking the woman, Luke grabbed the cups and walked back to the table. As he sat down, Heidi looked up from her pack.

"Thanks for bringing this," she said, setting the pack down on the floor beside her chair.

He nodded. "I went back to pick up the were's trail and came across it. I probably should have dropped it off at the ranger station."

Her brow furrowed. "Were?"

"It's short for werewolf," he explained, keeping his voice low so that no one else could hear.

She went pale beneath her tan at the word. "I had hoped you were making that up."

He gave her a rueful smile. "I think you already know that I'm not. Otherwise, you wouldn't have called me."

Her hand tightened on the cup, but she said nothing. After a moment, she shook her head and pushed her chair back. "This is crazy. I shouldn't have come."

Luke reached out to put his hand on her arm before she could get to her feet. "Stay and hear me out," he entreated. "Please. You need to listen to this."

Heidi stared down at the hand on her arm for a moment before finally lifting her gaze to his. He saw the indecision in her blue eyes, along with a little bit of wariness, and Luke found himself holding his breath. If she left, he would have to go after her. He couldn't let her get away again, not when the full moon was so close. To his relief, though, she nodded.

"Okay," she said softly.

Luke relaxed back in his chair. Okay, now that he had her attention, where did he start? "I know you think I'm out of my mind," he finally said.

She lifted a brow. "Can you blame me?"

A smile tugged at the corner of his mouth. "I suppose not. But as crazy as it sounds, werewolves are real, and you were attacked by one in up Chugach. That's why the bite closed up before I could even get you back to the car. It's also why you probably have a hard time even finding the scar on your leg. Within seconds of being bitten, your body was already starting to change."

She looked stricken at that, but said nothing.

Luke leaned forward to rest his forearms on the table. "I know this sounds crazy, but you have to believe me."

She shook her head. "I don't know what to believe."

"Fair enough. At least that means you're keeping an open mind," he conceded. "Let me describe a few of the things you're probably experiencing, and you tell me if I'm right, okay?"

"Okay," she said hesitantly.

"First, your eyesight has probably improved. You may even have realized that you see much better at night than you used to. Have you done something like walked into a dark room and not bothered to turn on the lights?"

She shrugged. "Sort of. I got pulled over by a cop last night for driving without my lights on. I didn't even need them."

He nodded. "Your hearing has gotten better, too. And your sense of smell. Right?"

She gave him a nod.

"You're probably eating yourself out of house and home. And if your transition is like mine was,

then your sleep patterns are completely out of whack.” He arched a brow. “Did I leave anything out?”

Heidi stared at Luke McCall in amazement. The only thing he’d left out had been the erotic dreams she had been having about him. Thank God, he didn’t know about those. She could barely keep herself from blushing as it was. If he had mentioned them, she would have literally slid under the table with embarrassment.

Now that her mind had brought up the subject, though, it was hard not to think about all the sexy things they had done in her fantasies. She tried to push the thoughts away, but it was almost impossible with him sitting there looking hotter in a pair of jeans and a T-shirt than any man had a right to. Or smelling so damn yummy. His masculine scent had been driving her wild since she’d sat down.

Blushing under his golden-eyed gaze, Heidi picked up her cup and hastily took a sip of coffee. “Look,” she said, “just because I can see without my contacts and eat a big Alaskan cheeseburger at the diner down the street, doesn’t mean I’m a werewolf.”

She expected Luke to be surprised by the fact that she had eaten a one-pound cheeseburger all by herself, but he didn’t so much as bat an eye. “Do you have some other explanation?”

Heidi was silent for a moment as she tried to think of one, but to her annoyance, nothing would come to mind. “No, I don’t.” Her brow furrowed. “But that doesn’t mean there isn’t one. And how do you know so much about werewolves, anyway? What do you do, study them or something?”

Luke’s mouth quirked. “Not exactly,” he said. “I suppose I probably should have mentioned this earlier. Heidi, I’m a werewolf.”

Her eyes went wide. “You’re what?!”

She hadn’t realized she had practically shouted the words until several people turned to look at them, but she ignored the curious looks they sent her way. The hunky guy in front of her really thought he was a werewolf? Sheesh, he needed a shrink as much as she did. They could probably get a group discount.

Luke glanced uncomfortably around the coffee shop. “Maybe we should go somewhere more private,” he suggested quietly. When she said nothing, he added, “Heidi, there’s a lot I have to tell you, and I can’t do it here. Why don’t we go back to my place and I’ll grill some steaks? We can talk over dinner.”

Heidi hesitated, stunned to realize that she was actually considering his invitation. Normally, she wasn’t the type of girl who went home with a guy she’d just met. Especially one who not only thought he was a werewolf, but that she was, too.

She needed answers, though, and her instincts told her that Luke might be the only one who

could give them to her. Besides, he had saved her life, after all. *That has to count for something, doesn't it?*

"Okay," she said finally, praying she wasn't making the biggest mistake of her life.

He looked relieved that she had agreed, but he didn't say anything. Instead, he simply nodded his head. Picking up her cup, Heidi bent to grab her pack, but Luke had already retrieved it for her.

"Where are you parked?" he asked as they walked outside.

"In the lot across the street," she said.

He nodded. "You can ride with me, or you can take your own car and follow me, whichever makes you more comfortable."

She hesitated. "I'll follow in my car."

"No problem."

As she followed Luke's silver Mercury Mariner out of Anchorage a few minutes later, Heidi automatically found herself memorizing the route as she went. It would probably be dark by the time she left his place and she didn't want to get turned around on one of the back roads.

She still found it hard to believe she was even willing to listen to what he had to say. There was no way in hell she was a werewolf. That was crazy. Regardless of all the strange stuff that had been going on with her, there had to be some other explanation.

Heidi was just beginning to wonder how far outside of town Luke actually lived when he turned into a driveway. The house was well off the road, and the driveway meandered through some trees for a little bit before opening up onto a beautiful, sprawling ranch-style house built near a lake. She found herself relaxing in her seat. She knew it was silly, but she felt a little better knowing he lived in such a nice house. In the movies, psycho killers always lived in dark, creepy dilapidated houses covered in vines. This place didn't fit that description. Instead, it looked like something out of *Field & Stream*.

Heidi parked and got out of the car. Looking around, she noticed that she couldn't see any other houses nearby. Luke apparently liked his privacy. That would make sense if he were a werewolf. She shook her head at the absurdity of the idea and walked into the garage to meet Luke, who had pulled his SUV inside.

"Guess you're not a big fan of having neighbors, huh?" she said dryly as he unlocked the door to the house.

He chuckled. "This is Alaska. Nobody likes neighbors up here."

The fact that there were no other houses nearby should bother her, but she discovered she wasn't really that concerned about it.

Luke stepped back so that she could enter and as she walked into the house, Heidi blinked in surprise. It was even nicer inside than it was on the outside. The open floor-plan probably made it seem bigger than it actually was, but as she took in the spacious kitchen and comfortable living room, she had to admit that Luke had really good taste, and wondered if all werewolves lived this nice. Then she caught herself. *Okay, that's just about enough of that.* She had to stop this werewolf nonsense. There were no such things as werewolves.

She turned as Luke closed the door. "This is really nice."

"Thanks," he said. "I can't take too much credit for it, though. Most of the furniture and stuff came with the place when I bought it. The couple I bought it from had really great taste that suited my style exactly. I barely had to change anything after I moved in."

Her brow furrowed. She didn't know why, but she had assumed he was from Alaska. So much for her roommate's theory about Alaskan men being so hot and tempting. "Oh, I just naturally thought you were a local. Where did you live before?"

"I lived in Seattle for a while, but I'm originally from Anchorage."

"What made you move back up here?"

"I grew up here," he explained. "When I came up for my brother's wedding, I just fell in love with it all over again."

Okay, so maybe her roommate had been right after all.

"Do you want something to drink?" he asked, walking into the kitchen.

She followed, setting her purse down on the sectional couch as she went. "Um, sure. What do you have?"

Heidi almost smiled when he opened the fridge and looked inside. How like a guy not to know what was inside his refrigerator.

"Water, milk, orange juice, soda, and beer," he said, glancing at her.

She wasn't the beer type, and wasn't in the mood for milk or orange juice. "Soda is fine, thanks."

Luke reached into the fridge and came out with a bottle of Mountain Dew and a beer. Taking a glass from one of the cabinets, he added some cubes from the ice dispenser, then filled it with soda before handing it to her.

“You know,” she said as she took a sip. “This whole werewolf thing is still really hard to buy into.”

He twisted the cap off his beer bottle and tossed it into the trash. “What if I offered you proof?”

She looked at him curiously. “What kind of proof?”

“I suppose the best way to prove to you that I’m a werewolf is to turn into one.”

She blinked in surprise. “Right here? Right now?”

His broad shoulders lifted in a shrug. “It’s the only way to get you to believe me.”

Heidi chewed on her lower lip, but said nothing.

Luke set his beer down on the granite countertop and walked into the living room. “Wait here. I’ll be right back.”

“Where are you going?” she asked, following him.

He turned to look at her. “Into the bedroom to change into a wolf.”

He said the words so matter-of-factly, like it was as normal as going into the bedroom to change into another shirt or something. Her brow furrowed. “Why can’t you do it out here?”

“Well, for one thing, the transformation can be a little disconcerting to watch if you’re not used to seeing it. And for another, I have to take my clothes off.”

She hadn’t been expecting that. “You have to be naked?”

He lifted a brow. “You ever see a wolf in jeans and a T-shirt?”

Heidi blushed. He was laughing at her. “Very funny,” she said. “But how do I know that you don’t have a pet wolf hiding in your bedroom? You could be trying to trick me into believing you.”

Luke’s mouth quirked. “Wow, you’re really paranoid, aren’t you? You’re probably the type of girl who Googles all your boyfriends before you go out with them, too. Am I right?”

Her color deepened. *Everyone does that now.*

He shook his head, letting out a sigh. “I don’t have a pet wolf hiding in my bedroom, but if it would make you feel better, you’re welcome to take a look. It’s the room at the end of the hallway.”

Heidi hesitated for a moment, eyeing the hallway that led to the bedroom. If he had a pet wolf, would he really be so willing to let her go in there? More importantly, if he had a pet wolf, did

she really want to go in? On the other hand, she couldn't be sure he wasn't trying to trick her if she didn't check it out herself.

Squaring her shoulders, Heidi took a deep breath and walked across the living room and down the hallway to the bedroom. The door was open and she paused outside to peek into the room. It was spacious and had the same masculine feel as the rest of the house. The huge king-sized bed against the back wall was flanked on either side by two matching night tables. Opposite that was a dresser; there was another along the adjacent wall. All in all, it was quite comfortable looking. Though she didn't know Luke McCall that well, the room, like the rest of the house, seemed to fit him.

While there weren't any signs of a wolf anywhere, Heidi entered the room cautiously just the same. Making her way over to the adjoining bathroom, she hesitantly looked inside. But apart from the double sinks, huge walk-in shower, and Jacuzzi tub, it was empty. She considered looking under the vanity, but decided that he probably couldn't hide a wolf in there.

Turning around, she was about to leave when her eyes lit on the bed again. She chewed on her lip, regarding it for a moment. Going over to the bed, she got down on her knees and lifting the edge of the navy blue comforter, held her breath as she looked underneath it. She was almost disappointed when she didn't find anything hiding there. Not even dust bunnies.

Letting out a sigh, Heidi got to her feet and turned, only to find Luke leaning indolently against the doorjamb, his muscular arms crossed over his broad chest and an amused smile on his handsome face.

"Sure you don't want to check in the closet, too?" he asked.

Heidi blushed, embarrassed at how paranoid she must seem. She tucked her hair behind an ear. "No, I'm sure you wouldn't keep him in there."

Luke chuckled, but as she started past him to go into the hallway, he gently touched her arm, halting her. Her skin tingled beneath his hand and her pulse fluttered in the same way it had when he had caught her arm at the coffee shop.

"When I come out, I don't want you to be afraid," he said softly. "I won't hurt you."

The words sent a little shiver down her back, but looking up into his gold eyes she instinctively knew she could trust him not to hurt her. "I'll be in the living room," she said softly.

Once out in the hallway, though, Heidi didn't go directly to the living room, but lingered outside the bedroom. Luke had left the door slightly ajar and through the opening, she watched him pull his T-shirt over his head as he moved over to the bed. His back was sleek and muscular like his arms, and as he turned to give her a view of his front, her mouth dropped open. *Daaaammnn!* She could practically do her laundry on those abs of his.

She watched a little breathlessly as his hands went to the buttons on his jeans, only to turn

away at the last minute. What if Luke looked up to see her lurking outside the door? She'd be mortified. Reaching up to tuck her hair behind her ear, she hurriedly made her way down the hallway and into the living room. Rather than sit down on the comfortable-looking sectional couch, however, Heidi paced back and forth in front of it.

She should grab her purse and leave. Now. While Luke was in the bedroom doing whatever it was he was doing. Seriously, she didn't honestly expect him to turn into a wolf, did she?

The minutes passed, and Heidi was just about to turn and head for the door when she heard a noise coming from the hallway. She whirled around, her heart hammering wildly in her chest. She craned her neck, trying to see down the hallway from where she was standing, only to step back with a startled gasp as a huge, gray wolf slowly padded into the living room. Before the other day, she had never seen a wolf so big, but if anything, this animal was even bigger than the one that had attacked her in the state park. Of course, it made sense that he would be big. After all, Luke was tall and muscular. Dear God, what was she saying? This wolf was not Luke. It was some kind of trick.

Ignoring the impulse to run for the door, Heidi eyed the wolf warily. He studied her for a moment before slowly making his way across the living room toward her. She tensed, ready to bolt if he charged at her, but the wolf merely came to a stop in front of her. She had known he was huge, but up close, she was able to see just how big he was. Yikes, his head was up to her waist. While she might not be ready to admit that he was a werewolf, he was definitely not a normal gray wolf like those she'd seen in the zoo.

As the wolf lifted his head to gaze up at her, though, Heidi was startled to see that his eyes were the same color as Luke's. *Of course that doesn't mean anything. Lots of wolves probably have gold eyes.* She might have believed that, if it weren't for the expression in them. While they were still the eyes of a wolf, there was something distinctly human in them. And distinctly familiar.

"Oh God," she breathed. "It really is you."

Before she could stop herself, Heidi reached out and gently ran her hand over the fur on his scruff. It was thick and soft beneath her fingers, and exactly the way she would have expected a wolf's fur to feel. But to think that the beautiful animal before her had been a man a few minutes before was too incredible to be believed.

She ran her hand over his fur again. "It is you, Luke, right?" Her brow furrowed. *Could he even understand human speech when he was in wolf form?* "If you can understand me, turn around in a circle three times."

Heidi waited expectantly for him to do as she asked, but he only cocked his head to the side and looked at her as if to say, "You're kidding, right?" and she couldn't help but laugh.

"Okay, so I guess you can understand me."



He made a sound that was somewhere between a bark and a chuff, then turned and loped out of the living room and back down the hallway.

Heidi stared after him in amazement. She tried to tell herself that this was just some strange dream she was having, but deep down, she knew the whole thing was real. Luke McCall was an honest-to-goodness werewolf, and apparently, so was she. Her legs went a little weak at that realization, and she sat down heavily on the couch. Should she go and watch him turn back into a human, just to be sure? No. She didn't need to; she believed him.

She was still sitting there when Luke walked into the living room a little while later, on two legs this time, instead of four. She looked up at him in wonder.

"I thought you were crazy that day up in the state park, but everything you told me is true," she said softly.

The corner of his mouth edged up. "I'm glad that you finally believe me."

Now that she did, Heidi realized she had a load of questions. "Have you been a werewolf long? Were you attacked like I was? How did you know what you were going to become? Did someone tell you or did you have to figure it out yourself?"

Luke chuckled. "I'll answer all of your questions, I promise. But it's going to take a while to explain everything, so why don't I grill those steaks first and we can talk over dinner? Changing into a wolf always makes me hungry."

"It does?"

His mouth quirked. "Among other things."

Heidi wondered what those "other things" were, but didn't ask. Instead, she followed him into the kitchen. "Can I help you with dinner?"

He glanced at her as he turned on the cook top grill. "You can make the salad, if you want. All the stuff is in the fridge."

While definitely not an expert in the kitchen, she could still manage to make a pretty good salad. But as she stood beside Luke a few minutes later rinsing the lettuce and dicing the tomatoes, it was difficult to concentrate on what she was doing with him so close. His scent seemed even stronger and more intoxicating than it had at the coffee shop, and she found herself repeatedly leaning closer to breathe it in.

Maybe it is pure chemistry. She felt her body begin to respond to his scent. She'd never felt anything like it. He hadn't even touched her in a sexual way, and yet her pussy was already wet and quivering.

As she finished dicing the tomatoes, she forced herself to think about something else. Sure, he

was hot, but right now, she had bigger issues to worry about, like being a werewolf herself. She had about a million questions about it, so in order to help herself think about anything other than how sexy Luke was, she decided to think about what questions she wanted to ask first.

When they sat down at the table thirty minutes later, she was ready with her first one.

“Okay,” she said as she poured dressing on her salad. “So how did you become a werewolf? Were you out hiking like I was and got attacked?”

He picked up the peppermill. “Not exactly. I’m a genetic werewolf.”

Her brow furrowed. “A genetic werewolf? You mean that you were born a werewolf?”

“Yes,” he said as he ground some pepper on his steak. When he was finished, he held it out to her, then set it down on the table when she shook her head. “I was born with the gene, but I didn’t actually become a were until I was sixteen. It was sort of a hormone thing.”

Heidi lifted her glass and took a sip of soda. “A genetic werewolf. I didn’t even know such a thing was possible. Then again,” she added dryly, “up until a couple of days ago, I didn’t know any werewolves existed.”

Luke chuckled. “Don’t feel bad. There aren’t many people who do know we exist.”

She considered that as she speared a piece of steak with her fork. “So, are there a lot of werewolves around? Besides your parents, I mean. And the one who attacked me, of course.”

“Actually, only my father is a werewolf. My mother isn’t,” he corrected. “And my brother is one.”

“What does your mother think about it?”

He glanced down at his plate. “That’s kind of complicated. She freaked out when she learned about it. Of course, my father never told her that he was a werewolf until it was obvious that my brother and I had the gene. That only made it worse.”

“What did she say when he told her?”

Luke picked up his beer and took a long swallow. “I’m not really sure. Hunter and I weren’t there when my father told her, and by the time we got home, she had already packed up her things and left.”

Heidi looked at him in astonishment. “She just left without saying goodbye to you?”

He shrugged. “I can’t really blame her. It’s not every day you find out that your husband and children are werewolves. My father probably should have told her before they got married, but admitting you’re a werewolf isn’t something you do on a first date. I always understood why

she left, but my brother really took it hard.”

She nodded, but couldn’t help thinking that maybe it had bothered Luke more than he was letting on. He had only been a kid, after all. It had to have been tough. But she understood defense mechanisms when she saw them, so she didn’t call him on it. “Is your brother younger or older than you?”

“We’re twins, actually.”

There is another guy as gorgeous as Luke out there? There really is something to that whole hot Alaskan guy thing. “Does he live in Anchorage, too?”

Luke shook his head. “No. He and his wife, Eliza, live up in Fairbanks.”

Heidi picked up her glass to regard Luke over the rim. “Does she know he’s a werewolf?”

Luke’s mouth quirked. “It kind of came out a little while after they met.”

“She must be okay with it.”

“She is,” he said, then went on to explain how Hunter and Eliza had met, and how she had been bitten by a rogue werewolf that had already attacked and killed two other people in Fairbanks.

Heidi listened in amazement, pleased that the story had had a happy ending for the couple. “If werewolves are going around attacking people right and left, I can’t believe more people aren’t aware they exist.”

“That’s the thing,” Luke said. “Werewolves don’t usually go around attacking people. That one Hunter and Eliza encountered in Fairbanks was out for revenge.”

“What about the one that attacked me?” she asked, unable to suppress a little shiver at the memory. “I wasn’t doing anything but taking pictures.”

He frowned. “I have to admit, that’s got me stumped. I’m not sure what made him go after you. I tried to track him, but after I chased him off, he went back to whatever he was driving and got out of there quick. I’m assuming he stumbled upon you and felt threatened for some reason, then hightailed it out of the area as soon as he’d realized what he’d done.”

Heidi looked across the table at him. “That reminds me. I was too freaked out that day to thank you for what you did. It was very brave to go up against him like that.”

Luke flushed beneath his tan at the compliment. “Anyone would have done the same,” he said with a shrug.

She wasn’t so sure about that, but she didn’t argue. “You said that you tracked him. Did you have to turn into a wolf to do it, or did you just sniff around as a person?”

He chuckled. "As a person. Our sense of smell is obviously much better when we're in wolf form, but even in human form, it's good enough to do most tracking."

She considered that for a moment. "Okay, I suppose I understand that. Let me go in a different direction now, then. When you're a wolf, what happens to the human part of you?"

His brow furrowed. "You mean our physical selves or our personalities?"

"Our personalities. I mean, do you remember that you're a person?"

"Of course," he told her. "Everything I know and feel is still there when I'm a wolf. I might look like an animal, but I'm still just a person underneath all that fur."

She thought about that. In all honesty, that was the part she was most concerned about, that she would be some type of wild animal. "So, you could understand what I was saying when I was talking to you in the living room before."

He grinned. "Why do you think I gave you such a funny look when you told me to turn around in a circle three times?"

She gave him a sheepish look, her face coloring. "I suppose that was a little silly. Especially since I could really already tell it was you."

Luke leaned forward in his chair. "Oh really? What convinced you?"

"Your eyes," she said softly. "They're that same beautiful golden color even when you're a wolf."

He lifted a brow, the corner of his mouth edging up. "Beautiful, huh? I never had anyone tell me that. Thank you."

Heidi couldn't believe no one had ever told him that before. She blushed even deeper and hastily reached for her glass to cover her embarrassment. From the way her pulse was fluttering, it was like she was a teenager on a first date. She needed to steer the conversation in a decidedly less intimate direction. Fast.

"So," she said after she had taken a sip of Mountain Dew. "What's it like when you turn into a wolf? I mean, does it hurt?"

Luke shook his head. "Not once you get used to it. The first time can be a little scary, though, because it's so different. And because your natural instinct will be to fight what's happening. But I can be there with you and help you through your first time. If you want me to, I mean."

She hesitated, remembering that he'd been naked when he had turned into a wolf in the bedroom before. While she was comfortable with her body, she wasn't sure if she would be okay with taking her clothes off in front of a guy she'd just met, even if she had already slept

with him in her dreams. Still, she didn't really want to go through her first time alone. What if she panicked and something went wrong?

"You don't have to decide now," he said when she continued to hesitate. "Your first change won't be until the night of the full moon and that isn't for a couple of days, so we have a little while to figure out how you want to handle it."

Her brow furrowed. "Wait a minute. There isn't a full moon now, so how were you able to change? Not to mention the guy who attacked me."

"The first change is brought on by the full moon. Something to do with it affecting our hormone levels. But as you get more comfortable with being a werewolf, you'll be able to control it. Given time, you'll be able to change at will."

"How long will that take?" she asked. "To control it, I mean."

He shrugged. "It's different for everyone. It took me a couple of weeks, but it took my brother almost twice that. My father said that he'd heard stories about it taking some people a lot longer to completely control it."

At her frown, Luke lifted a brow. "It's nothing to be concerned about. I'm sure you'll pick it up quickly."

"It's not that," she said. "It's just that I had planned on leaving next week to go home."

It was his turn to frown. "Home? You don't live in Anchorage?"

She shook her head. "No. I'm from Denver. I was just up here for the summer, doing some painting. Everyone is expecting me back next week."

"Oh," he said. Had she imagined it, or was that a trace of disappointment she heard in his voice? "I don't know why, but I just naturally thought you were a local, too. Well, that's going to make things a little more...complicated then."

Heidi chewed on her lower lip thoughtfully. She'd already stayed several extra weeks already anyway, so what were a couple of more days? "My apartment is paid up through the end of the month, so I suppose I could stay for a little while longer," she said. "I'll just tell everyone that I had a sudden burst of inspiration and decided to stay and do more painting."

Luke let out a breath, visibly relieved. "Good. I didn't want to pressure you or anything, but it'll be a lot easier for you if I'm there to help you learn to control your werewolf side."

She skewered the last remaining piece of steak and dipped it in some sauce. "Does it need to be controlled?"

He shook his head. "Not really. Like I said, you're still the same person, but you'll have different

abilities and instincts now. You'll need to understand them."

She frowned as she remembered how she had reacted the other night when those two guys had tried to molest her outside the diner. "I know you said that werewolves don't just go around attacking people, but does being a werewolf mean that I'll be more prone to violence?"

He thought a moment before answering. "Not really. Being a werewolf is a lot about chemistry and hormones. Sometimes, if a were hasn't changed in a long time, they can get a little moody. On edge, I guess you could say. But it doesn't mean you're going to go out and attack someone for the hell of it. Other than that, you're no more prone to violence than you would be if you weren't a werewolf."

"Good." Heidi sighed with relief. After the way she had broken that guy's arm, she'd been worried about that. It was nice to know she wasn't going to be more violent. That being said, though, she would still have to remember that she was a lot stronger than she used to be. She could hurt someone even if she didn't intend to.

They talked for a while longer after they finished eating, mostly about what it was like for him to grow up as a werewolf. When Luke got up to clear the table, Heidi insisted on helping him.

"That was a fantastic dinner," she said, glancing at him as she put the bottle of salad dressing back in the fridge. "I don't usually eat steak, and when I do, I don't usually eat that much." She closed the door and turned to face him. "Am I eating so much now because I'm a werewolf?"

He glanced up from loading the dishwasher. "It's one of the side effects. Your body needs the extra calories to prepare for your first change."

Heidi walked over to stand at the other side of the dishwasher, leaning one hip against the counter. "That makes sense, I suppose," she said. "All these extra calories aren't going to go to my hips or anything, are they?"

Luke's gold eyes caressed her slender figure as he closed the dishwasher. "No. Now that you're a werewolf, your metabolism is higher than it used to be, so you don't have to worry about that."

Her pulse quickened under his heated gaze. She gave him a smile. "Whew, that's a relief. Well, in that case, do you have any ice cream?"

He chuckled. "Actually, I think I'm out. But I might have cookies."

She considered the offer, but then shook her head. "That's okay. I was kind of in the mood for ice cream." She glanced at her watch and was surprised to see how late it was. The time had just flown by. "It's really late. I should probably be getting home anyway."

Luke nodded, but she could see the disappointment on his face. "I'll walk you out."

Almost wishing she didn't have to go, Heidi picked up her purse. Once outside, she stopped beside her car and turned to him wanting to tell him how grateful she was for what he was doing for her. "I'm sorry I was such a pain the other day," she said. "I really do appreciate your help."

He smiled. "No problem. And you really weren't that much of a pain."

As she stood there looking up at him, Heidi found her gaze drawn to his lips. *God, he has a beautiful mouth.* It was wide and sensuous, and she wondered what it would feel like on hers. Suddenly, Luke stepped closer, and Heidi had the craziest notion that he was going to kiss her. Breathless at the idea, she parted her lips in anticipation, but then realizing what she was doing, she cleared her throat and took a step back. What was she doing? They had only just met, after all, and if he were going to help her, it would probably be better if they didn't confuse the issue by throwing sex into the mix. Because if they kissed, they were definitely going to end up in bed.

When he only leaned forward and opened her car door, however, she felt like an idiot. Thank God, she hadn't closed her eyes and pursed her lips. That would have been beyond embarrassing.

"We should probably get together again before the full moon," he said, obviously clueless about what she'd been thinking. "So that I can tell you what kinds of things to expect the first time you change, I mean."

His voice sounded a little different than it had before. Had he felt the sparks between them, too? Realizing he was still waiting for an answer, she nodded her head. "That's probably a good idea."

Reaching into her purse, she pulled out a small, spiral-bound sketchbook and a pencil, and wrote down her cell phone number and the address of the apartment where she was staying.

As she handed the piece of paper to him, their hands touched, and she almost let out a moan of pleasure at how good his skin felt against hers. She had an overwhelming urge to run her hand up his muscular arm to touch more of him. But once again, she managed to control herself. She better get out of there, or she was going to end up doing something really foolish. Like throwing herself at him right there in the driveway.

"I'll call you," he said.

God, how could three simple words sound so sexy?

Heidi nodded and got in the car, then closed the door. As she started it and began to back down the driveway, she congratulated herself on showing such self-control. But as she looked back at Luke still standing there looking so damn sexy, she couldn't help mentally kicking herself for being so reserved at the same time. She didn't meet guys like Luke McCall every day—actually, she'd never met a guy like him—and yet here she was more worried about not complicating

things when all she really wanted to do was say screw the complications and jump his bones.

## Chapter 5

Heidi let herself into her apartment half an hour later. Dammit, she should have kissed him. Heck, she should have pushed him up against the car and kissed him until her legs were too weak to hold her up. She was a modern, independent, *Cosmo* girl, after all, and Luke McCall was one smokin' hot guy. Why couldn't she have her cake and eat it too? So what if having sex with him complicated things a little bit? They were both adults; they could handle complicated.

She had the feeling that Luke would be as hot in bed as he was out of it. Just the thought of his naked body entwined with hers had her panting for breath. Not to mention made her pussy quiver. She imagined his strong hands roaming over her bare skin, finding all her secret places. And that wonderful mouth of his, too. He would kiss and nibble everywhere—her neck, her nipples, her inner thighs, her...

She swallowed hard and threw her purse on the couch. Her overwhelming desire to sleep with him surprised her a little. She'd just met Luke and she hadn't ever responded to a man like this. She was usually pretty conservative when it came to jumping into bed with a guy. She didn't have a three-date rule or anything, but she usually tended to go out with a guy and get to know him first before sleeping with him. Then again, she'd never known a guy as hot as Luke, either. Or maybe it was the whole werewolf thing he had going on. Maybe she was more attracted to him because of it. Maybe he was putting off some type of "jump-me" pheromones.

Oh well. It wasn't like she could drive back to his house and rouse him out of bed demanding sex. If she were a guy, she'd just take a cold shower. Since she wasn't, though, she'd grab a pint of Haagen Dazs and curl up in bed with it.

But, to her annoyance, when she opened the freezer a few minutes later, she discovered that she had already eaten all the ice cream. "Damn," she muttered, slamming the door. *No sex and no ice cream.* She hoped the batteries in her vibrator were still good.

Frustrated, she undressed and got ready for bed. She was just pulling on a pair of cotton shorts and a cami when the doorbell rang. Her brow furrowed. *Who the heck could that be at this hour?* She would be amazed that Sukie would be stopping by at this time of night to show her a painting, but since the girl only lived a few doors down, Heidi supposed her parents might allow her to run over for a minute. If they even knew. They were likely already asleep.

Heidi ran her hand through her long hair as she went to answer the door. Considering it was so late, she probably should have looked through the peephole to see who it was first, but instead she pulled the door open without thinking, only to blink in surprise to see Luke standing there.

"Luke!"



He gave her a lopsided grin. "I thought you might still want that ice cream."

Heidi looked at the brown bag he was holding up in confusion for a moment, wondering if she were dreaming him up like she had the past two nights. Considering they were both wearing all their clothes, probably not. Which meant that he was really there. And that she was staring at him like a dufus.

Her face coloring with embarrassment, she gave him a smile and opened the door wider. "You have no idea how much I wanted ice cream. Come on in."

Closing the door behind him, Heidi turned to find Luke eyeing her bare legs. The cotton shorts she was wearing barely covered her bottom, so they were a lot more skimpy than the khaki ones she'd had on earlier, and she felt her pulse quicken at the almost predatory look in his gold eyes.

As if just realizing that he was staring, Luke cleared his throat and held out the bag. "I wasn't sure what flavor you liked, so I got a pint of vanilla and a pint of chocolate."

Heidi laughed as she took the bag from him. "Any flavor is fine with me," she said, then added, "Well, except for rum raisin maybe. Those are two tastes that just don't go together."

He chuckled. "I'll have to remember that."

As Heidi took the containers of ice cream out of the bag and set them down on the counter, she stole a glance at Luke. Though she had really been in the mood for ice cream just a few minutes ago, now that he was here, she suddenly had an appetite for something completely different. Having to resist the urge to push him down on the couch and climb into his lap, she opened the cabinet beside the fridge and took out two cereal bowls.

What was it about Luke that had her acting like a sex-crazed nympho? She'd been on fire since the moment she'd stepped into his house, and she hadn't cooled off the whole night. Maybe she was in heat or something. She supposed that could be a side effect of turning into a werewolf. Of course, it wasn't like she could ask Luke about it. *What would I say? Every time I look at you, I want to tear off your clothes and have wild, crazy sex. Is it because you're hot as hell, or is it simply because you're the nearest available werewolf in town? Oh yeah, that would go over really well.*

"These are really good."

Heidi looked up from the ice cream she was scooping to see Luke admiring the watercolor paintings she had lined up against the wall in the living room.

"Thanks," she said.

He crouched down to take a closer look at the painting she'd done of the purple fireweed flowers up in Chugach State Park before getting to his feet again. Entering the kitchen, he

leaned back against the counter beside her. “Do you show them at a gallery back in Denver?”

She rinsed the ice cream scoop in cold water and put it in the rack beside the sink, then stuck a spoon in each bowl and handed him one of them. “I’m in a few galleries and I have some prints out there,” she said, then smiled. “I think I’m even in a few hotel chains.”

“Wow.” The corner of his mouth edged up. “I didn’t know I was in the presence of such a famous artist.”

She laughed as she dipped her spoon into her ice cream. “I’m not sure if having my prints in a national hotel chain qualifies me as famous.”

Luke chuckled. “Well, if not famous, then certainly talented.” His eyes met hers, and he added softly, “Not to mention beautiful.”

Heidi caught her breath at the hot look in that gold gaze, the spoonful of ice cream in her hand forgotten. He had looked at her exactly the same way back in the driveway outside his house when she’d thought he was going to kiss her. Her pulse began to race, her lips parting in anticipation. His masculine scent was intoxicating as it enveloped her, and she took an unconscious step toward him.

But instead of bending his head to kiss her, he gave her a lazy grin. “I think you’re melting.”

“W-what?” she stammered in confusion, her voice a little breathless.

“Your ice cream,” he said. “It’s running off your spoon and down your hand.”

She looked down, surprised to see ice cream running down her hand and dripping onto the counter. Quickly putting the spoon back in the bowl, she set it down on the counter and turned to the sink. Before she could wash the ice cream off, though, Luke took her hand and pulled her close.

“I’ll get that,” he said, his voice husky. “No need for it to go to waste.”

She wondered what he meant by that, but before she could ask, he bent his head and began to slowly kiss his way along the inside of her wrist. When he reached the ice cream, he lightly ran his tongue over the sensitive skin, licking it up as he went. Between her legs, her pussy quivered as she watched his tongue move. *Oh God.* If she had been hot before, now she was on fire. She’d never had a guy do anything so damn sexy before.

“There,” he said, lifting his head to give her a sexy smile. “All clean.”

Heidi gazed up at him, her pulse beating wildly. “I think you missed a spot,” she said softly.

He lifted a brow. “Really? Where?”

“Right here,” she said, going up on tiptoe to kiss him.

Luke bent his head to meet her halfway, his mouth closing over hers. The kiss was even better than in her dreams. Heidi leaned into him. His mouth was firm and yet gentle as it explored hers, and she parted her lips with a sigh. He slid one hand in her long hair, pulling her closer and deepening the kiss. His tongue swept into her mouth, finding hers and tangling with it in an erotic dance that left her knees weak.

Heidi ran her hands up the front of his shirt. The muscles were hard and well-defined, and she found herself longing to slide her hands underneath his T-shirt and caress his bare chest. She moved her hands down and slid them under his shirt, urgently pushing it up. His abs were as rock-hard as they looked, and she couldn't help taking a few seconds to run her finger over every ripple on the way up to his broad chest. His muscles flexed beneath her hands as he ran his up and down her back. Mmm, she just loved a guy who was well built.

Not to be left out, Luke's hands began to do a little exploring of their own, slipping beneath the hem of her fitted cami. She held her breath, waiting for him to move higher. But he teased her first, his fingers merely gliding back and forth over the skin of her stomach. Only when he had her practically squirming with need did he slowly inch his fingers up until they were just grazing the bottom of her breasts. She pushed her breasts into his hands, silently letting him know that she not just wanted him to keep going, but that she needed him to.

To her relief, Luke got the message and gently cupped her breasts in his big, strong hands. She wasn't wearing a bra and her nipples immediately hardened beneath his touch as he traced little circles over them with his thumbs. The sensation sent waves of pleasure coursing through her body to pool between her legs. That made her pussy start to tingle even more, and she knew that she was going to be very wet, very soon.

Moaning against his mouth, Heidi slid his shirt up even higher, letting her hands run all over him. Suddenly, she wanted to see him naked, if only to find out if he was this well built everywhere else.

Luke lifted his head with a groan. “I want you, Heidi,” he said, his mouth against hers.

“I want you, too,” she breathed. And she did. More than she had ever wanted any man. It was like she'd never really known what it meant to be turned on until now.

“I was hoping you'd say that.” He kissed her again, gently tugging on her lower lip with his teeth. “Where's the bedroom?”

“Just through the living room,” she said.

Heidi would have taken his hand and led him there, but Luke had already swung her up in his strong arms and was heading in the direction she had indicated. Not that she was complaining. There was something decidedly sexy about being in the arms of a big, strong, handsome man.

Once by the bed, Luke gently set her down on her feet beside it, letting her body slide deliciously down his. With her arms still looped around his neck, Heidi went up on tiptoe again to kiss him. This time, she was the aggressor, her tongue dipping into his mouth to tease his. He groaned and ran his hands down her back to firmly cup her ass through the skimpy shorts she wore. *Mmm*. He definitely knew his way around the female anatomy. Or maybe he just somehow instinctively knew where she liked to be touched.

Luke tightened his hold on her bottom, pulling her more tightly against him, and she could feel his hard-on straining against his jeans. Well, that certainly answered the question as to whether he was well-built everywhere. She needed to see every inch of that gorgeous body of his. Now. Maybe even have a taste or two. Running her hands down his chest to the bottom of his shirt, she eagerly pushed it up.

Luke got the hint. Letting out a low chuckle, he stepped away and reaching back, pulled his T-shirt over his head and tossed it on the floor.

Though she had gotten a glimpse of him without his shirt earlier at his place, seeing all that sculpted muscle up close was even better. She hadn't done nude figure studies since art school, but a body as gorgeous as his made her want to grab her pencil and sketchpad. That was definitely going to have to wait, though. Right now, what she wanted to do with him didn't involve a pencil and a pad of paper. It involved his naked body on top of hers.

Leaning forward, she pressed her lips to the side of his neck before slowly kissing her way down to his chest. His masculine scent was strong and intoxicating, and she closed her eyes as she breathed it in. It was almost enough to make her dizzy, and she clung to his shoulders. When she reached his nipple, she swirled her tongue around it before drawing the stiff, little peak into her mouth to gently suckle on it. Above her, Luke sucked in a breath and thrust a hand into her hair, his fingers lightly massaging. Playfully flicking his nipple with her tongue, she moved to the other one to lavish it with the same kind of attention. She would have continued moving lower, but he tightened his hold in her hair, gently bringing her head up.

"My turn," he said huskily.

"Hey, I wasn't done..."

But he silenced her by covering her mouth with his. Urging her back on the bed, he found the hem of her cotton cami and began to pull it up. Just as eager to get naked as he was to see her that way, Heidi quickly lifted her arms so he could take it off.

Luke gazed down at her, his gold eyes molten in the soft light as they caressed her bare breasts, and Heidi felt her nipples tingle under their heat.

"God, you're beautiful," he breathed.

Other men had told her that she was beautiful, but there was something about the way Luke said the words that made her feel warm all over. Before she could say something suitably

complimentary in reply, though, he bent to kiss her again and his mouth pushed all rational thought out of her head.

Luke gently pushed her back on the bed. Cupping a breast in each hand, he slowly trailed scorching hot kisses along the curve of her jaw and down her neck until he came to a nipple. Heidi instinctively arched against him, offering herself to him. He swirled his tongue around the taut peak before taking it in his mouth to suckle on it, and she let out a moan. *God, that feels good.* She'd always had ultrasensitive nipples, but tonight, they seemed to be even more responsive to a man's touch. But as he moved from that nipple to lavish the same glorious attention on its twin, she began to think that maybe Luke just had the magic touch.

As he began pressing moist, hot kisses down her stomach a few moments later, however, she held her breath, waiting to see where else he might put that talented tongue of his.

But it seemed that Luke was determined to torment her, because rather than make his way directly to her pussy, he stopped to tease her belly button on the way. Having a guy play with that part of her anatomy was definitely a first for her. She squealed in delight as he made circles around the tiny hollow, then dipped his tongue inside. She was so into what he was doing that she barely realized he had pulled down her shorts until they were halfway down her thighs. She lifted her legs to make it easier for him, and soon her skimpy shorts were flying across the room to join the ever-growing pile of clothes on the floor.

Hands behind her knees, Luke leaned back and gently spread her legs, drinking in the sight of her. As his heated gaze took in her neatly trimmed pussy, a low groan of approval escaped his lips, and she shivered in anticipation. *This is going to be so good.*

A moment later, Luke leaned forward, but rather than bury his face between her thighs like she wanted him to do, he instead started at her ankle and began to slowly kiss his way down her leg. He really did enjoy teasing her, didn't he? She had to admit that it was the most delicious form of torture, though. He was driving her wild with his mouth, and he hadn't even gotten to her pussy yet. She couldn't wait to see what it would be like when he actually did.

The closer Luke got to her pussy, the more that area of her body throbbed. Damn. If he didn't put his mouth on her soon, she was going to go mad, she was sure of it.

"Luke, please..." she begged as he pressed a gentle kiss to the tender skin on the inside of her thigh.

He lifted his head to give her a look that managed to be hot and yet teasing at the same time. "Please what?"

Heidi almost groaned in frustration. He was so bad, making her say it. "Lick my pussy," she demanded, saying what she knew he wanted to hear.

"You mean like this?" he asked, before bending his head to swipe his tongue along her slick folds.

She sighed with pleasure. “Yeah, just like that.”

“What about like this?” he asked, before pushing his tongue into the wet opening.

She let out another sigh. “Oh yeah. That, too.”

Luke shifted his hold on her to cup her ass cheeks with his hands and ran his tongue up her slit to bury his nose in the neatly trimmed curls. “Mmm,” he breathed. “You smell good, do you know that?”

Heidi had never had a guy tell her that before. But then again, she’d never been with a werewolf before. “Do I?”

“Mmm-hmmm,” he said. “And you taste even better.”

She felt her cheeks grow warm. *Damn, he really knows what to say to get a girl hot and bothered, doesn’t he? Talk about a sexy compliment.* She was about to thank him, but just then he began to make slow, little circles round and around her clit, and all rational thought once again flew out the window. He seemed to have a way of making that happen to her.

Heidi dropped her head back on the pillow and closed her eyes, writhing on the bed as Luke did things with his tongue that she hadn’t known were possible. He would use fast, little licks to push her close to the brink, only to draw her back by slowing his movements and moving his mouth down to her slit. It was like he could sense when she was about to come. Then again, maybe he could. Maybe it was one of those side effects to being a werewolf that he’d failed to mention. Like a werewolf mind-meld. She reminded herself that she would have to ask him later. Right now all she wanted to do was lose herself in the delicious sensations rushing through her body.

Just when Heidi couldn’t imagine how it could possibly get any better, Luke slipped one of his long, tapered fingers inside her dripping wet pussy. Though she was perfectly lubricated for the entry of his finger, it still made her gasp in surprise. However, the startled sound quickly turned into a moan of exquisite pleasure when he began to wiggle his finger back and forth, introducing himself to her G-spot. That alone would have been enough to send her into orbit, but then he began swirling his tongue around her clit at the same time.

The two sensations were more than enough to shove her over the precipice, and Luke couldn’t have held her back now even if he had wanted to.

Most of the time her orgasms were slow, leisurely affairs, but this time it coursed through her at a hundred miles an hour, and she was helpless to do anything but go along for the ride. Throwing her head back, she clutched at the bed sheets and screamed her release loud enough for the whole apartment building to hear.

When she finally came back down to earth, all Heidi could do was lay back on the pillow and try to catch her breath. She’d never come so hard in her life.

Luke pressed his lips to the inside of first one still-quivering thigh, then the other. “Was that okay?”

She pushed herself up on her elbows to find a teasing smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. “Okay?” she asked. “It was amazing.”

With a chuckle, Luke got to his feet and unbuckled his belt, then made quick work of the buttons on his 501's. From her position on the bed, Heidi watched eagerly as he pushed them down. His legs were long and well-muscled, just like the rest of him, and she let her gaze run over them before fixing her attention on the bulge in his boxer briefs. She pushed herself up a little higher as she waited breathlessly for the reveal. When he finally pushed down his boxer briefs and his hard cock sprang into view, all Heidi could do was stare. She'd never seen a guy so big. Or so perfect. She could only wonder what he would feel like inside her. But as eager as she was to find out, she decided that she owed him a little oral pleasure of his own. It would only be fair, after all.

Flipping over on her stomach, she slithered her way toward the edge of the bed until she could reach out and wrap her hand around his throbbing cock. Her pussy gave a little spasm as she again thought about what he was going to feel like spreading her wide to push deep inside. The idea was almost enough to make her pull an “I'll owe you one later” on the oral pleasure and get right to the main event. But that would be wrong. Besides, taking him in her mouth was bound to be fun, too. Tightening her hold on his shaft, she pulled him close with a firm but gentle tug.

He left out a little chuckle. “You could have just asked me to step closer.”

Heidi gave him a playful look. “I could have,” she agreed. “But my way was more fun.”

Luke opened his mouth to reply, only to suck in a sharp breath when she reached out with her tongue and licked off the glistening drop of pre-cum on the head of his cock. He tasted sweet and yet musky at the same time, and she let out a little moan.

“Oh God,” he breathed.

Thinking that must mean he liked what she was doing, Heidi wrapped her lips around his shaft and slowly moved her mouth up and down. Each time, she took him a little deeper until he was finally touching the back of her throat. Above her, Luke let out a groan, and she couldn't help but feel a little surge of pride at knowing how good she was making him feel.

Wrapping her hand more firmly around the base, Heidi moved her head up and down on him faster and faster. She could feel him begin to slowly thrust his hips to match her rhythm, and she knew that he must be getting close to coming. She would have loved to make him come with her mouth, to feel him spurting his cream down her throat, but Luke tightened his fingers in her hair, gently pulling her away. She looked up at him curiously.

“I'm close,” he rasped. “And I want to be inside you when I come.”

As much as Heidi had wanted to make him come with her mouth, having him inside her when he did sounded even better. Giving him a sexy smile, she rolled onto her back and scooted up the bed until her head was on the pillows. Luke wasted no time climbing in with her, and she bit her lip in anticipation as he settled himself between her legs.

Bracing himself on his forearms, Luke positioned the head of his cock at the opening of her pussy. Rather than slide in right away, though, he rubbed the tip along the folds. After all those erotic dreams she'd had, Heidi was more than a little impatient to have him inside her, and was on the verge of telling him as much when it occurred to her that he must be giving himself a minute to cool down after the lick she had just given him.

Thankfully, neither Luke nor his cock needed much of a breather, because in the next moment, he was sliding into her pussy. Heidi gasped, her arms and legs instinctively going around him to pull him in as deep as he could go. His cock filled her so completely and so perfectly that she could almost believe he had been made for her. As he slowly began to thrust, all she could think was that the real thing was way better than any erotic dream she'd had of him.

"God, you're so wet," he breathed.

Bending his head, Luke closed his mouth over hers in a kiss so thorough and possessive that she was left gasping for breath when he finally pulled away. If she hadn't already been lying down, Heidi thought her knees might actually have given out. *Damn, is there anything he isn't good at?* As he nibbled his way along the curve of her jaw and down her neck a moment later, she decided the answer to that was a resounding "no."

Loving to have her neck kissed, Heidi turned her head on the pillow, giving him even more access to that sensitive part of her anatomy. Of course, with how good his cock felt thrusting in and out of her pussy, it was a little difficult to concentrate on what he was doing with his mouth, but she was surprised to feel his teeth against the curve of her shoulder. That felt different. Abruptly, she remembered the dream she'd had, the one where she and Luke had been making love in the forest. He had nipped at her then, too. And she had liked it. As he gave her another little love-bite now, she decided that she really did like it. In fact, it was incredibly hot.

She was just wondering if it was the werewolf in her that made her want to give him a little love-bite in return when Luke suddenly rolled onto his back, taking him with her. She came up with her long hair a wild tumble around her shoulders and a smile on her face.

"Ride me," Luke commanded softly, guiding her into motion even as he said the words.

Heidi obeyed, slowly moving up and down on his thick cock. In this position, Luke went in so deep that it almost took her breath away. Part of her wanted to just sit down hard on his shaft and let him remain there until she passed out from pleasure. But she wanted it to be good for him, too, so she rode all the way up and down, letting the tip of his cock almost slip out each time before she sank back down. The rhythmic sound as her ass smacked against his thighs was



almost hypnotic, and she closed her eyes and gave into the moment. Luke took care of the pace, so all she had to do was move and enjoy.

The pleasure began to mount almost immediately, and soon she was moaning and babbling incoherently as her pussy started to spasm uncontrollably. Luke was just as vocal, groaning deep in his throat every time she came down hard on his rock-hard shaft. He gripped her hips more firmly, urging her to go faster, and she did. He was close, she knew. Opening her eyes, she locked her gaze with his and sped up her movements. The look of pure, unadulterated sexual pleasure on his face was all it took to push her over the edge, and she let out a cry of ecstasy as her climax burst forth from deep inside her and spread to every part of her body.

Unable to sit upright any longer, she fell forward onto his chest, her head on his shoulder. Luke immediately began thrusting harder, and she let out little yelps of pleasure as he grabbed her ass firmly and pumped his cock deep into her over and over. When he buried his face in her neck to sink his teeth firmly into her shoulder as he emptied himself into her, she thought she actually saw stars. Thrusting his hard cock deep into her pussy, he held it there as his cum splashed inside her. All she could do was moan as her pussy quivered in one long, continuous orgasm.

By the time their mutual orgasms had subsided, Heidi was completely spent and more than happy to spend the rest of her life right there on Luke's broad, muscular chest, breathing in his scent and feeling their hearts beat together.

All too soon, though, their heartbeats began to slow and their breathing gradually resumed a more normal pattern. Still she didn't move. Instead, she just lay there and reveled in the fact that she'd just had what was almost certainly the very best sex of her life. Even now, her pussy was trembling with the memory of what it had felt like to have that perfect cock of his pounding into her.

Her lips curved into a smile. Maybe spending a few more weeks up in Alaska wasn't going to be that much of a drag after all.

## Chapter 6

Heidi woke slowly the next morning. Of all the erotic dreams she'd had since getting turned into a werewolf, she had to admit that the one last night was definitely the most vivid. Her pussy was even a little tender. It must have been one heck of a dream.

Letting out a wistful, little sigh, she snuggled deeper into her pillow, only to blink in surprise when a strong, male arm went around her waist and pulled her close. *Well, well. So, last night hadn't been a dream after all.* She hadn't thought it was possible to dream in such exquisite detail, and she was glad to see that she'd been right. She wouldn't have wanted to think that such perfect, mind-blowing sex had been nothing more than her imagination.

She snuggled into Luke's arm and relived a few of last night's spicier moments. She had fallen asleep on his chest only to be awakened a little while later by the feel of his hard cock moving slowly in and out of her pussy again. That had woken her right up, and they had made gentle, passionate love for hours. *God, what a lover.*

While sleeping with a guy she hardly knew was definitely a first for her, she decided right then and there that she certainly didn't regret it. She'd been in a dry spell of sorts for a while. In fact, she hadn't been with anyone since breaking up with her ex-boyfriend months before coming up to Alaska. She hadn't realized how much she missed not only the sex itself, but also the emotional feeling of closeness that came with it.

Not that she expected what she'd done with Luke to be anything more than what it was—great sex—but just the simple act of snuggling up to him now made her feel more relaxed than she'd been in a long time. Maybe she should have given into her wild side long before this.

That thought almost made her giggle. Up until last night, she hadn't even realized she had a wild side. Maybe being turned into a werewolf had brought it out. But as she felt Luke's hard body press against hers, she decided that maybe it was just being around him that had done it. Heaven knew that a guy as hot as he was could have that effect on any woman.

Lifting her head, she looked over her shoulder to see him sleeping soundly beside her. She couldn't help but smile. With his hair all tousled and a trace of stubble on his chiseled jaw, he looked very sexy first thing in the morning. Not to mention completely adorable. Oh yeah, she could definitely get used to waking up next to him every day. She sighed at that. *Don't get crazy.* There was no reason she couldn't enjoy herself while she was here, but at some point, she would have to go back home to Denver. It would be smart not to forget that.

But those thoughts were best left for another day. Right now, she was going to enjoy the moment. Not every day a girl got to snuggle up with a hunky werewolf after a night of hot sex, after all.

Thinking that Luke could probably use the rest after their marathon sack session from the night before, Heidi resisted the urge to wake him with a good morning kiss and a strategically placed hand. After a few minutes of snuggling, though, she realized that she needed to make a run to the bathroom. And she needed her caffeine. Though she was reluctant to leave the warmth of his arms, she slowly slipped from beneath his arm and padded into the adjoining bathroom.

Quietly closing the door behind her, she walked over to the sink and looked at herself in the mirror, only to blink in surprise at the light teeth marks on her shoulder. She lifted her hand to run her fingers over them, a smile curving her lips. Well, she'd had the feeling that Luke would be an animal in bed.

Giggling to herself at the comparison, Heidi quickly washed her face and brushed her teeth, then took her terrycloth robe from the back of the door and slipped it on. Letting herself back into the bedroom, she gazed down at Luke still sleeping soundly in her bed. Before she could

give into the urge to crawl back in it and wake him up, she tiptoed out of the room.

Thinking that Luke would probably rather have a hot cup of coffee instead of a bottle of Starbucks Frappuccino from the fridge, Heidi made a pot. While it brewed, she cleaned up the ice cream they'd left out on the counter, tossing out the cartons of gooey mess she had forgotten to put in the freezer last night and rinsing the bowls. She had just finished up and was about to pour coffee into a mug, figuring she would take it back to bed and drink it while curled up beside Luke when she heard a sound behind her. She turned to see Luke standing there. Her breath hitched at the sight of him. He had put his jeans and T-shirt back on. It looked like all he had done was run his fingers through his hair, and he still managed to look gorgeous. God, it was all she could do not to drag him back to bed.

To give herself something else to do, she tucked her hair behind her ear. "I didn't wake you up, did I?"

He shook his head. "I smelled the coffee."

She smiled sheepishly. "I can't seem to get myself going in the morning without it. I was going to wake you up, but you looked tired."

Luke chuckled. "After last night, I don't wonder why." He walked across the small kitchen to stand in front of her, stroking her chin with his finger. "I wish you had woken me up, though. I would have loved to see how beautiful you look with the first rays of the sun shining on your face."

Heidi couldn't help but blush at that as she leaned in closer to his touch. "You sure know how to sweet-talk a woman first thing in the morning."

He chuckled softly. "It's only easy because it's true. You really are a beautiful woman. I hope you don't mind me saying that."

"Not at all. My mom always says to take a compliment with a smile and a thank you."

Before she could actually get the thank you out of her mouth, though, Luke bent his head, touching his lips to hers in a gentle kiss. All at once, his mouth became more insistent, his tongue delving into her mouth to lay claim to hers in a way that had her clinging to his shoulders. His hand slid from the curve of her hip to cup a breast through the short terrycloth robe she wore, and she moaned against his mouth. At the sound, his hand moved lower, finding the sash at her waist. Mmm, she definitely liked where this was going. *Who needed caffeine in the morning when you could have sex?*

Abruptly, the doorbell rang. Just as Luke was starting to tug the belt on her robe open, too. *Damn.*

"Are you expecting someone?" he asked against her mouth.

“No,” she said, pulling him back down for a kiss.

The doorbell rang again, followed by a knock.

“Ignore it,” Luke said, taking her lower lip into his mouth and suckling on it. “They’ll go away.”

Another knock, more insistent this time.

Heidi groaned. “I’d better answer it.” She kissed him. “Wait right here. I’ll get rid of whoever it is.”

That was going to be easier said than done, she discovered, especially since a smiling Sukie breezed into the apartment the moment Heidi opened the door.

“I’m not too early, am I...” Sukie’s voice trailed off as she caught sight of Luke standing in the kitchen. “Oh! I didn’t know you had anyone here.” She swung her gaze back to Heidi. “I didn’t interrupt something, did I?”

As she closed the door, Heidi couldn’t help but smile at how mature Sukie always sounded. “This is Luke McCall,” she said. “Luke, this Sukie Teeland, my neighbor.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Luke said.

“I’ve been giving Sukie art lessons,” Heidi explained.

The teenager nodded. “She’s a really good teacher, too.”

Luke’s eyes twinkled as he looked at Heidi. “Really? Well, maybe I could get her to give me a lesson sometime.”

Despite the fact that Sukie was too young to know what kind of lessons he was referring to, Heidi blushed anyway. Hoping to hide her embarrassment, she reached up to tuck her hair behind her ear again and turned her attention to the other girl. Her brow furrowed at the pad and watercolor paints in Sukie’s hand. “We weren’t supposed to have a lesson today, were we?”

Sukie nodded. “Yeah, but you’re busy, so I can come back some other time. No big.”

Heidi glanced at Luke. That sounded like a good idea to her. To her dismay, however, Luke was shaking his head.

“No, I don’t want to come between a budding artist and her lessons,” he said. “Besides, I have to go into work for a couple of hours anyway.” He gave Heidi a meaningful look. “I could come back and we could...talk. If that’s good for you?”

Oh yeah, talking is very good. “Yeah, that’d be great.”

He grinned. “Good. I’ll see you in a couple of hours then.”

Luke’s fingers brushed hers as he walked past. It wasn’t as good as a kiss, but she supposed he couldn’t exactly lay one on her with Sukie there.

“He’s cute,” Sukie said as the door closed behind Luke.

Heidi smiled. “Yeah, I suppose he is.”

The other girl walked over to put her watercolor pad and box of paints on the living room table. “And he likes you.” She gave Heidi a smile that was all too knowing for a teenage girl as she sat down on the floor. “You like him, too. I can tell.”

Heidi poured a cup of coffee for herself and pulled a bottle of Starbucks out of the fridge for Sukie. “You can, huh?”

“Oh yeah,” Sukie said. “It’s obvious.”

Is it obvious? Heidi walked over to sit down on the floor beside Sukie.

“You guys should go out,” the younger girl added conversationally. “Like on a date or something.”

Heidi laughed. “We’re just friends, Sukie.” *With benefits.*

Sukie didn’t look convinced. “I have a friend at school named Jimmy, and he doesn’t look at me like Luke looks at you. All he does is tease me and pull my hair.”

Luke liked to tease her, too. And he had tugged on her hair last night when she had been on her hands and knees and he’d been taking her from behind. But she wasn’t about to mention that to Sukie.

“Okay, enough about my social life,” she told the younger girl. “Let’s do some painting.”

As Heidi opened her watercolor pad to a fresh page and pulled out her paints, however, she found herself glancing at the clock and counting the hours until she would see Luke again.

\* \* \* \*

Luke was falling for Heidi. Way faster than he should. If he had any sense, he would put on the brakes before he fell any further. Thing was, he didn’t want to stop himself. Not this time. He shook his head. *How the heck can I feel this way about a woman I have barely known for more than a day? Is it because she is just so damn beautiful? Or is it because she is a werewolf? Or is it because she is so unbelievably hot in bed? Maybe it is a little bit of all of that.* Whatever the reason, he couldn’t stop thinking about her. Or wanting her.

That was why he had jumped into his SUV after she had left last night and driven to an all-night

convenience store to buy ice cream. He had needed a reason to see her again. And because he'd known that he wouldn't get any sleep if he didn't.

Not that he had slept much last night. Despite how spent he had been after that first round of hot sex, he had found himself getting hard again a short time later. He had never been with a woman so amazing. It was as if their bodies had been in perfect sync.

Luke wondered if this was how Hunter had reacted when he'd first met Eliza. Had his brother experienced the same almost uncontrollable attraction? Was it some sort of animal instinct that made him want Heidi the way he did? He had always joked with his brother about male werewolves giving off pheromones that made them irresistible to the female sex, but now he had to wonder if it weren't the other way around. Maybe female werewolves gave off a scent that made males lose their minds when they were around them. Considering the way Heidi's intoxicating scent had kicked his sex drive into high gear, he could believe it.

Turning into the parking lot of the Fish and Game office, Luke pulled into a space and cut the engine. He was just heading into the building when his cell phone rang. Taking it out of his pocket, he flipped it open and held it to his ear.

"I thought you were going to call me."

Luke groaned inwardly at the sound of his brother's voice. *Shit*. He'd forgotten to get back to Hunter about going up to Fairbanks for the weekend. "Yeah, I meant to," he said as he shouldered the door open and walked into the building. "I've been...busy."

"Busy?" Hunter echoed. "Is that your way of saying you aren't coming up to Fairbanks this weekend?"

Luke nodded his head to Madge in greeting on the way to his desk. "In a way," he said into the phone. "Something...um...came up. I'll try to make it up there in a couple of weeks."

He could almost picture Hunter frowning on the other end of the line. "You sound weird, like you're distracted or something. What's up with you?"

Luke ground his jaw. *Shit*. He should have known his brother would pick up on that little fact. "Nothing," he said. "I'm just busy with work, that's all."

"Uh-huh."

He didn't think Hunter would buy that. Which meant he needed to get off the phone before his brother asked any more questions. "Listen, I just walked into the office. I'll call you next week."

Disconnecting the call before his brother could reply, Luke flipped his phone closed and shoved it back in his pocket. While part of him wanted to confide in his twin about Heidi, he knew that Hunter would start asking a lot of questions, most of which he wouldn't have an answer to. Hunter would want to know about where the "relationship" was going, and he didn't have a

clue. As far as he knew, Heidi was planning on going back to Denver as soon as she got used to being a werewolf. That thought was kind of depressing, so he pushed it aside. There was absolutely no reason he couldn't enjoy every minute that he did get to spend with her. That's what he should be focusing on.

With that thought in mind, Luke quickly read through his emails, replying to the important ones and deleting those that weren't. After that, he listened to his phone messages and returned a few calls before going to see his boss. He told the man that a friend was in town for the weekend, and that he had to drag her around to all the tourist attractions. To his relief, his boss said he understood and didn't have a problem with him taking off early that day and completely bagging it on Monday. So, after jamming out a few quick reports, he straightened his desk and headed for the door.

Madge looked up from her computer to regard him over the rim of her half-moon reading glasses. "I heard you telling Phil that a friend is in town for the weekend. A female friend. Got big plans?"

Luke's mouth quirked. "Not really. Just going to hang out."

The secretary gave him a skeptical look. "Right," she said. "A female friend comes to visit you all the way up in Alaska and you're just going to hang out? Is that what they're calling it these days?"

"It's not like..." he began.

She held up her hand. "No need to explain. Just promise me you'll have fun. You've been working nonstop since you started here. You need a break."

Grinning, Luke promised her that he would definitely have fun.

Though Heidi's apartment wasn't far from his office, it seemed to take forever to get there. Taking the stairs two at a time, he hurried up to the second floor and knocked on her door. Damn, he was hard just thinking about seeing her. He'd be panting in a minute.

Luke almost pulled Heidi into his arms the moment she opened the door, but stopped himself just in time when he caught sight of the teenage girl sitting on the floor beside the coffee table. Trying to hide his disappointment, he ran his hand through his hair.

"Sorry about that. I thought you'd be done," he said to Heidi. Had hoped they'd be done. "Do you want me to come back?"

She smiled. "No. Come in. We were just finishing up."

Thank God.

"There's still some coffee left, if you want some," Heidi said as she walked over to sit down

beside the younger girl.

He would much rather have her, naked and riding his hard shaft. But he'd settle for the coffee. As he poured some into a cup, he listened while Heidi gave the dark-haired girl pointers on how to create lifelike flowers in watercolor. Though he was eager to get Heidi alone, he had to admit that watching her paint was enjoyable. All the same, he was relieved when Sukie packed up her paints a little while later.

"You guys should spend the day together," the girl said as she walked over to the door. "Take in a movie or something. Explore your common interests."

Was that her not-so-subtle way of trying to set him and Heidi up together? "How old is she again?" he asked as Sukie left.

Heidi shook her head. "Thirteen. Going on thirty, I think."

Luke chuckled. Setting his coffee mug down on the counter, he walked over to Heidi. "You're good with her."

Heidi smiled. "She makes it easy."

He watched as Heidi cleaned her brushes and set them out on a towel to dry before she got to her feet. That was when he noticed the smear of paint on her cheek. Unable to help himself, he grinned. "You've got paint on yourself."

Her face colored. "I do? Where?"

"Right here," he said, reaching up to gently wipe it off with his thumb.

The embarrassment on her face was suddenly replaced by an expression that could only be called playful, and he wondered what she was thinking. He found out when she dipped her finger in some of the paint that was left on the palette she'd been using and smeared it on his nose.

"There," she said, giving him a teasing look. "Now you have paint on you, too."

He chuckled. "Is that supposed to qualify as my art lesson?"

She looked up at him from beneath lowered lashes. "Don't you like finger painting?"

"Depends."

"On what?"

He grinned. "What we're going to paint on."

She gave him a sexy smile. "How 'bout each other?"



“Sounds like fun.”

“Good. I’ll go first.”

As she spoke, Heidi slid her hands underneath his T-shirt and pushed it up. Luke lifted his arms, reaching over his head with one hand to pull it off. She ran her hands over his bare chest and down his abs, her fingers finding every muscle and lingering tantalizingly over it before she leaned forward and swirled her tongue over a nipple. He sucked in a breath and she laughed softly

“It’s very important to make sure you have a clean surface to paint on, you know,” she told him.

His mouth quirked. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

Keeping one hand on his chest, she reached down with the other to dip her finger in the yellow paint, then carefully brought it back up to spread it on his nipple. Luke looked down, watching as she worked from the center outwards to make a perfect circle. After a few quick brushes with her finger, she turned it into what looked like the sun. She was a landscape painter, so that made sense.

Curious to see what she would paint next, he watched as she dipped her right forefinger in some white paint, then used her other hand to scoop up a generous amount of blue. Taking the latter, she caressed his chest, starting right above his left pec and gliding downward. She then used the white paint to make what he supposed were fluffy clouds, though he was enjoying her touch too much to be sure.

Heidi went for the green paint next. Picking up the tube, she put some on her left hand, using it as a palette, then did the same with the brown paint. Tilting her head to the side, she eyed his chest thoughtfully for a moment before taking some brown paint and making a line down the center until she came to the top of his jeans. She painted on a little more, making the line wider, then added several more thinner lines off of it. Like branches of a tree. As she took some green paint and began making leaf shapes, he saw that he’d been right.

When she was done, Heidi grabbed the towel that was sitting on the coffee table and wiped the paint off her hands. Or at least enough of it to tug open his belt and unbutton his jeans without getting paint on them.

As she pushed them down, then did the same to his boxer briefs, Luke wondered if Heidi was planning on painting his cock as well. When he asked her as much, she gave him a flirtatious little smile.

“That would definitely be fun, but I’ve got something else I’d rather do with it.”

As she spoke, Heidi dropped to her knees in front of him and holding onto his thighs with her hands, leaned forward to slowly run her tongue up the length of his shaft from base to tip. Once there, she wrapped her lips around him and swirled her tongue over the head. Luke let

out a groan. *Damn.*

She lifted her head to look up at him. “Good?”

He grinned. “Better than good. Don’t stop.”

“I’m just getting started,” she said.

Still holding onto his thighs, she bent her head to take him in her mouth again. This time, she didn’t do any tongue-swirling, but wrapped her lips around his cock and began to slowly move up and down, taking him deeper and deeper with every bob of her head. He couldn’t control the ragged groan that escaped his mouth when the head of his cock touched the back of her throat. Just when he thought it couldn’t get any better, she took him all the way in and he felt himself slide down her throat. *Oh shit.* He’d never felt anything so amazing. He never wanted her to stop, though he doubted he would last too long if she kept doing that. Which was why he decided he needed to slow her down just a little bit.

Wrapping one hand around the base of his cock, Luke slid the other in her long, silky hair, guiding her movements. If Heidi minded him taking control, she didn’t protest. In fact, she let out a soft, sexy moan that made his cock pulse. Did she even know how hot she got him?

Her mouth was warm, her tongue gliding along his length as she moved her head up and down, and it was all Luke could do not to explode right on the spot. But Heidi must have sensed when he was about to come because every time he got close, she would start to lick more slowly. She would occasionally switch things up, too, going from taking his cock deep to running her tongue along his hard length to focusing all of her attention on the head. She kept him on the edge for so long that he was practically dizzy from it.

Unable to hold back any more, Luke tightened his hand in her hair and urged her head down. “Make me come,” he begged hoarsely.

Heidi obediently bobbed her head up and down, swallowing almost all of him, then gliding her mouth back up his shaft. She repeated the motion over and over, faster and faster until he thought he might go crazy from how damn good it felt.

“Oh yeah, that’s it,” he rasped. “Make me come, babe. Make me come.”

She did, slowly drawing his orgasm out of him, and he shot his cum into her mouth with a groan that left his legs trembling.

Luke loosened his grip on her hair and Heidi ran her tongue over her lips as she gazed up at him with the sexiest look in her eyes that he’d ever seen. His hand still in her hair, he dropped to his knees and covered her mouth with his in a hard, hot kiss.

“God, you’re amazing,” he breathed when he finally came up for air. “But now it’s my turn.”

Giving the belt on Heidi's robe a tug, he pushed it off her shoulders and urged her back onto the floor. She looked so beautiful lying there naked with her long, blond hair around her shoulders and her peaches-and-cream skin on display that for a moment all he could do was gaze at her. He'd never seen a woman more perfect.

Remembering what she had said about an artist needing to make sure their painting surface was clean, Luke leaned over and cupping one pink-tipped breast in his hand, took her nipple in his mouth. He flicked his tongue over it once, then twice, before finally suckling on it.

Heidi moaned softly, her hand going to his head, her fingers threading into his hair in an effort to pull him closer. He went willingly, taking more of her nipple into his mouth even as he gently squeezed her breast. He slid his free hand down her taut stomach, over the curve of her hip and along her thigh. The scent of her arousal filled the air and it took everything in him not to spread her legs wide and plunge himself inside her right then.

But he had some painting to do first.

Releasing her breast, Luke lifted his head and grabbed the first tube of paint he saw. He glanced at the color as he unscrewed the cap. Cobalt blue. To match her eyes. *Perfect choice.*

Luke supposed he could have put some on the palette and used his finger to apply it, but decided it would be more fun to squeeze out a generous amount of paint on her stomach.

She jumped. "Yikes, that's cold!"

Not bothering to put the cap back on, he tossed the tube of paint on the coffee table with a chuckle. "Don't worry. I'll warm you up."

As he spoke, he smeared his warm hand through the paint, spreading it over her stomach. "Better?" he asked.

"Much," she sighed, then lifted her head to regard the paint covering her stomach and most of one breast. "I take it you're more of an abstract artist."

He took her painted nipple between his thumb and forefinger, rolling it back and forth. "Guess so. You must bring out my creative side."

She laughed. "And here I thought I brought out the animal in you."

He let out a soft growl. "You do," he said, bending to kiss her.

Heidi laughed again.

Grinning, he reached for another tube of paint. Vivid green. That should definitely go with blue. Unscrewing the cap, he squirted some directly on her unpainted nipple. She jumped and let out another squeal, but it quickly turned into a moan of pleasure when he cupped her breast and

gave it a firm squeeze, causing the green paint to ooze between his fingers.

“Mmm,” she breathed. “You’re very good at that.”

His mouth quirked. “Painting?”

“Painting? Not so much,” she said. “I was talking about what you’re doing with your hands.”

“Ah,” he said. “Well, as it turns out, I’m very good with my mouth, too. Want to see?”

She smiled. “Oh, definitely.”

Repositioning himself so he was between her legs, Luke placed his paint-covered hands on her thighs and gently spread them wide, smearing paint all over her. Her pussy lips were pink and glistening. This close, her scent was even more intoxicating. Bending his head, he slowly ran his tongue up the center of her folds, and groaned. *God, she tastes delicious.* Like the sweetest peach he’d ever had. He didn’t think he would ever get enough of her.

Swallowing her juices, he slowly ran his tongue up one side of her pussy lips and down the other before repeating the motion. With each pass, he got closer and closer to her clit, but didn’t quite touch her there. He wanted to tease her like she had teased him. And if the squirming she was doing was any indication, then he was definitely succeeding.

The plump, little nub was too tempting to resist for long, though, and he was soon making lazy little circles around her clit with his tongue. Heidi moaned and slid her fingers in his hair, holding him in place. He almost smiled. He wasn’t going anywhere until he had made her scream with pleasure.

He could tell from the way the muscles in her thighs flexed that she was already close. But he wanted to draw her orgasm out in the same way that she had done for him. So he brought her to the edge with quick, little flicks of his tongue, before going back to lazy, little circles again. Heidi writhed beneath him, rotating her hips in time with his movements.

“God, that feels so good,” she said, her voice husky. “Don’t stop. Please don’t stop.”

Luke slid his hands down to cup her ass and pulled her even tighter against his mouth, lapping at her clit faster.

“Oh yeah,” she breathed. “Just like that. Don’t stop. Please...”

The rest of her words were lost as she cried out in orgasm. She tightened her hold on his hair, yanking his face into her pussy. He sucked her clit deep into his mouth, reveling in the fact that he could give her so much pleasure.

And he wasn’t finished yet.

The moment her orgasm subsided, he lifted up and positioning himself between her legs, and plunged his cock deep inside her in one smooth motion.

Heidi gasped, her hands going to his shoulders even as her legs wrapped around him.

She was so unbelievably tight, so incredibly hot that he almost lost control right then. And he hadn't even started to thrust yet.

Clenching his jaw, he closed his eyes and tried to think about anything other than coming. Once he gained control of himself, he started to pump his hips slowly. Leaning forward, he bent to nibble at her lips, and found himself gazing deeply into her eyes as he thrust in and out with a slow, steady rhythm.

Keeping to that slow, steady rhythm soon became impossible, however. Especially when Heidi began to undulate her hips beneath him. Every time her hips rose to meet his, her pussy clenched tightly around his cock and he automatically started to thrust faster.

"Harder," she begged, her voice a breathy whisper. "Fuck me harder."

After a sexy command like that, Luke couldn't have held back if he wanted to. His orgasm came fast and hard, and he let out a hoarse groan as he spilled himself into her. He thrust into her forcefully, yearning to feel her come with him. As if in response, Heidi let loose a scream as her own pleasure tore through her.

Breathing ragged, Luke closed his eyes and rested his forehead against hers. They stayed like that; Heidi's legs still wrapped tightly around him, with his cock deep inside her. If he had his way, he'd never move out of that position.

"That was amazing." She kissed him on the mouth and let out a sigh. "But we're a mess. Maybe we should go shower off."

He chuckled. She was right. The paint had gone from cool and wet to uncomfortably sticky. "That's fine with me. I think getting the paint off you is going to be just as much fun as putting it on."

\* \* \* \*

As Luke ran his soapy hands over her breasts a little while later, Heidi discovered that he had been right. Cleaning up was just as much fun as getting dirty. Despite the fact that they'd just made love a few minutes ago, her body was already responding to his touch, and she let out a little moan of appreciation when he slid his slippery hands down to cup her ass.

She let her hands glide over his chest. "It's a good thing I don't paint with oils or we'd never get it off."

Luke's chuckle was soft in her ear. "They actually make paint for this kind of thing, you know. I

hear it's even edible."

She shivered at the image. "Mmm, maybe we should use that next time."

He kissed his way along her jaw to nibble on her bottom lip. "Maybe so."

Still cupping her bottom with one hand, Luke slid the other around to palm her pussy. As he ran his finger along her moist slit, Heidi murmured her approval against his mouth. Dear God, she was ready for him again.

Leaning against the back wall of the tub, she lifted her leg and rested her foot on the built-in soap dish halfway up the wall. It was high enough to put her pussy at the perfect angle so they could have sex standing up. Luke must have thought the same thing because he let out a lusty groan and slid a finger deep into her pussy.

"Mmm," he said. "Not only are you a talented artist, but you're extremely flexible as well."

"Pilates," she explained, the word coming out on another moan as he slid his finger from her pussy.

Wrapping his hand around the base of his cock, he positioned the head at the opening of her pussy, then slid inside inch by incredible inch until he was all the way in.

Heidi gasped. With her leg up like this, it made her pussy even tighter than normal, and his thick cock was stretching her in the most amazing way. As Luke began to thrust, she reached up with both hands and grasped the showerhead to steady herself.

While their lovemaking in the living room had been almost frenzied in its intensity, now it was slow and languid, the water from the shower pouring over their naked bodies like a gentle rain. She'd read in *Cosmo* that having sex with your guy in the shower was an amazing carnal experience, and they were definitely right. Not only did Luke look sexy as hell all wet, but with her leg up high like it was, his cock was touching her in places she'd never dreamed.

Wanting to touch him, she released her hold on the showerhead and ran her hands over his shoulders. The muscles there bunched and flexed beneath her hands, a delicious reminder of just how strong he was.

Luke bent his head to capture her mouth in a hot kiss, his tongue seeking hers and tangling deliciously with it as he slowly pumped in and out of her. Considering she'd just had an orgasm a little while earlier, Heidi wouldn't have thought it possible to climax again so soon, but she was already beginning to feel that familiar tingle that came right before an orgasm.

"Harder," she moaned, digging her nails into his shoulders. "Faster."

He obeyed and within moments, her back was thumping up against the wall of the tub as he slammed into her.

Heidi's cries of pleasure combined with Luke's own hoarse groans of release to echo around the shower, and she collapsed forward to wrap her arms tightly around him as waves of dizzying pleasure coursed through her.

All either of them could do afterward was stand under the spray from the shower and try to catch their breaths.

"God, you're incredible," Luke said, his voice deep and husky in her ear.

She smiled against his shoulder. "You're pretty incredible yourself."

He lifted his head with a groan. "We should probably rinse off before all the hot water runs out."

"Do we have to?" she asked. "I could just stay here all day."

He chuckled. "You say that now, but when the hot water is gone, I don't think you'll be quite so eager to stand here."

Heidi laughed. "That's probably true," she agreed. "Okay, you wash my back and I'll wash yours."

As she felt his hands sliding up and down her back, then linger on the curve of her ass, she shivered. Something told her that they wouldn't be getting out of the shower anytime soon, no matter how cold the water got.

## Chapter 7

Over breakfast the next morning, Luke asked Heidi if she wanted to go to the zoo, then stop by the Anchorage Market.

"You know, do the whole tourist thing," he added.

She smiled at him over the rim of her coffee mug. "Sounds like fun."

Heidi had been to both places already, of course, but the idea of going to the zoo, then wandering around the open-air market with Luke sounded like the perfect way to spend a lazy Saturday. Then again, she imagined she would be happy doing almost anything with him.

Picking up a piece of bacon, she nibbled on it thoughtfully. She had never been this comfortable with any man she'd ever gone out with before. For some reason, she just felt like she could be herself around him. Why else would she be sitting there having breakfast in her terrycloth robe without any make-up on and her hair still wild from their romp in bed that morning?

She sighed. Just her luck she had to get attacked by a werewolf to find the perfect guy. The

more she was with Luke, the more she felt herself falling for him. Which was probably pretty foolish considering that she would be going home soon. The thought made her heart squeeze in her chest, and she pushed it away. She wouldn't be going back to Denver for another week or so yet. She could let herself be depressed then.

Not wanting to think about it anymore, she forced her attention back to her breakfast. After the two large pizzas she and Luke had devoured the night before, she couldn't believe how hungry she had been when she woke up that morning. But when Luke had suggested he make a quick run to the grocery store on the corner to pick up some eggs and bacon after he had discovered that all she had in the way of breakfast food was oatmeal, cold cereal, and whole-wheat bread, her mouth had started to water. Eating so much all the time would definitely take some getting used to.

After they finished breakfast, Heidi automatically started to clear the table, but Luke told her that he would clean up while she got ready.

"You sure?" she asked.

"I'm sure. Now go get dressed before I yank off that robe, tie you up with the sash, and have my way with you."

She placed her hand on his chest, then went up on tiptoe so that her mouth was almost touching his. "Oooh, sounds like fun."

"It would be. But then we'd never get out of here." Giving her a quick kiss on the lips, he turned her around and gave her a firm smack on the bottom with his hand. "Now behave yourself and go get dressed," he growled in her ear.

Her pussy quivering from the smack on her ass, Heidi went into the bedroom to get dressed. Rather than pull on her usual shorts and T-shirt over her bra and panties, however, she put on a short skirt and a cami. Brushing her hair, she wondered if she should pull it back in a ponytail, but then decided to leave it loose so that it hung down her back.

She was just slipping her feet into a pair of sandals when Luke walked into the room.

He let out a low whistle. "You look beautiful."

Heidi smiled at the compliment. "Thank you."

Going over to the dresser, she picked up the oversized silver hoop earrings and was about to put them on when a thought occurred to her. She turned to give Luke a frown. "I can still wear silver jewelry, right?"

His mouth quirked. "You mean now that you're a werewolf? Yeah, you can still wear silver. It has no effect on us. That's stuff Hollywood made up."



“Good,” she said as she reached up to put them on. “I have a lot of silver earrings and I’d hate to have to give up wearing them.”

He chuckled. “Ready to go?”

She nodded. “Just have to grab my camera.”

The zoo was just ten minutes from her apartment building, so it didn’t take long to get there. An animal lover, the Anchorage zoo was one of her favorite attractions in the city, and even though she’d been there before, she waited eagerly while Luke paid their admission. Taking the map the teenage boy at the ticket window held out, she looked it over as Luke put his wallet away.

“Which way first?” he asked.

She smiled. “The wolves.”

He chuckled. “The wolves it is.”

Of course, the wolf habitat was on the other side of the zoo, which meant she and Luke had to pass various other animals on the way. That was fine with Heidi, though, and she stopped to take pictures of every one. She was glad to see that the two Amur tigers, which had just arrived at the zoo a little while before her first visit, had settled into their new home. The two siblings were roughhousing with each other when she and Luke walked up to the enclosure, and she couldn’t help but laugh as the tigers rolled around on the grass.

The monkey enclosure was next, and they stopped there for several minutes before making their way over to the camels. Knobby, one of the zoo’s newest additions, was off to the side of the main camel enclosure, and Heidi snapped at least a dozen pictures of the baby camel before they moved on to the petting zoo.

“Let’s go in,” she suggested to Luke, hurrying over to the mini barnyard.

Heidi had always been used to the animals running right over to demand either attention or treats whenever she went into a petting zoo, so she was a little surprised when all the pigs, goats, and sheep actually shied away from her.

“Our scent tends to confuse most animals in the beginning. We don’t look like wolves, but to other animals, we smell sort of like they do,” Luke explained softly. “They’ll come over in a few minutes, once they figure out we aren’t here to eat them.”

Heidi hadn’t given much thought to what they smelled like to the animals in the enclosures as she and Luke strolled through the zoo, but now that she did, it made a lot of sense. “The other animals we looked at didn’t seem like they were afraid of us,” she observed.

He shrugged. “Since they’re predators, tigers don’t consider us a threat. Camels and monkeys

don't instinctively recognize wolves as a threat, either, since there aren't any in their normal habitats. The moose that we passed would have smelled us, but they're all large enough not to be concerned, especially since it takes a full wolf pack to bring down an adult moose. But all of these guys," he gestured to the barnyard animals, "would definitely recognize a wolf as something to stay away from. They'll soon figure out we're not a threat to them, however." He grinned and dropped down into a crouch as a fat, little pig waddled over to them. "Like this little guy."

Smiling, Heidi crouched down beside Luke and held out her hand to the pig. The animal sniffed at her fingers for a moment, then shuffled closer so that she could pet him. "Aren't you just adorable?" she said to him.

Luke chuckled. "I'll go get some food so you can feed him."

Still petting the pig, Heidi nodded.

Of course, when Luke came back with a bag of food a moment later, Heidi had more barnyard animals around her than she could pet at one time, even with Luke's help. They were still laughing when they walked out of the petting zoo ten minutes later.

As they made their way to the next enclosure, Luke casually linked his fingers with hers as they walked. Heidi smiled. She hadn't had a guy hold her hand since college, and even then, it had never felt this good. Or this right.

Heidi was so into it that she didn't realize they had come to the wolf enclosure until Luke led her over to it. Still holding onto Luke's hand, she edged closer to the area. She had always thought wolves were breathtakingly beautiful animals, and she watched in fascination as one of them lounged in the grass while the others circled the perimeter of the enclosure at a quick trot.

As if just noticing her and Luke, one of the wolves that had been running laps stopped in his tracks to gaze at them. He eyed them curiously for moment, then began making a soft, breathy chuffing sound.

Heidi glanced at Luke. "What's he doing?"

"Trying to figure out what we are," Luke said. "Though they recognize our scent, they're still confused, because we also smell like humans. And obviously, we don't look like wolves."

She considered that as the wolf continued to chuff at them. After a moment, she looked at Luke. "So, are you going to answer him?"

He lifted a brow. "You're kidding, right?"

She shook her head. "No. I mean, you speak wolf, don't you?"

Luke chuckled. “Well, I took it in college, but to be honest, I only got a ‘C’ in the course because the professor liked me.”

She made a face at him. “Very funny. But I’m being serious. Can’t you communicate with other wolves?”

He shook his head. “Sorry, but no. That’s not one of the talents we have.”

Bummer. Heidi put her camera back in her purse. It would have been really cool to be able to talk to other wolves. Luke draped an arm over her shoulder and pulled her close for a kiss.

“Come on,” he said. “Let’s go check out the rest of the zoo.”

Hands linked, they started down the walkway to the next enclosure. As they came back around to the entrance a little while later, Heidi tugged him in the direction of the gift shop. She really wasn’t looking to buy anything, she just liked browsing. Luke didn’t seem to mind, though, and followed her around with an amused expression on his face as she moved from one part of the store to another. She was just “oohing” and “ahhing” over a display of cuddly looking stuffed animals when she glanced at Luke to see him holding a big, plush, gray wolf in his hands.

She walked over to him. “Getting in touch with your inner wolf?” she asked with a smile.

Luke chuckled. “Actually, I thought I’d get it for you. Something to remember Alaska by.” He reached up to gently brush her hair back from her face, his fingers lingering on her cheek as he softly added, “And me.”

Heidi felt her heart tighten uncomfortably in her chest the same way it had back at her apartment when she’d reminded herself she would be leaving soon. Only this time, the feeling brought a rush of tears with it, and she quickly blinked them back before Luke could see. He obviously didn’t consider their relationship to have long-term potential, and she shouldn’t, either.

Swallowing hard, she forced herself to give Luke a smile. Reaching out to take the wolf, she cradled it to her chest as she leaned forward to kiss him tenderly on the mouth. “Thank you. He’s perfect.”

Just like the man who had bought it for her.

\* \* \* \*

Luke glanced at Heidi as he drove toward E Street and the Anchorage Market. She was gazing out the side window, absently running her fingers through the stuffed wolf’s plush fur. His mouth curved into a smile as he watched her. He hadn’t bought a stuffed animal for a girl since high school, but when he’d seen the gray wolf, he couldn’t resist buying it for her. He was glad she liked it.

Of course, he supposed he could have left out that part about it being something to help her remember him by. Not only had it sounded like something out of a lame chick flick, but going by the way Heidi had reacted, it had also clearly made her uncomfortable. He didn't want her to think it was his subtle way of implying there was more to their relationship than there was. That didn't stop him from wishing there could be more, though.

"So," he said, glancing at her again. "Have you been to the market yet?"

She turned her attention away from the window to give him a nod. "Once."

"What did you think?"

"I loved it," she said. "Kind of a cross between a huge arts and crafts bizarre and a county fair. Well, without the rides and the farm animals."

He grinned. "That's a good way to describe it."

"I was kind of surprised by some of the stuff they have for sale, though," she admitted.

"Like what?"

"Canned reindeer, for one thing. I didn't realize people even ate reindeer."

He chuckled. "Up here, they do. Did you try it?"

She shook her head. "No. Have you ever had it?"

"When I was a kid," he said. "I had a friend who was half-Inuit, and his mother used to make it when I went over to his house for dinner."

"What does it taste like?" she asked.

"A lot like venison. A little more gamey, maybe." He turned off the road into one of the downtown parking lots that serviced the market. "We should pick some up while we're here so you can taste it."

She made a face. "No thanks. I think I'll just take your word for it. Though I wouldn't mind picking up some of the hot cocoa mix and a bottle of birch syrup. Something for lunch, too," she added. "I'm starving."

"Good idea." Luke grinned as he put the Mariner in park and shut off the engine. "Maybe reindeer sausage," he suggested as he opened her door. "Or a musk ox burger."

Heidi made a face at him.

"Last night, you told me that one of the best parts about your stay here was being able to immerse yourself in the culture," he reminded her as he took her hand and led the way toward

the market. “You can’t get more Alaskan than a musk ox burger.”

She gave him a skeptical look from behind her sunglasses. “Okay, I’ll try the burger. But no reindeer. I’m not eating Rudolph.”

He chuckled and pulled her close for a kiss. “Okay, no reindeer.”

Since neither of them felt like walking around the Market on an empty stomach, they decided to head to the traditional Alaska grown area of the market where the eat local section was located. Though it was already late summer, the place was still filled with tourists, and there weren’t many unoccupied tables.

“Why don’t you grab us a table and I’ll go get the burgers?” Luke suggested to Heidi, giving her a quick kiss on the mouth.

She nodded, and he watched as she made her way through the maze of tables over to an empty one in the corner before going over to the food tent. Despite how crowded it was, Luke was still able to get their food pretty quickly.

“Mmm,” Heidi said as he set the burgers down on the table a few minutes later. “Those smell delicious.”

He pulled out the chair beside her and sat down. “They taste delicious, too.”

Luke expected her to say “yeah, right,” but he noticed that she didn’t look nearly as skeptical as she had before. Instead, she picked up her burger and bit into it with relish. A moment later, she let out a moan.

“You’re right,” she said. “This is delicious.”

Luke only grinned as he bit into his own burger.

They ate in silence for a little while before Heidi spoke.

“I’ve noticed that I seem to crave meat a lot more now than I used to,” she said, picking up the root beer he’d gotten for her and taking a sip. “Is it because I’m a werewolf?”

He picked up a fry and dipped it in ketchup. “Yup. Your body is storing up protein for your first change.”

She was silent as she considered that. Then her brow furrowed. “I just realized something,” she said. “The full moon is tomorrow night, isn’t it?”

At the worried tone in her voice, he reached across the table to give her hand a reassuring squeeze. “You don’t have to be afraid, Heidi. I’ll be with you the whole time.”

She chewed on her lower lip. “But what if I don’t change? What if I can’t?”

“You will.” Lifting her hand, he pressed a tender kiss to the back of it. “And after you do, I’ll change, too, and we’ll spend the night exploring the forest. I’ll take you places, show you things that you’ve only dreamed of.”

Damn. He was sounding like a stupid chick flick again. Or some sappy old black-and-white movie.

Heidi didn’t seem to notice, though. Or if she did, she didn’t seem to care. She gave him a small smile. “You make being a wolf sound so wonderful.”

“It is. You’ll think so, too. Promise,” he said, before leaning close to kiss her gently on the mouth. “Now, let’s go find that hot cocoa mix you wanted.”

As they wandered from one vendor to another, Heidi found a lot more to buy than just hot cocoa mix, but Luke didn’t mind. He’d never been one for shopping, but he couldn’t help but smile as he watched her “ooh” and “ahh” over the locally made arts and crafts. And the way she seemed to be able to talk to just about anyone was amazing. She had this way of making everyone smile. He’d never had so much fun doing absolutely nothing with a woman.

Heidi was just admiring some watercolor paintings done by a local artist when Luke leaned close to whisper in her ear.

“Yours are better.”

She laughed, turning her head a little to look at him. “Are you sure you’re not being biased?”

“Maybe a little,” he agreed. “But that doesn’t mean I’m not right.”

Heidi laughed again and went back to perusing the paintings. A moment later, the artist came over to greet them. Luke was standing beside Heidi, listening with half an ear as she and the other woman talked about watercolor techniques when he caught a whiff of a familiar scent on the breeze. He lifted his head and sniffed the air as surreptitiously as he could, trying to place it. He frowned. *What the hell...*

It was the were who had attacked Heidi. And he was here, in the market.

Shit.

Eyes narrowing behind his dark sunglasses, Luke scanned the crowd, trying to pick out the other werewolf. With so many people in the market, not to mention all the various smells, it was difficult to distinguish where exactly the scent had come from. No one seemed to be paying attention to him and Heidi, though. It could just be coincidence that the other were was at the Market. If it were, he didn’t want the werewolf picking up their scents.

Luke’s first instinct was to immediately hustle Heidi out of the market, but he resisted the impulse. He didn’t want to alarm her. She had enough to worry about with her first change

coming. So instead, he kept a watchful eye on the crowd as they slowly made their way through the maze of booths. To his relief, he didn't pick up the other were's scent again. Even so, he was glad when Heidi announced a little while later that she was "shopped out."

Though he hadn't picked up the other were's scent again the whole time they were at the market, Luke kept his guard up as he and Heidi walked to the parking lot. But there was no sign of the werewolf. Maybe it really had just been a coincidence that he was there.

"I had fun," she said once they were in the SUV. "I'm glad you suggested spending the day down here."

"Me, too," he said, giving her a smile as he pulled out of the parking lot onto the street.

When they arrived back at Heidi's building, Sukie, the dark-haired teenager he'd met the day before, was just letting herself into her apartment, and she gave them a big smile.

"Hey, you two!" she said. "How was your date?"

Luke chuckled softly. *How old did Heidi say the girl is again?* He glanced at Heidi to see her looking just as surprised by Sukie's forwardness as he was. When the teenager continued to look expectantly at them, he turned to Heidi and teasingly asked, "So, Heidi, how was it?"

She smiled. "It was fun. I had a really good time."

Sukie's grin broadened. "I knew you would!" she said. "I'm a really good matchmaker."

Luke was just glancing at Heidi to see if she was as amused by the girl's words as he was when a dark-haired woman appeared in the doorway.

"Who are you talking to, dear?" she said, only to smile when she saw Heidi. "Oh, hello, Heidi." She put her arm around her daughter. "Sukie mentioned that you were going to be staying in town for a while longer. I'm glad. She really loves your art lessons."

Heidi gave a Sukie an appraising look. "So, Sukie said I'd be staying for a while, huh? Well, as it turns out, she's right. I will be staying for a while longer. I couldn't leave before finishing up our art lessons." She glanced at Luke. "By the way, this is Luke McCall, a friend of mine."

"He's her boyfriend," Sukie said, grinning.

"Sukie!" her mother admonished, clearly embarrassed. "Why don't we let Heidi make the introductions?"

Heidi laughed. "It's okay. Luke, this is Anita Teeland, Sukie's mother."

Luke extended his hand. "Nice to meet you."

Anita smiled. "It's nice to meet you, too. I imagine you two are probably busy, so if you don't

mind, Sukie and I will go back inside and have a talk about manners and boundaries.”

“Oh, Mom!” the younger girl moaned, but the rest of her complaint was cut off as her mother led her inside and closed the door.

Laughing, Heidi unlocked the door of her own apartment and pushed it open. Luke followed her inside and closed it behind them, only to tense when an all-too-familiar scent caught his nose. Reaching out, he grabbed Heidi’s arm, tugging her back when she would have walked into the living room.

“Wait here,” he whispered.

Heidi looked at him quizzically as he walked past her into the living room. A glance into the kitchen told him it was empty, and he quickly went into the bedroom. It was empty, too, as was the adjoining bathroom.

“What is it?” Heidi asked when he walked back into the living room a few minutes later.

“The werewolf who attacked you was here.”

Her eyes went wide. “What? How do you know?”

He clenched his jaw. “I can smell him.”

Heidi looked surprised at that announcement, but then she cautiously sniffed the air herself. After a moment, her brow furrowed. “Wait a minute. I recognize that scent. I smelled it a few nights ago.”

He frowned. “Where?”

“Outside in the woods behind the apartment building,” she said. “I went out on the deck to get some air and I smelled it.”

Luke’s gut clenched. *Shit*. He had thought the attack on Heidi was random, but maybe he’d been wrong. *If it had been random, why would the were be stalking her?* There were only two answers that Luke could think of, and neither of them were good. Either the other werewolf knew Heidi had survived the attack and had come back to finish her off. Or he had decided that Heidi would make a suitable mate and had come back to claim her. Both theories made Luke’s blood boil.

“You’re not safe here,” he told Heidi. “You’ll have to come stay at my place. And I won’t take no for an answer.”



## Chapter 8

The thought of saying no had never even entered Heidi's mind. If she hadn't needed to pack up some clothes, she would have turned right around and gotten out of there without wasting another minute. As it was, her hands trembled as she grabbed a stack of neatly folded panties out of the drawer and hurriedly shoved them in her suitcase on top of the rest of her clothes. The idea that a stranger had been in her apartment while she and Luke had been at the market completely creeped her out. And not just some random guy, either, but the werewolf who had bitten her. Why had he broken into her apartment in broad daylight? Nothing looked out of place, but she shivered at the thought that he might have pawed through her things. If he hadn't been there to go through her things, then why had he come? To kill her? She swallowed hard, trying hard to quell the rising panic that thought brought with it.

"Almost finished?"

Startled, Heidi jumped at the sound of Luke's voice. She'd been so preoccupied with her thoughts that she hadn't heard him come in. Reaching up to tuck her hair behind an ear, she glanced over her shoulder at him. "Almost," she said. "I just have to get some things out of the bathroom."

Going into the bathroom, she grabbed her toothbrush, face cleanser, body lotion, straightening iron, and whatever else she could carry in her arms, then went to dump it on the bed before going back to grab the rest of her toiletries.

Luke lifted a brow at the pile of stuff on the bed. "I have a hair dryer, you know. Shampoo, too."

She glanced at him as she dropped the bottle of shampoo into her toiletry bag. "Yeah, but not this kind," she said absently.

His brow furrowed. "All shampoo is the same, isn't it?"

The total "guy" question pulled her free of the freak-out mode she'd been in since entering the apartment, and she stopped packing to give him an incredulous look. "No. It's not," she told him, then held up the bottles for him to see. "This is hydrating shampoo, this is hydrating conditioner, and this is to help straighten my hair when I use the iron."

"I don't know about the iron thing, but my shampoo does all the other stuff," he said.

"Really?" she asked dryly. "And what kind of magical shampoo do you use that does everything?"

His brow furrowed as he thought a moment. "I don't know," he finally said. "But it comes in a green bottle."

Heidi shook her head. "Thanks, but I think I'll bring my own."

Zippering the toiletry bag closed, she swung it up on her shoulder while Luke picked up her suitcase. Though she reluctantly left her paintings and art supplies, the artist in her couldn't go without her sketchbook, and she grabbed it from the living room table along with a handful of pencils and slipped them into the outside pocket of her toiletry bag. Not wanting to leave the stuffed wolf that Luke had given her, she scooped that up, too, then on impulse, picked up the bag with the hot cocoa mix, berry jam, and birch syrup in it.

As she and Luke walked to his SUV a few minutes later, the nervousness returned and Heidi glanced anxiously at the wooded area behind the building. "You don't think he's out there now, just watching us, do you?"

Luke shook his head. "No." Opening up the back of the Mariner, he put her suitcase and toiletry bag inside. "If he were, we'd smell him."

Heidi kept forgetting that part. Then again, she hadn't been a werewolf for very long, so she wasn't quite used to having a super sniffer yet. Letting out a sigh of relief, she climbed into the Mariner when Luke held open the door, then leaned back in the seat as he walked around to his side. Her brow furrowed as an idea suddenly came to her. *What if the other werewolf were sitting in a car or truck somewhere nearby instead of lurking in the woods?* She and Luke probably wouldn't be able to pick up his scent then.

Starting to freak out all over again, Heidi glanced over her shoulder warily as Luke pulled out of the parking lot onto the street. As she turned back around in her seat, she saw Luke's gaze flick to the rearview mirror before returning to the road again. He was concerned the other werewolf was following them, too.

"What do you think he wants with me?" she asked softly.

Luke's mouth tightened. "I don't know. Maybe he's just curious about what happened to you after he bit you."

Heidi frowned. That didn't make sense. The other werewolf had to have known what would happen to her after he bit her. There had to be some other reason he had tracked her down. *But what?* She had a feeling that Luke knew more than he was letting on, but she didn't want to press him on it. Maybe because part of her didn't really want to know what the other werewolf had in mind.

Luke must have sensed her unease because he reached over to take her hand in his. "I won't let him get near you again, Heidi. I promise."

His words made her feel warm and safe, and she gave him a small smile. "I know."

But despite how safe Luke made her feel, Heidi couldn't stop thinking about the other werewolf.

Luke took a roundabout way back to his place, checking the rearview mirror frequently.

Because he was being so cautious, it took twice as long to get to his house as it normally did. Heidi was relieved when they finally pulled into the garage.

“I’ll go put your stuff in the bedroom,” Luke said when they walked into his house a moment later.

She nodded, but didn’t follow. Instead, she stood in the middle of his huge kitchen, lost in thought. Which was how Luke found her when he came out of the bedroom a few minutes later. After walking over to her, he put his arms around her, holding her close.

“You okay?” he asked quietly.

She nodded, her cheek rubbing against his chest. She could feel the heat of his body through the soft material of his T-shirt. “Uh-huh. Just a little freaked out.”

Luke pulled back to gaze down at her, concern in his gold eyes. “You’re safe here, Heidi,” he said. “How ’bout I build a fire and you can curl up in front of it while I make us some of that hot cocoa we bought at the market?” He reached up to gently tuck her hair behind her ear. “How does that sound?”

She gave him a small smile. “That sounds wonderful.”

Taking her hand, Luke led her into the living room. Slipping off her sandals, Heidi took the fleece throw from the couch and settled herself on the faux bearskin rug in front of the fireplace. As she watched Luke make a fire, it occurred to her again how different he was from the other men she had known. He had completely taken charge of the situation and made her feel safe and protected, without once coming across as arrogant or overbearing. He was the perfect man for her, and she couldn’t imagine finding anyone else like him. For the hundredth time, she wondered if one of the reasons she was so attracted to him was because he was a werewolf like her. Did she instinctively recognize that they were a good match? Maybe, but that didn’t make her feelings for him any less real. And she had feelings. Lots of feelings.

When he’d gotten the fire going to his satisfaction, Luke stood and went to her. Bending over, he kissed her lingeringly on the mouth. “Now, you stay here and relax, and I’ll go get us that cocoa.”

“Are you sure you don’t want help?” she asked.

“I think I can handle making hot water,” he said with a smile. “You just sit here and look beautiful.”

Heidi smiled. He really knew how to make a girl feel special, that was for sure. From her seat on the bearskin rug, she watched as Luke moved around the kitchen. *Sheesh. How could a guy look so sexy doing something as simple as making hot cocoa?* She was tempted to jump up and go join him in the kitchen just to be closer to him. But before she could, he finished up and came back to join her on the rug. He handed her one of the mugs, then settled down beside her.

“So, let’s see if this stuff was worth all the money we paid for it,” he said, giving her a grin before he took a swallow.

“Well?” she asked expectantly.

He nodded. “It’s not bad.”

She blinked. “Not bad? It’s absolutely delicious.”

He leaned close to kiss her on the mouth. “Not nearly as delicious as you.”

Blushing, Heidi laughed.

Luke reached up to brush her hair back from her face. “Feeling better?”

She nodded. “Much. Thanks.”

“Good.” Taking the mug from her hand, he set it down on the coffee table along with his own. “But I know a way to help you relax even more. Turn around and I’ll massage your shoulders.”

Thinking that would be absolutely heavenly, Heidi scooted around so she was sitting between his legs, her hips snug against his hard thighs, her back against his muscular chest. Reaching up with one hand, she pulled her long hair around to the front, eager for him to begin.

Luke slowly slid his hands up her bare arms and over her shoulders to gently massage her neck, and Heidi let out a sigh. She hadn’t realized how tense she still was, but as his fingers made slow, sweeping motions along her muscles, she felt the anxiety gradually begin to fade away.

“Mmm,” she murmured. “That feels good.”

Luke didn’t reply, but simply continued to gently work all the tightness from her neck and shoulders with his fingers. *God, he has magical hands. His mouth is pretty magical, too.* He pressed his lips to the curve of her neck a moment later. Heidi tilted her head to the side, exposing even more of her neck to him. He trailed a path of hot kisses up to her ear, nibbling teasingly on the lobe before swirling his tongue inside. The move was both erotic and ticklish at the same time, and Heidi let out a little laugh as goose bumps chased up and down her arms. It was amazing the way Luke could make her forget all of her troubles with just a few simple touches.

Chuckling softly, Luke turned her around in his arms. Cupping her face in his hands, he covered her mouth with his own in a kiss that made her dizzy. When he lifted his head, his eyes were like molten gold in the firelight as they studied her, and Heidi caught her breath at the emotion she saw in their depths. No man had ever looked at her like that before. It wasn’t just lust that she saw there, but something deeper, something she wouldn’t have thought possible could exist after knowing each other only a few days. Her heart did a little back flip in her chest. Was Luke falling for her? Maybe she wasn’t the only one who was head over heels in love.

It was the first time she had even dared to say it to herself, but now that she had, it seemed obvious. Of course, she was in love.

Before she could think on it any more, though, Luke leaned in close to kiss her again, and as his tongue moved inside her mouth to take possession of hers, she surrendered to him with a throaty purr. Sliding her hand up to bury her fingers in his thick hair, Heidi deepened the kiss and rolled onto her back, taking him with her. As his broad chest pressed firmly against her breasts, her nipples stiffened, straining against the thin top she wore, yearning for the touch of skin on skin.

Luke must have read her mind, because he pulled back just enough to slide his hand under the hem of her shirt and slowly make his way up to her breasts. He gently cupped one breast through her bra, his thumb brushing tantalizingly back and forth over the satin-covered nipple, teasing it to full arousal. She let out a moan.

“Here, let me help you with that,” she said.

Grabbing the hem of her shirt with both hands, she pulled it up and over her head, then reached behind her to unhook her bra. Naked from the waist up, she lay back on the bearskin rug with her arms over her head and gave him a sexy look. “That makes things easier, doesn’t it?”

Luke let his gaze lazily caress her bare breasts. “Much,” he agreed.

Bending, he swooped down to close his mouth over hers again. Heidi lifted both hands to thread her fingers into his dark hair. Drawing her lower lip into his mouth, Luke suckled on it deliciously before leisurely kissing his way along her jaw and down her neck. She arched impatiently against him, offering her breasts to him with a sound that was almost a whimper. He didn’t keep her waiting; one large hand cupping a breast even as his mouth closed over the pert nipple he found there. She closed her eyes, a moan escaping her lips as he gently drew the stiff peak into his mouth. *God, that feels exquisite.* Her nipples had always been incredibly sensitive, but Luke seemed to know exactly how to touch them to really drive her wild. Only when he had her panting for breath did he turn his attention to the other breast and lavish it with just as much attention. Her already taut nipple tightened even more in his mouth, and she gasped as he suckled on the sensitive little tip.

Flicking her nipple with his tongue, Luke lifted his head to gaze down at her. “You’re still wearing way too many clothes,” he said, his voice husky. “Take off your skirt.”

Her pulse fluttering at the command in his voice, Heidi obediently lifted her hips to undo the zipper at the back of her skirt, then pushed it down. The skimpy bikini panties she wore were nothing more than tiny triangles held together by two pieces of string, and Luke watched hungrily as she slowly wiggled them over her hips and tossed them over her head onto the floor.

She drew up one knee in a sexy pose and gave him a sultry look. Good heavens, when had she become such a sex-kitten? Here she was completely naked, and he still had all his clothes on. How hot was that? “Better?” she asked softly.

The look he gave her was so hot and full of desire that she almost melted right there on the spot. “Mmm-hmm,” he agreed, bending over her again.

Claiming her lips in another searing kiss, Luke lightly trailed his hand down her belly to find the neatly-trimmed curls at the juncture of her thighs. Sliding his hand between her legs, he swiped a finger lightly along the slick folds of her pussy lips before focusing his attention on her plump little clit. Heidi moaned against his mouth, automatically making little circles with her hips as he played with her clit.

He teased her, moving his fingers away from her clit to run them up and down her pussy lips once more before finally sliding deep inside her. Once again, his fingers magically found her G-spot. If she didn’t know better, she’d think he had GPS coordinates for that exact location. Maybe it was a werewolf thing.

But then all thoughts of how he found her G-spot fled her mind as he stroked it with his finger. Heidi cried out and bucked against him, her breath coming in quick little pants as he moved his finger back and forth inside her. To her dismay, however, Luke stopped what he was doing and slid his finger out of her pussy.

Heidi was about to voice her complaint when Luke reached one arm over his head to pull off his T-shirt. Her pulse quickened at the sight of his bare, muscular chest. Now that she thought about it, she wasn’t sure if watercolor was the best medium to capture all of that glorious muscle. Maybe she should try her hand at sculpting. She would have to decide later, though. Right now, she had more important things to focus her attention on. Like his thick, hard cock which had just sprung into view. The sight alone was enough to make her pussy quiver with anticipation.

Taking her hand, Luke sat upright and urged her onto his lap so she was straddling him. Mesmerized by those incredible gold eyes of his, Heidi couldn’t do more than hold onto his shoulders as he slowly sheathed himself inside her.

“God, you’re so tight,” Luke growled, sliding his hands into her long hair and covering her mouth with his in a long, drugging kiss that made her whole body tremble.

In spite of how hot she was for him, Heidi was in no hurry to make either of them come too quickly. Instead of bouncing wildly up and down on him like she was tempted to do, she made little circular motions with her hips.

Murmuring something unintelligible, Luke tore his mouth away from hers to trail hot kisses over her jaw and down her neck. As he moved lower, his stubble scraped against her tender skin, and Heidi shivered. While she wasn’t crazy about a guy having a beard, a little five o’clock

shadow was definitely sexy.

Finding his way to her shoulder, Luke gave her skin a gentle yet firm nip with his teeth. Heidi gasped, the sound caught somewhere between a sigh and a moan. She had no idea getting a little love-bite now and then could be such a turn-on. But every time his teeth grazed her flesh her pussy positively purred with pleasure.

Luke slowly kissed his way back up to the curve of her neck and along her jaw before reclaiming her lips again. Releasing his hold on her hair, he slid his hands down her back to grasp her bottom. Firmly holding on to her ass, he began guiding her up and down on his cock in a slow, sexy rhythm.

Heidi immediately started to feel her orgasm begin to crest. Wanting to make the pleasure last as long as possible, she tried to hold off. But it was useless. Luke felt too good inside her.

Giving into the sensation, she clenched her pussy tightly around him, letting her body milk the hot cum from him even as she shuddered and trembled uncontrollably with her own release. Luke tore his mouth away from hers to groan low and deep against her neck, and she wrapped her arms tightly around him, resting her cheek against the top of his head as they came together. The feeling was so amazing that it brought tears to her eyes.

If she'd had any doubts that she was truly in love with Luke, they were gone now. She decided right then that she wanted to spend the rest of her life with him.

## Chapter 9

Luke would never have believed that waking up with a woman in his arms could feel so damn good. Then again, he'd never gone out with a woman like Heidi before. She was perfect, in bed and out of it. In bed, she was passionate and loving. Out of it, she was beautiful, smart, funny, and caring, not to mention sexy as hell. And on top of all that, she was a werewolf, too. He couldn't believe how lucky he was to have found her. Letting her go back to Denver was going to be pure torture.

But he didn't have to let her go just yet. He gazed down at her sleeping form. Reaching out, he gently brushed her long, silky hair back from her face. She moaned and snuggled deeper into the pillow, but otherwise didn't stir at his touch. He wasn't surprised she was sleeping so soundly. After making love in front of the fireplace last night, he had scooped her up and carried her into the bedroom for round two, so they hadn't gotten to sleep until late. As much as he wanted to wake her up with a tender kiss on the lips and a hand between her legs, he resisted the urge. She would need the rest with her first change coming on that night.

Lying there looking so damn beautiful, Luke knew it would be impossible to resist touching her for long, and since he was determined not to wake her up, he decided to focus his attention on something else, like making breakfast. He might even bring it to her in bed.

Wondering what it was about Heidi that brought out the romantic in him, Luke slipped out of bed as quietly as he could. After pulling on a pair of pajama bottoms, he made his way into the kitchen.

He had gotten the bacon started and was just whisking the eggs with a fork when his cell phone rang. Afraid it would wake Heidi, he hastily grabbed it from the counter and flipping it open, held it to his ear.

“Yeah.”

“Hey, Luke.”

Luke set the bowl down on the counter. “Hey, Hunter. What’s up?”

“Not much,” his brother said. “Eliza just wanted me to give you a call, see if you’re doing okay.”

Luke frowned. “Yeah. Why wouldn’t I be?”

“No reason. You just sounded kind of distracted the other day. She worries about you.”

“Things at work are crazy, that’s all.”

On the other end of the line, his brother was silent, as if considering whether to believe Luke or not. Before Luke could say anything else, however, Heidi’s voice came from behind him.

“Mmm, I thought I smelled something cooking. It was sweet of you to make breakfast, but I would rather you’d stayed in bed with me and... Oh!”

Luke had turned halfway into her speech and he saw Heidi flush with embarrassment when she noticed the phone he held to his ear. She was probably thinking that whoever was on the other end of the line had heard everything. Considering his brother was a werewolf and had exceptional hearing, Hunter probably had. *Great.*

“Sorry. I didn’t know you were on the phone,” Heidi said softly.

Luke shook his head. “Don’t worry about it,” he said. “It’s just my brother. I’ll be done in a minute.”

She smiled, her face still red. “Take your time. I’ll be outside on the deck.”

Luke let his gaze follow Heidi as she made her way through the living room and let herself out onto the back deck. She had put on one of his button-up shirts, and the way it showed off her legs was sexy as hell.

“Work, huh?” Hunter said teasingly. “You could have just told me that you had a girlfriend, you know.”



Luke ground his jaw. "It's not what you think. Heidi's just a friend I'm helping out."

His brother chuckled. "Helping her do what exactly? Test out mattresses?"

"Funny," Luke said sarcastically, then sighed. "Look, Heidi was hiking up in the state park a couple of days ago and got bitten by a were."

"What?" his brother asked incredulously, all teasing gone from his voice. "Why the hell didn't you say anything about this the other day?"

"Because it was none of your business."

Hunter let out a sigh. "What about this other were?" he asked, ignoring the words. "Do you know who he is?"

Luke shook his head. "No. I tried to track him after I chased him off, but no luck." His gaze strayed to Heidi. She was perched on the railing that ran around the perimeter of the deck, her long, blond hair blowing in the late summer breeze. "But I think he wants Heidi," he told Hunter.

"For his mate, you mean?"

Luke's hand tightened around the phone. "Yeah."

"What makes you say that?"

"I thought it was my arrival that had prevented him from killing her, but I realize now that the were hadn't intended to kill her. He bit her once and backed off. I think he deliberately wanted to turn her. Then she smelled him hanging around outside her apartment building after he attacked her. And yesterday, he broke into her place when we were at the market. He's been stalking her."

Hunter was silent for a moment. "Do you need some help on this? Eliza and I can be down there tonight."

"Thanks, but I can handle it," Luke said. "There is something you could help with, though. Heidi's first change is tonight. Is there anything I should know? I mean, is it different for a woman?"

"Not really," Hunter said. "Just remember that women are naturally more emotional, so just keep her calm."

Luke nodded. "I will."

"So, this thing with Heidi," his brother said, changing the subject. "I know you said you're friends and that you're just helping her, but from what I heard, it's obvious you're sleeping with

her. Is there more than sex going on here? Are you falling for her?"

Luke hesitated. He didn't really want to have this conversation with his brother. "Look, the sex just kind of happened. Sure, I like her, but Heidi is just up here for the summer doing some painting. Once she learns to control her werewolf side, she's going back to Denver. We both know that."

Hunter was silent for a moment. "She might not be so quick to leave if she knew you have feelings for her."

Luke snorted. "You've been watching too much Oprah or something. I don't really think I like the idea of pouring my heart out to Heidi only to have her leave and go back to Denver anyway. I've never been the sharing type of guy. You, of all people, should know that."

"Neither was I until I met Eliza," his brother said. "Before she knew I was a werewolf, I tried hard to fight it, but that didn't stop me from falling in love with her. And while I was scared as hell for her to know what I was, when she inadvertently did find out—and didn't run out of the house screaming—I knew it was time to finally open myself up and let someone in."

Luke said nothing for a long time. "Look, that's you. That's not me. And things are different between Heidi and me. She's got a whole separate life in Denver she's waiting to get back to."

On the other end of the line, Hunter let out a breath. "Okay. I won't push you. But just think about what I said. Female werewolves don't come along every day, you know."

No, they don't. Luke looked out at Heidi again. *And definitely none who are like her.*

"So, what are you going to do about this other were?" Hunter asked.

Luke sighed. "Right now, nothing. I've got to get Heidi through her first change. That's my first priority. But after that, I'm going to track him down."

"And then what?"

Luke clenched his jaw. "I'll do whatever I have to do to protect Heidi."

His brother was silent for a moment. "I understand. But if you change your mind and want some help, give me a call."

"I will."

Flipping his phone closed, Luke set it down on the counter and gazed out the French doors to where Heidi was still sitting on the railing. Part of him wanted to take his brother's advice and tell Heidi how he felt about her. But the other part of him was afraid. He had never gone out with another woman long enough to let himself develop feelings for her, so he wasn't even sure if what he was feeling now was love. It sure felt like it was. But all he really knew was that

every time he thought of letting Heidi go it was like all the oxygen had been sucked out of the room and he could barely breathe. *That has to be love, doesn't it?*

Now, if he only she felt the same way about him.

\* \* \* \*

After last night, Heidi wasn't sure how she was ever going to leave Luke and go back to Denver . She was in love with him and she didn't know what to do about it. It wasn't like she could just come right out and tell him. Then again, she couldn't very well announce that she had decided to move up to Alaska out of the blue, either. It would be painfully obvious that she'd done it simply to be closer to him. Considering they'd barely met a week ago, he'd probably think she was crazy. Like those psycho-obsessive girlfriends she read about in *Cosmo* .

The French doors opened and she turned her head to see Luke coming out onto the deck.

"I didn't mean to interrupt your phone call," she said, giving him a smile.

He returned her smile with one of his own. "You didn't."

"Please tell me your brother didn't hear what I said."

Luke chuckled as he walked over to her. "Okay, I won't."

She felt herself blush. "Oh, God. I'm so embarrassed."

"Don't be," Luke said. "Hunter's a big boy. He's old enough to know I have a girlfriend."

Girlfriend. Her heart did a triple backflip with a half tuck at the word. He thought of her as a girlfriend. *That is promising, isn't it?*

Luke reached up to gently tuck her hair behind her ear. "You looked like you were deep in thought when I came out. What were you thinking about?"

She shrugged and looked away, staring out at the lake. "Nothing really," she said, hoping her voice sounded casual. "Just that I'm really going to miss it up here when I go home."

"So stay."

Heidi jerked her head around to look at him, sure she couldn't have heard him right. "Wh-what?"

He cupped her cheek in his hand. "Don't go back to Denver . Stay here."

She blinked. "With you?"

He grinned. "That was the plan."

Heidi gazed up at him, speechless. He was asking her to move in with him.

Luke, however, must have taken her inability to speak for hesitation because he said, “Sorry, I didn’t mean to pressure you. We just met. Uprooting your life and moving up here is—”

“Exactly what I was thinking about doing when you were on the phone with your brother,” she said before he could finish.

His brow furrowed. “It was?”

She slid off the railing to loop her arms around his neck. “Well, not the part about where I was going to live or anything, but moving in with you would definitely be my first choice.”

As Luke stood there regarding her with something that could only be called wonder in his gold eyes, it occurred to Heidi that he was surprised she had agreed to stay.

“Mine, too,” was all he said before he bent his head to kiss her.

Heidi melted against him, her hands finding their way into his hair as her lips parted beneath his. Luke’s hands cupped her ass cheeks, pulling her tightly against him. She could feel his hard cock straining against the material of his pajama bottoms as it pressed against her belly, and her pussy quivered with need.

With a groan, Luke dragged his mouth away from hers to trail a path of hot kisses along the curve of her jaw. Heidi slid her hands down to his shoulders and arched against him, moaning a little as he gently nipped her earlobe. The love-bite sent shivers down her back.

He lifted his head to gaze down at her, hunger in his eyes. “You look sexy as hell in that shirt, do you know that?”

She gave him a flirty smile. “But something tells me you want to take it off, am I right?”

He chuckled softly. “How did you guess?”

As he spoke, Luke reached for the buttons, his long, tapered fingers undoing two of them before she even realized what he was doing.

She looked at him in surprise. “Out here?”

He looked up from undoing another button to give her a sexy grin. “Why not?”

Heidi looked around. “Because someone could see.”

He undid the last button. “We’re in the middle of nowhere. Who’s going to see?”

She supposed he had a point. *But still...* “I don’t know. What if someone’s out hiking in the woods or something?”

“They’re not,” he assured her.

“How do you know?”

He slowly pushed the shirt off her shoulders, letting it fall to the deck at her feet and leaving her completely naked. “Well, for one thing, I own all the property around us. And for another, I’d smell them. I’m a werewolf, remember?”

Oh, she remembered. In fact, he was the perfect combination of man and beast. Civilized, educated, and refined, yet a complete animal in bed. And apparently on the back deck, too. *God, it is hot!*

She opened her mouth to tell him as much, but he chose that moment to push his pajama bottoms down, and all she could do was stare at his thick cock. She’d never get tired of seeing him naked, that was for sure.

Taking her hand, Luke gave it a tug, pulling her against him. He slid his free hand in her hair, tilting her head back and covering her mouth with his. Heidi moaned as his tongue slipped into her mouth and began to play with hers. Her hands glided up the well-defined muscles of his chest to rest on his shoulders.

Luke moved his hand up her stomach to cup her breast, his thumb and forefinger closing over the sensitive nipple and giving it a firm squeeze. She murmured her approval against his mouth. She wanted him to take her right now. Right here on the deck where anyone could see.

Dragging his mouth away from hers with a groan, Luke gazed down at her hotly before turning her around so that her back was to him. Heidi gasped, surprised by the sudden change in position, but before she could say anything, Luke bent his head to kiss the curve of her neck, and all thought of conversation fled. As he nibbled his way up to her ear and back down again, he reached around with both hands to cup her breasts and play with her nipples. The combination of sensations sent shivers of pleasure through her body, and she closed her eyes with a moan. Almost of their own accord, her hips began to undulate so she was grinding her bottom against his hard cock.

Luke growled something unintelligible in her ear and releasing her breasts, slid his hands around to her back to gently nudge her forward. The movement left her leaning over the railing and Heidi immediately grasped it tightly in her hands. As he grabbed her hips, she looked over her shoulder, expecting him to slide in from behind, but he surprised her by dropping to his knees and slowly running his tongue up the center of her pussy.

Heidi inhaled sharply at the contact, her hands tightening on the wooden railing. She’d never been licked in this position, but one swipe of his tongue and she was already almost dizzy with pleasure. Could he actually make her come like this? Probably not, since he couldn’t get to her clit from this angle. But what he was doing felt delicious all the same, and she eagerly spread her legs wider, pushing her ass up in the air.

Luke didn't need more encouragement than that. Shifting his hands so he was cupping her ass cheeks, he gently spread her folds and plunged his tongue into her pussy, driving it deep inside her.

She moaned and gripped the railing even harder.

Luke moved his tongue slowly up and down the folds of her pussy, making her shiver with pleasure. While Luke couldn't reach her clit from this direction, he sure as hell could still drive her crazy. And he seemed to take great pleasure in doing just that. The more she writhed, the more he licked until she was letting out moan after moan after moan. If she hadn't been holding onto the railing, she might have melted onto the deck, it felt so incredible.

But Luke must have decided that he had teased her enough because after giving her a quick kiss on each ass cheek, he got to his feet. Eyes half closed, Heidi lifted up a little and glanced at him over her shoulder. His cock jutted out thick and erect between his muscular legs, the head already glistening with pre-cum. She licked her lips in anticipation as he stepped up behind her.

Grabbing her hips in a firm grip, he positioned the head of his cock at the opening of her sopping wet pussy. Instead of sliding inside right away, though, he teased her by entering her pussy a little at a time. That would have been torture enough in itself, but before going deeper, he would pull all the way out each time and start again. The whole thing was enough to drive her wild with need, and she would have pushed back to impale herself on his shaft if he hadn't been holding onto her so tightly.

"Please..." she begged, throwing him an imploring look over her shoulder.

His gaze flicked to her, his cock poised at the opening of her pussy, a teasing smile tugging at his lips. "Please what?"

She gripped the railing. "I need you inside me. Now!"

"Like this?" he asked, pulling her back against his hips and sliding his cock deep inside her in one smooth motion.

"God, yes!" she moaned loudly.

Luke stayed like that for what seemed like hours, his cock nestled inside her wetness before he finally began to thrust. He pumped in and out of her slowly, his hips slapping against her ass cheeks.

Leaning forward, he slid one hand in her hair, gently wrapping his fingers in it. A moment later, Heidi felt his warm mouth on the curve of her neck. As he lightly nipped her skin with his teeth, all she could think was how primal what he was doing seemed. And how unbelievably erotic.

Letting out a moan, Heidi reached back with one hand and clenched at his well-muscled thigh.

“Harder,” she demanded. “Fuck me harder!”

With a low growl, Luke tightened his hand in her hair and began pumping his cock into her faster.

“Yeah,” she breathed. “Just like that! Don’t stop!” She couldn’t believe how much his hand wrapped in her hair was turning her on.

“I won’t, baby,” he rasped, his voice hoarse in her ear. “Come for me. That’s it. Come for me.”

As if at his command, her orgasm exploded through her, and she screamed out her pleasure for the whole forest to hear. Her cries echoed across the lake, only to return to her. Luke’s own groans of release were muffled against the curve of her neck as he thrust into her and held himself there. She felt the heat of his release as he poured himself inside her.

Loosening his hold on her hair, Luke wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her close, and Heidi leaned back against him, too spent to do more than that.

Luke brushed her ear with his mouth. “I wasn’t too rough, was I?” he asked softly.

Heidi smiled. “Definitely not,” she said, reaching behind her to caress his cheek. “It was perfect.”

He wrapped his other arm around her. “Good. I don’t know what it is about being outside with you, but it just brings out the animal in me.”

She smiled as she gazed out at the lake. “So I see.”

“You know,” Luke said, his breath warm as it stirred her hair. “I had planned on bringing you breakfast in bed, then keeping you there for the rest of the day.”

Heidi smiled. “Sounds romantic.”

“I thought so,” he agreed.

She turned in his arms so she was facing him, then looped her own around his neck. “There’s nothing to say that we can’t still have breakfast in bed. Or stay there the rest of the day.”

His mouth twitched. “Oh really?”

She nodded. “I’ll even help you make breakfast.”

Thirty minutes later, however, Heidi was beginning to think that maybe they should have had breakfast at the table instead. Between the scrambled eggs, bacon, and French toast, the bed was covered with dishes. Even so, she had to admit that having Luke feed her pancakes while she sat there completely naked was a decadent experience. Though she suspected that he deliberately dripped syrup down her breasts more than once just so he could lick it off. Not that

she minded, of course, especially since it led to some pretty fantastic oral sex. God, she loved his tongue.

“You know,” she said as she lay curled up in his arms much later. “My roommate back in Denver—correction, my former roommate—would be very jealous.”

He absently ran his fingers through her hair. “Because you spent the whole day in bed, you mean?”

She grinned. “Because I spent the whole day in bed with an honest-to-goodness, real-life Alaskan hunk.”

“A what?” He laughed.

Heidi pushed herself up on her elbow to look at him. “An Alaskan hunk,” she explained, then added, “There are a lot of women in the lower US who seem to be of the opinion that the men up here are more rugged and manly than the guys down there. In fact, there are whole magazines devoted to the subject.”

He lifted a brow. “You’re kidding, right? About the magazines, I mean.”

She shook her head. “I’m not. There’s even a website.”

“I see,” he said, his tone of voice suggesting he found the whole thing amusing. “And are you also of the opinion that Alaskan men are more rugged and manly?”

Her lips curved into a smile. “I am now,” she said, leaning close to kiss him. “Though I’m not sure my roommate would go in for the whole werewolf thing. She’s not really much for the great outdoors.”

Luke chuckled at that. “I could see how that could be an issue.” He reached up to gently brush her hair back. “Speaking of which, we should probably go. It’s getting dark.”

Her brow furrowed in confusion. “Go where?”

“Just into the woods behind the house,” he explained. “It’ll be easier if we’re outside for your change.”

“Oh.” She’d completely forgotten about that.

Her unease must have shown on her face because Luke caressed her cheek and said, “It’ll be fine, Heidi. I promise. And I’ll be right beside you the whole time.”

She nodded, but couldn’t quite manage a reply.

He pulled her close for a kiss then took her hand. “Come on.”



At Luke's suggestion, Heidi wore one of his button-up shirts, a soft flannel one this time, and she wrapped her arms around herself nervously as she watched him tuck a blanket under his arm, then grab a bottle of water from the fridge. Taking her hand, Luke led her out of the house around the lake into the surrounding woods. With their excellent night vision, they didn't need a flashlight, though the moon was so bright that they probably wouldn't have needed to bring one anyway.

Heidi glanced up at the moon as they made their way through the trees. Though her pulse was definitely faster than normal, she didn't feel any different. Just scared.

"This looks like a good spot," Luke said, coming to a stop in a clearing surrounded by tall fir trees.

Heidi stopped, too. She watched in silence as he spread the blanket out on the ground. It was thoughtful of him to bring something for them to sit on.

When he was finished, Luke held out his hand. "Come sit."

She did. Drawing her knees up, she wrapped her arms around them. "Should I take off my shirt?" she asked as he sat down beside her.

He put his arm around her, pulling her close. "You can keep it on for now. We'll know when it's time."

Heidi rested her head on his shoulder. "How?"

"As you get close, you'll start to feel hot all over," he explained. "And your muscles will start to tingle, like a mild electric shock. You might feel a strange sensation in your stomach, too."

She swallowed hard. "I'm afraid, Luke. I don't know if I can do this."

He pressed a kiss to the top of her head, his hand moving soothingly up and down her arm. "I know, baby, but it'll be okay. You just need to try and stay calm once you start to change. I'll be right beside you the whole time."

Heidi tried to relax, but it was no use. Seeing how nervous she was, Luke lay back on the blanket, pulling her down with him.

"Just lay down with me," he said softly. "We're just going to relax and look at the moon."

They lay there like that for a while, neither of them saying anything. She was just starting to relax, when a sudden fluttering in her stomach made her sit up quickly.

"I think it might be starting," she said.

Luke sat up beside her. "Are you feeling hot?"

She nodded. “A little. And my stomach feels funny. Like I’m on a roller coaster.”

“Okay. It’s starting,” he said. “Take your shirt off and lie back down.”

Heidi’s fingers trembled as she undid the buttons. She hadn’t worn anything underneath the flannel shirt, and she shivered a little in the cool night air. Taking the shirt from her, Luke covered her with it after she lay down, then laying down beside her, he put his arm around her, molding his body to her. Heidi could feel his breath warm and steady on the back of her neck.

“Oh God, I forgot to ask,” she said, looking over her shoulder at him. “After I turn into a wolf, how will I turn back?”

“Don’t worry. Your body will take care of that itself. It will know when it’s time,” he said.

That really didn’t tell her much.

They lay there quietly, Luke’s breathing even in her ear, his strong arm reassuring around her waist as she began to breathe faster and faster. Her stomach was still doing the roller coaster thing, only now it was complete loops. After a few minutes, she pushed the shirt off with a moan, too hot to keep it on any longer.

Luke ran his hand soothingly over her hip. “Just relax, Heidi. Don’t try to fight it, just let it wash over you.”

Heidi wasn’t sure what that meant. She closed her eyes and let out another moan. “Does it always feel like this?” she asked.

“Just the first time because you’re not used to it,” he said. “Don’t fight it. Just stay calm and breathe evenly. Concentrate on the sound of my voice.”

She closed her eyes and tried to do as he suggested. As he continued to whisper soothing words in her ear, she felt herself gradually start to relax as if she were being hypnotized.

Heidi didn’t know when the transformation from human to wolf actually started. She just suddenly felt a strain in the muscles of her arms and legs, like she was stretching them really hard. Then the feeling began to invade her bones, and she groaned in pain. If it weren’t for Luke’s calm voice whispering in her ear, she would have completely freaked out. Her heart was beating a hundred miles an hour and she couldn’t seem to get enough air.

Then all at once, it was over and the pain was gone. One minute Luke was running his hand up and down her bare hip and the next she could feel him running it through her thick fur.

Heart racing, Heidi jumped up and promptly fell over. She tried to get her feet back under her, but that seemed a lot more difficult now that she had four of them instead of two. Getting them all under her at the same time took a little work, and it was a few minutes before she could actually stand up on her own.

“Whoa, take it easy, Heidi.”

She looked at Luke to find him regarding her with what could only be described as awe in his gold eyes.

“I knew you’d be a beautiful wolf,” he said softly.

Heidi couldn’t help but be pleased by the compliment. Then she realized her body was swaying like crazy as if someone were shaking her from behind. She looked over her shoulder to see that her extremely bushy tail was wagging. So, that’s why she was shaking. Turning back around, she looked down to see what the rest of her was like, and blinked. She had paws. Big paws. But they were still very feminine, at least as far as she was concerned. She looked at her nails. They were long and slightly rounded at the tips. As she continued to gaze down at herself, she took in her fur. It was thick and glossy and light beige color. That’s when it finally struck her. She was really a wolf!

Giddy at the realization, she started forward toward Luke, only to trip over her paws and land in an ungraceful heap on the blanket. Embarrassed, she didn’t look at Luke as she pushed herself to her feet.

“Here, let me help you,” he said, coming over to crouch down beside her. “Walking around on four feet can take a while to get used to.” He flashed her a grin. “Trust me, I know.”

Heidi would have laughed if she could have. But since she couldn’t, she settled for smiling as Luke patiently showed her how to put one paw in front of the other. His hands were gentle on her fur, his voice soothing in her ear as he instructed her, and though she picked it up quickly, it was a little frustrating not being able to talk to him. Which was why when she was finally able to walk around, she let out an impatient sound and wagged her tail as she looked at him expectantly. It would be much easier to communicate with him if he turned into a wolf.

Apparently, Luke must have known what she wanted because he chuckled and said, “Okay, okay. I’ll change, too.”

Remembering what he had said about watching a person transform into a wolf being disconcerting, Heidi wondered if he would duck into the woods or something after he took off his clothes, but once he had pulled off his jeans and T-shirt, he got down on all fours on the blanket. He was going to change right there in front of her. She watched in fascination as he transformed into a big, gray wolf. She had thought it might be a little scary to see, but it was far from scary. In fact, it was beautiful. And he did it so fast, too. It must have only taken him a minute or two.

When he was done, Luke came over to stand in front of her. He was bigger than she was, and he had to bend his head a little to touch his nose to hers. The contact was nice and she rubbed her nose against his. A moment later, she felt Luke’s wet tongue on her muzzle as he licked her face. Wagging her tail, she rubbed up against him.

Licking her face again, Luke jerked his head toward the forest, then took a few steps in that direction before turning to look at her over his shoulder. Realizing he wanted her to follow, Heidi started after him.

Heidi noticed that Luke kept his pace slow so she could keep up, but within minutes, she was trotting alongside him through the trees.

Luke hadn't been exaggerating when he'd said that being a wolf was amazing. It was exhilarating. As they ran through the woods, jumping over downed trees and following trails of different animals, Heidi realized that her eyesight was even sharper in wolf form. Not only could she see more clearly, but she could see further, too. She could also smell better. While she could differentiate between each individual scent in the forest, she couldn't identify them all yet. But she bet that would come with time.

Her hearing was so good, it was almost scary. She could hear every little animal as they scurried around, and she figured she could probably close her eyes and track every one of them just by the sounds they made.

Heidi didn't know how many hours they spent frolicking in the forest, but by the time he led her back to the clearing, she was more than ready to lay down on the blanket and put her head on her paws. She was worn out. Luke leaned down to lick her face again, but rather than lay down beside her, he took a step back. A moment later, he was transforming back into human form.

She lifted her head from her paws, perking her ears, and giving him a questioning look. He had said that her body would transform back when it was ready. But now that Luke had changed back, she was eager to as well. But what if she couldn't change back? What if she was stuck like this? He must have sensed her impatience because he reached out to run a soothing hand over her fur.

"Just relax. Your body will change back soon. But only when it's ready," he said softly.

Relax. Easy for him to say. After all the fun they'd just had, she had a ton of things she wanted to talk to him about, not to mention questions she wanted to ask. But knowing she couldn't do that if she was a wolf, she decided to take Luke's advice and relax. Putting her head down on her paws, she closed her eyes and lost herself in how good his hand felt stroking her fur.

Changing from a wolf back into her human form was easier. Then again, maybe it just seemed that way because she was much more relaxed than she had been before. One minute, Luke was running his hand over her fur, and the next he was caressing her bare skin. There was some discomfort, of course, but not really anything like before. Heidi opened her eyes to see him smiling down at her.

"So, what did you think?" he asked as she sat up.

She pushed her hair back from her face with a smile. "You were right. It was amazing!"

He reached out to tuck her hair behind her ears. "How do you feel?"

"Wonderful," she said, before leaning forward to give him a kiss. "Absolutely wonderful!" She blinked as she suddenly became aware of a familiar tingling between her thighs. "And...aroused. Is that normal?"

He chuckled. "I can't speak for other werewolves, but based on my experience, I'd say that it's completely normal, yes."

"So you're..." She looked down to see his cock standing proud and erect between his legs. Her pussy quivered at the sight. "Yes, I see that you are."

She ran her hand down his chest and over his abs to caress his cock with her fingers. He sucked in his breath at her touch.

"You know," she said, pressing a kiss to the corner of his mouth. "I had all these questions I wanted to ask you." She kissed him again, this time on the opposite side. "But I'm thinking now that they can wait."

He slid a hand in her hair to hold her still so he could draw her lower lip into his mouth and suckle on it. "Are you sure?"

She moaned against his mouth, her hands sliding up his chest to rest on his shoulders. "I'm sure. Believe me, I'm sure."

Luke didn't ask again. Instead, he tightened his hold in her hair and closed his mouth over hers with a husky groan. As his tongue tangled with hers, Heidi wrapped her arms around his neck to bury her hands in his thick hair. God, she'd never get enough of him.

He lifted his head to gaze down at her, his eyes almost iridescent in the moonlight. "Get on your hands and knees," he commanded softly.

Pulse quickening, Heidi did as he asked. It was the perfect position considering the night they'd just had. While it wasn't the first time they'd done it like this, there was something about doing it outside in the middle of the forest that made it seem sexier and more primal.

When he grasped her hips, she looked over her shoulder at him and their gazes locked. Then, with one swift motion, he slid all the way inside her.

Even though she was completely wet and ready for him, Heidi still gasped as she felt his thick cock fill her pussy.

Unlike their lovemaking that morning on the deck, which had been slow, this time Luke took her fast and hard, and as he pumped in and out of her, Heidi found herself crying out over and over. She felt so free and alive that she couldn't have contained her screams even if she had wanted to.

“Oh God, harder,” she cried. “Just like that. Harder!”

Luke responded, pounding into her so forcefully that she had to brace herself to keep from falling forward. Of course, his firm grip on her hips kept her coming back for more. It felt so wonderful that she thought she was going to pass out from the pure ecstasy of it.

Luke came only seconds after she did, and as his hot cum poured into her, she cried out her pleasure loud enough for the entire forest to hear.

They both had been so aroused that their lovemaking had only taken mere minutes, but it was the most intense pleasure she had ever experienced, and as she lay in his arms afterward, all she could think about was turning into a wolf again as soon as she could so they could make love exactly the same way.

## Chapter 10

Heidi woke the next morning to find sunlight streaming through the trees. Squinting, she blinked up at it and wondered absently what time it was. Since the sun was just barely visible, she guessed it must be early.

She stretched, feeling totally refreshed and relaxed. Hard to believe after last night. After making love, she and Luke had cuddled together talking for what seemed like hours. The whole night had been absolutely perfect.

She couldn't believe how lucky she'd been to stumble upon Luke. Though she supposed it would be more accurate to say that he had stumbled upon her. If the other werewolf hadn't bitten her that day, she and Luke probably would never have met. So, in an odd way, she supposed she should be grateful to him, whoever he was.

Stifling a yawn, Heidi stretched again, her body brushing up against Luke. He stirred beside her, and she lifted her head from his chest to smile down at him.

“Good morning,” she said, before leaning close to kiss him.

He slid his hand in her hair, deepening the kiss. “Mmm, good morning to you, too,” he said. “How'd you sleep?”

She smiled. “Great, actually. I thought I'd be a little cold, but I was nice and warm. I suppose you probably had something to do with that.”

He chuckled and reached up to tuck her hair behind her ear. “Bed warmer is just one of the many services I provide.”

Heidi laughed. “That's the kind of service I can definitely get used to.” She kissed him again then let out a sigh as she stretched again. “But I could use a shower. And a toothbrush. How about

you?”

He grinned. “I’m up for anything that involves getting naked with you.”

“Mmm,” she moaned as he nuzzled her neck. “I like the way you think.”

As they got dressed a moment later, Heidi glanced up from buttoning her shirt. “Last night was amazing,” she said.

Luke’s mouth quirked as he pulled on his T-shirt. “Which part? Changing into a wolf or the sex we had after we came back from the run?”

She laughed. “Both. Though I was talking about changing into a wolf. I still can’t believe how incredible it was.”

He smiled. “I somehow knew that being a wolf would agree with you.”

She watched as he picked up the blanket and shook it out then tucked it under his arm. “Do you think we can come out tonight and do it again?”

Luke’s brow furrowed. “We can try, but it probably won’t work. The first change is really exhausting on the body, and it will usually take a while before you’re ready to do it again. But if nothing else, we can start working on teaching you how to control it so you can turn whenever you want.”

“Like you do, you mean,” Heidi said as they made their way through the trees and back to the house. “How do you do that, anyway?”

He glanced at her. “It’s all about relaxation and concentration, really. Do you remember that funny tingling you felt in your stomach right before the change?”

She nodded. “Yeah, I think so.”

“Well, that tingle is sort of the trigger that you can use to turn yourself into a wolf whenever you want. I don’t really know what it is, but now that you’re a were, that feeling will always be there if you know what to look for. So first, I’ll help you learn how to find that trigger. Then it’ll be just a matter of drawing on that feeling and letting it envelop you. When I first learned, it really helped me to visualize myself as a wolf while I focused on that feeling in my stomach. You can’t really force it to happen, you just have to let it happen. But we’ll find the right technique that works for you. Once you let it take you, the change occurs pretty much on its own after that.”

It sounded so simple, but she was sure it wasn’t. She was eager to learn how to do it, though. She didn’t want to have to wait until the next full moon to go running with Luke again. Maybe she would ask him to start teaching her after they took a shower. And had something to eat. She was famished.

They had just walked into the house and were about to head into the bedroom when her cell phone rang. Heidi was tempted to let whoever was calling just leave a message on her voice mail, but then decided it would be easier to simply answer it. Hurrying over to the couch, she reached into her purse and pulled out her phone. Flipping it open, she held it to her ear.

“Hello.”

“Heidi? Thank God you answered! This is Anita Teeland. Sukie’s mother. Is she with you?”

Heidi’s brow furrowed. “No, but I’m not at home. Did she tell you that she was going to be with me?”

On the other end of the line, Anita let out a sigh. “No. I just thought—hoped—she was with you. She’s missing.”

“Missing?” Heidi echoed. “What do you mean, missing?”

“I hope not, but...” Anita’s voice caught on a sob. “She spent the night at a friend’s house and was supposed to be back this morning so we could go shopping for new school clothes, but when she didn’t come home, I called her friend’s mother and she told me that Sukie had left their house early this morning. She had ridden her bike, so I went outside to look for it, and I found it just lying on the grass along with her backpack. She’s always so careful with her things. She would never just throw them on the ground like that unless...”

Unless someone had grabbed her. The same panic that had Sukie’s mother in its grip taking hold of her now. “Have you called the police?”

“Not yet,” Anita said. “I wanted to check to see if she was with you first.”

“Okay. Listen, why don’t you go ahead and call them?” Heidi suggested. “I’m at Luke’s house right now, but I’ll be there as soon as I can. Just try to stay calm. I’m sure Sukie’s fine. We’ll find her.”

At least she hoped Sukie was fine. Flipping her phone closed, Heidi dropped it back in her purse and turned to Luke.

“Sukie’s missing?” he asked before she could say anything.

Heidi didn’t even question how he had been able to hear her conversation with Anita. “Yeah. Apparently she stayed over at a friend’s house last night and didn’t come home.” She glanced at him over her shoulder as she started for the bedroom. “I told her mother that we’d come over and help out with the search.”

“Actually, it might be better if you stay here,” Luke said. “I’ll go.”

Stopping, Heidi turned to look at him in confusion. “What? Why?”



“Because it’s possible that the were who attacked you also grabbed her.”

She blinked. “What would make you think that?”

He ran his hand through his hair with a sigh. “I didn’t mention it to you the other night because I didn’t want to scare you, but I’m starting to think that he’s been stalking you ever since he bit you.”

She frowned. “Why would he do that?”

He shrugged. “I’m not sure. I’m still trying to figure that out.”

“But why grab Sukie?” Heidi asked. “What does she have to do with this?”

Luke shook his head. “I don’t know. Maybe he tried to break into your apartment again and she saw him. Or maybe he has been following you long enough to know that you two are close. Maybe he wants to use her to get you to come out of hiding. Which is why I want you to stay here where you’ll be safe. I’ll go look for Sukie.”

Heidi watched as he picked up his wallet from the counter and shoved it in his back pocket. “Wait a minute, Luke. Sukie may be in danger because of me. I’m not going to just sit here and do nothing.”

He reached out to cup her cheek. “I won’t let anything happen to her, Heidi. I promise. Now, please say you’ll stay here where it’s safe. I won’t be able to find her if I’m worried about you.”

She chewed on her lower lip, not liking the idea of him confronting the other werewolf on his own. “What about you? If you’re right, and that other werewolf does have Sukie, you could be in as much danger as she is.”

The corner of his mouth curved. “I think I can handle myself a little better than Sukie can,” he said, before bending his head to kiss her gently on the mouth. “I’ll give you a call the moment I find out anything.”

He gazed down at her for a long moment, then grabbed his keys from the counter and started for the door.

“Luke.”

He turned to look at her, his hand on the doorknob.

“I...” she hesitated, the rest of what she wanted to say stuck in her throat. She wanted to tell him that she loved him, but now just didn’t feel like the right time to say it. She wanted it to be special when she did. “Just be careful.”

He flashed her a grin. “Always.”

After he left, Heidi stood there in the empty kitchen, listening as the garage door opened, then closed. Now that she was alone with her thoughts, they immediately started running wild. *What if Luke is right and this is some kind of trap? What if Sukie is already dead? Oh God.* She didn't even want to think of that. Dammit, she should have gone with him.

Muttering under her breath, Heidi turned and hurried into the bedroom, unbuttoning Luke's shirt as she went. Tossing it on the bed, she quickly put on her bra and panties, then pulled on jeans and a T-shirt. She was halfway out the door when she realized that her car was back at her apartment. She'd completely forgotten about it. She wasn't going anywhere.

She threw her purse down on the couch. "Dammit!"

Heidi chewed on her lower lip, wondering if she should call a cab when the doorbell rang. Startled, she whirled around to stare at the front door, her heart pounding in her chest. She really needed to calm down.

Shaking her head, she walked over to the door and looked through the peephole, only to frown when she saw the park ranger Ryan Ackerman standing on the other side of it. Unlocking the door, she pulled it open.

"Ryan!" she said. "What are you doing here?"

That came out sounding rude. He didn't seem to notice.

He gave her a smile. "I ran into Luke in town and he said something about you guys being worried about that girl you teach art to, Sukie? That you think she's missing or something?"

"Yeah, that's right." Her brow furrowed. "You and Luke know each other?"

Ryan nodded. "Fish and Game work pretty closely with the rangers up in Chugach."

"Oh." She reached up to tuck her hair behind her ear. "So, what about Sukie? You haven't seen her, have you?"

"Actually, I just picked her up on the road on the way out here. She's out in my truck right now."

She glanced at his extended-cab pickup sitting in the driveway, then looked back at him in confusion. *What would Sukie be doing all the way out here?* She was about to ask Ryan that same thing when she picked up his scent. Her eyes went wide. Ryan Ackerman was the werewolf who had attacked her. "Oh, God."

Ryan smirked. "Wow, that took a while. I was wondering when you'd finally figure it out."

For a moment, Heidi just stood there, frozen in place. Then pure survival instinct took over and she tried to slam the door in his face. But Ryan anticipated the move and put his arm against

the other side, shoving it open with such force that she was thrown back.

Heart pounding, Heidi turned to run, only to have Ryan grab her arm and yank her back. Desperate to get away from him, she tried to pull free, but her increased strength was no match for another werewolf, and she cried out as he tightened his grip on her arm and began to drag her out the door.

“Why are you doing this? Where are you taking me?” she demanded as he steered her down the steps and across the lawn to the pickup parked in the driveway. *Oh God*. She couldn’t let him get her inside his truck. If she did, she’d never get away from him. Panicking at the idea, she renewed her struggles, trying to yank her arm free of his hold.

“Stop it!” he ordered, tightening his grip. “Dammit, Heidi, I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Maybe you should have thought of that before you decided to attack me that day up in the state park,” she said through gritted teeth.

He glared at her, but said nothing. Instead, he yanked open the driver’s side door of the pickup and shoved her inside, then climbed in after her, forcing her to slide across the seat to the opposite side. She immediately reached for the door handle, but when she jerked at it, nothing happened. Childproof locks. She was trapped.

She turned to glare at him. “What do you want with me...” she began, but her words trailed off as she caught sight of the still form of a teenage girl in the backseat. *Sukie. Oh God, is she...*

“What did you do to her?” she demanded.

Ryan gave her a cold look as he turned the key in the ignition. “Nothing. And I won’t do anything to her as long as you do what I want.” He must have misinterpreted her look of panic because he added, “Relax. It’s just chloroform. She’ll be fine.”

As if to confirm his words, Sukie let out a moan from the backseat. Heidi turned to see her trying to push herself into a sitting position, one hand pressed to her head. After a few moments, she succeeded and looked around in confusion, her gaze finally coming to rest on Heidi.

“Heidi, what’s going on? Where am I?” she asked, eyeing Ryan warily. “Who is he?”

Heidi’s mouth tightened as Ryan backed out of the driveway. “Someone I thought was a friend.” She turned sideways in the seat so she was facing the younger girl. “Are you okay?”

Sukie nodded. “Yeah, I think so. I feel like I’m going to throw up, though.” Still eyeing Ryan suspiciously, she scooted over on the seat so that she was closer to Heidi’s side of the truck. “Where are we going?”

Heidi would like to know that herself. “I’m not sure,” she told Sukie, reaching over the back of

the seat to smooth the girl's dark hair. "But it'll be okay. You'll be home soon." She turned to look at Ryan again. "So, where are you taking us?"

"You'll find out when we get there," he told her.

She clenched her jaw. "That stuff about working with Luke was crap, so how did you know where to find me? Did you follow us from my apartment the other night?"

"I was going to, but I didn't want McCall to get suspicious, so I wrote down his license plate number and had my ex-girlfriend run it for me," he said, then added, "She's a dispatcher with the Anchorage Police."

How convenient.

"That asshole McCall really screwed things up for me, you know," he said conversationally. "I was supposed to be the one to rescue you. The plan was to bite you, disappear into the forest so I could change, then pretend I heard you scream and come running to your rescue. But then that bastard Luke McCall showed up like some damned knight in shining armor. And he's not even a man, but another werewolf. What are the chances of that?"

In the backseat, Sukie's eyes went wide. "Werewolf? Did he just say that Luke's a werewolf?"

"Don't pay any attention to him," Heidi told her. "He's crazy."

"Crazy about you, Heidi," Ryan said, giving her a sidelong glance. "That was why I bit you. I want you to be my mate. I love you."

She snorted. *He is crazy.* "Well, I've got a newsflash for you. Attacking a woman when she's out hiking in the woods, then kidnapping her isn't the best way to make her love you in return."

"You gave me no choice," he told her. "After our lunch date, you wouldn't give me the time of day. And then you told me that you were leaving Alaska. I couldn't let that happen. I had to do something to make sure you stayed."

"Why me?" Heidi asked.

"You're special," he said. "Different." He reached out to put his hand on her knee. "I knew you were the one woman who could accept me for what I am."

She pushed his hand away. "Accept you for what you are? A psychopath, you mean? You kidnapped an innocent teenage girl so you could use her to make me do what you want. That's not the way a normal person acts."

His jaw tightened. "I told you that I wouldn't hurt her."

"You already have!" she snapped. "You kidnapped her."

From the way Ryan's hand clenched on the wheel, Heidi knew she had angered him, and she braced herself. But he merely stared straight ahead, his gaze fixed on the road.

Deciding not to provoke him any further, she turned to look out the window. Where was he taking them? They were heading toward Anchorage, but she didn't really think he would take them into the city.

"You don't know what it was like for me growing up, Heidi," Ryan said abruptly.

Heidi said nothing. What was he trying to do now, make her feel sorry for him? Fat chance of that, considering he was holding her and Sukie prisoner.

"I always sensed I was different than the rest of my family," he continued. "I never fit in with any of them. Never had any friends. I thought it was because I was adopted. It took me a long time to realize that was because I was a werewolf."

Heidi darted a quick glance at Sukie to see the other girl looking at Ryan like he was out of his mind. God, she hoped the girl really did think he was crazy. Come to think of it, he probably was a little off his rocker. She figured it was best not to mention it, but that was probably why he had never had any friends. No wonder her creep-meter had pegged out every time he had tried to ask her out.

"I didn't even know what was happening that first time," Ryan was saying. "I was lying in bed, staring out the window at the full moon when it happened. One minute I was human, and the next I was a wolf." He glanced at her. "I couldn't understand it. I mean, according to all the lore, you have to be bitten to become a werewolf. But I never got bitten. So, I figured that I must have been born a werewolf. I couldn't ask my adoptive parents, though. And since I never knew my birth parents, I couldn't talk to them about it, either." He shrugged. "I've been alone ever since then, alone with a secret that I could never share with anyone. Do you know what that's like? The moment I met you, I knew what I had to do. I knew the only way that I would ever get you to stay with me would be to turn you into a werewolf, too."

Out of the corner of her eye, Heidi saw Sukie looking at her incredulously. "And how did you know it would even work?" she asked Ryan angrily. "For all you know, you could have killed me."

He gave her a superior look. "I didn't though, did I? I turned you into a werewolf."

"How can you be so sure?" she asked.

"Your scent. It's different," he said with a grin. "Sweeter. Even sexier than it was before."

Heidi felt ill. He was a complete nut job. Swallowing hard, she looked out the front window again just in time to see Ryan turning onto an access road that led into the state park. About half a mile in, he pulled over to the side of the road and shut off the engine. Without a word, he took the key from the ignition then got out of the truck, slamming the door closed behind him.

Heidi watched nervously as he walked around the front to her side of the pickup.

She swung her gaze to Sukie. "When I tell you to run, do it."

Sukie's brow furrowed. "But what about you?"

"I'll be fine," Heidi assured her. "Just do what I tell you. Luke's at your mom and dad's. Tell him that the man who kidnapped you took me to an access road into the state park off Glenn Road. The one that leads up to River Trail. He'll be able to find me."

Sukie looked like she wanted to protest, but before she could say anything more, Ryan yanked open her door and dragged her out of the truck.

Terrified for the girl, Heidi spun around in her seat and immediately jerked at the handle on her own door, but it still wouldn't budge. *Dammit!*

Holding tightly onto Sukie with one hand, Ryan reached out with the other to open Heidi's door.

"Try anything and I'll have to hurt the girl," Ryan warned as she climbed out.

Heidi held out her hand in a placating gesture. "Look, Ryan, why don't you let Sukie go? I promise that I won't make trouble."

His grip on Sukie's arm tightened so much that she cried out. "She stays right where she is until I'm sure I can trust you."

"Then you'll let her go?" Heidi asked.

"Then I'll let her go," he agreed.

Despite how sincere Ryan sounded, Heidi didn't believe him. There was no way he could let Sukie go, not after revealing he was a werewolf. If he wasn't going to let Sukie go, then what did he plan to do with her? The answer to that made Heidi's blood run cold. She had to come up with a way to free Sukie. Fast.

"Start walking," Ryan ordered.

Heidi looked around. "Start walking where?"

He pointed behind her. "That way."

Giving Sukie what she hoped was a reassuring look, Heidi turned and began walking in the direction Ryan had indicated. If she walked slowly enough, maybe she would be able to come up with a plan.

They began climbing a steep trail that headed up to the top of the ridgeline. The going was

rough and she had to be careful she didn't fall over the large rocks that lay along the trail. She glanced over her shoulder several times, checking on Sukie to make sure she was okay. The younger girl actually seemed to be doing better on the trail than she did.

As they climbed higher, the ground began to fall away to the right of the trail. She had never come this far up this path for just this reason. It was too dangerous. One misstep and it would be a long slide to the bottom.

Between negotiating the rough terrain, Heidi tried to come up with a plan. Since she couldn't physically overpower him, she realized she was going to have to trick Ryan into releasing his hold on Sukie so the girl could get away. *But how?* She considered pretending to be sick, but then quickly decided against it. Ryan would never buy her act. She had to come up with something more believable. *But what?*

The answer when it came to her was so simple that Heidi almost discounted the idea. But the more she thought about it, the more she thought it might actually work.

After walking for a good ten minutes more, they got to a part of the trail that was perfect for what Heidi was planning. She stopped right near the edge of path and bent down, pretending to look for a nonexistent rock in her sandal. From the corner of her eye, she was able to see down the boulder-strewn hillside for at least a hundred yards. This would work fine.

"What are you doing?" Ryan asked. He had stopped right behind her and was eyeing her suspiciously.

"I've got a rock in my shoe," she said, still pretending to look for it. "Sandals aren't exactly the best footwear for hiking, you know."

"Well, hurry up," Ryan said.

But Heidi deliberately took her time, hoping that if she stayed in her crouch looking for the rock long enough that Ryan would get impatient and come over to hurry her up. Which was exactly what he did.

Releasing Sukie, Ryan walked over to Heidi and bent down. Heidi tensed, waiting until he was close enough.

"Sukie, run!" she shouted, standing up quickly and reaching out with both hands to give Ryan a hard shove at the same time.

The plan was to push Ryan over the edge so he would fall down the ravine while she and Sukie made their escape. Heidi hadn't counted on Ryan grabbing her and pulling her over the side with him. Before she even realized what was happening, they were both tumbling down the slope.

They rolled a long way, plants and trees catching at their clothes as they went, and as much as

she hated to do it, Heidi was forced to grab onto Ryan to keep from being beaten up too badly. Once at the bottom, though, she immediately pushed away from him and scrambled to her feet. Ryan got to his feet just as quickly and Heidi took an involuntary step back at the fury in his eyes.

Crap. Turning on her heel, Heidi ran in the opposite direction as fast as she could.

Ryan caught up to her before she'd gone more than a dozen feet, tackling her from behind and knocking her to the ground. Before she could even regain her breath, he had her back on her feet.

"Try something like that again and I'll have to really hurt you," he warned. "Now, stay here. I'm going to go get Sukie!"

"No, you're not," Heidi said. "If you try to go after her, I won't be here when you get back."

Ryan swore. "You wouldn't leave her behind."

"I wouldn't be leaving her," Heidi said. "I'd be going to get help."

She could see the indecision on Ryan's face. He tried to look up the hill for Sukie, but she was long gone. Finally, muttering something under his breath, he tightened his hold on Heidi's arm and began dragging her through the woods away from the direction that Sukie had gone.

Heidi prayed that Sukie would be able to find Luke soon. Ryan was on the edge, and she didn't want to think about what he was going to do to her if he were given time. Thank God, she and Ryan were on foot. At least Luke would be able to track them.

Heidi wondered again where Ryan was taking her. She found out about twenty minutes later when a small cabin came into view.

As he unlocked the door and shoved her inside, Heidi had to resist the urge to fight back. She looked around the interior of the cabin, searching for another avenue of escape, but she barely got a glimpse of the place before Ryan dragged her across the kitchen and pushed her into the tiny pantry.

Heidi whirled around to glare at him. "So, what now?" she demanded as she rubbed her arm.

"You stay in here until you cool down," Ryan said.

"Then I'll be in here a long time," she said between clenched teeth.

His mouth tightened. "It doesn't have to be this way, you know. You could just accept me as your mate."

"I already have a boyfriend," she told him. "And he's going to come looking for me."



Ryan snorted. “I kind of figured he would. This time, I’ll be ready for him, though.”

She stiffened. “What do you mean?”

He shrugged. “McCall won’t let you go without a fight. When he comes to your rescue this time, I’m going to kill him.”

Heidi’s heart squeezed in her chest. “Kill him?” she echoed. “Please tell me you’re not serious.”

“I won’t have you go running off to be with him once my back is turned, Heidi. Which is exactly what you’ll do if he’s around.”

She shook her head, desperate to change his mind. “But I won’t!” she told him. “I promise I’ll stay with you. Just please don’t hurt Luke.”

Ryan shook his head. “I’m not going to stay here and listen to you beg for that asshole’s life.”

“Ryan, please—”

But he had already slammed the door. A moment later, a lock clicked into place.

Heidi threw herself at the door, pounding on it with her fist. “Ryan, don’t do this! Please!”

There was no answer.

Tears stinging her eyes, Heidi thumped her fist against the door with a scream of frustration. “Answer me, damn you!”

But there was still no sound from the outer room. For all she knew, Ryan could have left the cabin and gone looking for Luke.

Heidi turned and leaned back against the door with a muffled sob, her breathing ragged. She had to get out of here. But even as she looked around the small pantry, she knew that escape was impossible.

## Chapter 11

Luke stood outside of the crime tape that surrounded Sukie Teeland’s bike and backpack. A forensic team was going over the area with a fine-tooth comb looking for evidence while cops went up and down the street talking to every neighbor.

Luke didn’t need a forensic team to tell him that Sukie had been abducted by the same men who had attacked Heidi; his scent was all over the area outside her apartment building. Of course, the cops didn’t know that, so they were wasting hours looking for evidence they were never going to find.

When he had gotten there over two hours ago, the cops had just arrived. Luke had had just a few minutes to talk to Sukie's parents before the cops shuffled them off to start asking questions and taking statements. But it had been enough time for him to see that Anita Teeland and her husband were completely losing their minds. Luke wished he could reassure them that everything was going to be okay, but he couldn't be certain. He didn't understand why the other were had taken the girl. Luke had tried to follow the other werewolf's trail, but it had immediately disappeared in the middle of the road. He had obviously gotten into a vehicle, which meant that Luke couldn't follow him.

Luke ran his hand through his hair. Man, Heidi was going to be frantic with worry when she found out that they had been right. Taking out his cell phone, he flipped it open and pushed speed dial, then moved a little away from where Sukie's parents were talking to the cops so he could have some privacy.

After several rings, Heidi's voice mail answered. Luke frowned as he listened to her soft voice ask the caller to leave a message. *Why the hell isn't she answering her phone?*

"Hey, Heidi, it's me," he said. "It looks like we were right about Sukie. I'm going to hang around here for a little while and see if someone remembers seeing anything." He paused and ran his hand through his hair again. "Listen...um...call me, okay?"

Disconnecting the call, Luke flipped the phone closed and shoved it in the pocket of his jeans. He turned and was about to head back over to where Sukie's parents were standing when he saw something that made him stop in his tracks.

Sukie Teeland was hiding behind his Mariner, peeking over the hood and vigorously motioning with her hand for him to go over to her. Luke's brow furrowed. *What the hell?*

Luke glanced over his shoulder to where Sukie's parents were still talking to the cops. Frown deepening, he jogged over to his SUV. *Why the hell is she hiding from her parents?*

From where she was crouched beside the Mariner, Sukie held a finger up to her lips. "Shhh," she whispered. "Don't tell anyone I'm here."

"What? Why not?" he asked, keeping his voice low.

"Because I have to help you rescue Heidi," she said.

Luke's gut clenched. "Rescue Heidi? What are you talking about?"

"The guy who kidnapped me grabbed Heidi, too," she explained. "He took her up to the state park."

Shit. The bastard must have been just waiting for him to leave, so he could get to Heidi. He should never have left her there. He should have realized it was a set-up. "Which part of the park?" he asked. "Do you remember?"

She nodded. "Yeah, but I'm not good with directions. I'll have to go with you."

"Definitely not," Luke said firmly. "It's too dangerous. Just give me a general idea of where he took Heidi. I'll be able to find them."

Sukie lifted her chin, a stubborn look in her dark eyes. "No, I have to show you," she insisted, then added, "I'll stay in the SUV the whole time. Promise."

Luke hesitated. While he didn't want to put Sukie in any more danger, he didn't want to waste time arguing with her, either. Heidi was in danger.

"Okay," he finally said. "Get in."

Hoping he wasn't making a huge mistake, Luke walked around to the driver's side and climbed in. Starting the engine, he put the SUV in gear and pulled out of the parking space.

"Which way?" he asked, glancing over at Sukie.

"Toward Glenn Road."

Luke turned right out of the parking lot. He looked at Sukie again. "How did you get away?"

"Heidi helped me. She distracted him so I could get away," the dark-haired girl said. "I didn't want to leave her, but she said I had to get help. She told me to find you."

"You did the right thing," he told her. "How did you get back to town?"

"I hitched a ride with some tourists," Sukie said.

If Luke hadn't been so worried about Heidi, he probably would have lectured Sukie on the dangers of getting into cars with strangers. Right now, he was glad she had. "The guy who kidnapped you," he said. "Did he hurt either of you?"

To his relief, Sukie shook her head. "But he was saying some really weird things."

Luke frowned. "Like what?"

She shrugged. "That he wanted Heidi to be his mate."

Luke glanced at her sharply. "He used that word? Mate?" *What the hell else did he say in front of the teenager?*

Sukie nodded. "Yeah. He said some other stuff, too." She sat up straighter in the seat and pointed. "Turn at that road up there."

Luke did as she directed, not surprised to see it was one of the access roads that the park service used.

“There’s his truck!” Sukie said excitedly.

The pickup looked empty, but Luke parked about a hundred feet behind it just the same. Turning off the engine, he pulled out his cell phone and handed it to Sukie.

“I’m going to go after Heidi. Call your parents and tell them that we’re on the access road near River Trail,” he told her, reaching for the door handle.

“Are you going to turn into a wolf?” she asked as he opened the door.

Startled by the question, Luke swung his head around to look at her in disbelief. “What? No!”

Sukie regarded him thoughtfully. “The guy who kidnapped us said you were a werewolf. Heidi, too.”

Shit. Well, that answers the question about what else the bastard said in front of her. “Call your parents,” he told Sukie. “And stay here.”

She opened her mouth to reply, but he slammed the door before she could say anything. He moved quickly up the trailhead before he turned back to see Sukie sitting in the SUV watching him. Man, he hoped she did as he’d told her and stayed put. Because regardless of what he’d said, he was most certainly going to change into a wolf. It was the only way he could get to Heidi fast enough. His blood ran cold at the thought of the other werewolf. After finding someone as perfect as Heidi, there was no way he was going to let anyone take her from him.

\* \* \* \*

Heidi paced back and forth across the small pantry, her fear for Luke just about driving her insane. Tears suddenly stung her eyes. She should have told him that she loved him before he’d left to find Sukie because now she might not get the chance. *Stop thinking like that.* She was going to get out of here and warn Luke that he was heading into a trap. As soon as she figured out how to get through that damn door. She smacked her hand against the wood in frustration. God, she felt like a trapped animal!

She paused in mid-step, the words echoing in her head. That was it. She couldn’t believe she hadn’t thought of it before. Her best chance for escape would be to turn into a wolf. Ryan would never expect it. And when he opened the door, she could bolt out before he even realized what was going on. But could she actually do it? She had no idea. Luke had said it would take her time to learn how to control it, but she didn’t have a choice. She had to try.

Keeping one eye on the door, Heidi stripped off her T-shirt and wiggled out of her jeans, praying that Ryan wouldn’t decide to come in while she was naked. Or worse, while she was in the middle of changing. Not even wanting to think about that, she took off her bra and panties, then got down on her hands and knees.

Remembering what Luke had said about focusing on his inner wolf whenever he wanted to

change, Heidi took a deep breath and closed her eyes, trying to find that fluttering sensation she had felt in her stomach right before her first change. But concentrating while she was worried that Ryan was going to open the door at any second wasn't easy to do. She was so keyed up that she found herself jumping at every little noise she heard.

This isn't working. *I have to try something else.* She needed to find something that would help her relax. An image of Luke immediately came to mind. *That would work.* Closing her eyes again, she pictured herself lying in his arms as he slowly ran his hands up and down her body, kissing her and whispering soft words of encouragement in her ear like he had last night.

As she let the images wash over her, she felt herself becoming more and more relaxed. She wasn't sure how long she stayed there like that, but after a moment, she suddenly realized she could feel that familiar fluttery sensation in her belly. There it was. Now all she had to do was let it envelop her like Luke had said.

But when she tried to lock on the sensation, it began to subside. Terrified it was slipping away, she stopped trying to reach for it and just let it come to her. To her relief, the sensation began to get stronger again. She let herself go with it. A moment later, she felt the cramping and stretching in her arms and legs that had preceded last night's change. It was working.

Heidi gritted her teeth, ignoring the momentary pain that came with the change. This time, she actually reveled in it knowing that soon she would be able to get to Luke. She gritted her teeth, almost feeling the fur as it grew along her back and side. She was almost there.

When it was done, she was left panting on the floor. Afraid that she might just have imagined the change, Heidi slowly opened her eyes, and was relieved to see big paws where her hands used to be. She had done it! She was so excited that she almost let out a howl.

The sound of the lock being opened brought her head up sharply. Heidi tensed, her heart pounding in her chest as she watched the doorknob turn. This was her chance. She got to her feet. She couldn't blow it. She didn't give Ryan a chance to come into the pantry, but barreled through the door the moment it swung open.

"What the..." he began as she ran into the outer room. "Oh, fuck!"

But Heidi barely heard him as she raced across the cabin. She hadn't given much thought to what she would do once she got out of the pantry, but now that she was free, she instinctively headed for the nearest window. Knowing it was the only way out, she leaped into the air, closed her eyes and smashed through it. The sound of breaking glass was deafening in her ears, but she paid no attention to it as she landed on all four feet on the soft grass outside a moment later.

Yes!

Heidi paused just long enough to look over her shoulder and see Ryan hurrying over to the window before she started running again. Deciding her best bet would be to go back to the way

they had come, she headed in that direction.

She ran as fast as she could, but she was unfamiliar with the area and wasted a lot of time getting turned around on the network of trails that crisscrossed all over the place. *Damn.* She had to hurry. Ryan wouldn't wait forever before he changed himself and came after her.

Just then, she came to the part of the trail that ran along the ravine that she had pushed Ryan into before. *Good.* That meant she was almost back to the road. She picked up her speed, only to hear Ryan crashing through the forest behind her. Though she was running as fast as she could, he was gaining on her quickly. *Oh God.* He was going to catch her before she got back to the trailhead, she knew it.

Abruptly, a huge gray shape burst from the trees to leap over her and slam into Ryan. Startled, Heidi skidded to a stop to see Luke getting to his feet. He was bigger than Ryan, and more heavily muscled, too, and Heidi held her breath as the two of them squared off. While she was relieved to see Luke, she was also petrified he would get hurt.

They growled at each other for a moment, then suddenly, they both charged. Terrified, Heidi could do no more than watch as they viciously fought. Part of her wanted to help Luke, but the rest knew that she'd just get in the way. So, she forced herself to stay where she was.

The two of them slammed into each other again and again, teeth and claws ripping at each other. Ryan was faster, but Luke was stronger, and he used that strength to continuously push Ryan further and further away from Heidi. She instinctively knew Luke was giving her a chance to get away, but there was just no way she could leave him. Instead, she stood there by the edge of the ravine holding her breath.

Ryan was weakening quickly and bleeding from half a dozen gashes on his neck and shoulders, while thankfully, Luke only seemed to be getting stronger. Ryan took a step back, hesitating, and Heidi thought for a moment that he was going to give up. But suddenly, Ryan darted around Luke, not even trying to attack him. Instead, he came straight toward her, his teeth bared in a ferocious snarl. Heidi tried to backpedal, but she was already on the edge of the ravine and there wasn't enough room. Before she could even think, Ryan's teeth closed over the thick fur on her neck. Pain shot through her. Oh, God, he was going to kill her.

With an enraged growl, Luke launched himself at Ryan, slamming his large shoulder into the smaller werewolf's side. The force of the impact ripped Ryan's teeth away from her neck, taking a good bit of fur with it, and tumbled him over the edge of the ravine. This time, his slide down the hillside was less controlled than it had been before, and Heidi watched as he bounced off several boulders and trees on the way down. He came to a stop to lay unmoving at the bottom.

Luke glanced at her before making his way down the slope. Before he could reach Ryan, however, the other werewolf had already slowly started turning back into a human. Even as a new werewolf, Heidi knew there was only one reason for that to happen.

Heidi watched as Luke walked over to cautiously sniff Ryan's still form. After a moment, he climbed back up the hill and padded over to her. He touched his nose to hers and gave her muzzle a lick before taking a step back to change back into his human form. When he was done, he crouched down beside her and gently ran his hand over her fur.

"I need you to change for me, Heidi," he said, his voice soothing. "Do you think you can do that?"

Heidi let out a little yip, hoping he would take that for a yes. She didn't know exactly how to change back into her human form, so she was glad when Luke began to talk her through it. She was so exhausted that it seemed to take a lot longer to change back this time than it had the previous night.

Opening her eyes after it was done, Heidi gazed at Luke for a moment, then threw herself into his arms. His went around her, holding her to him tightly.

"It's all right. You're safe now, sweetheart," he said softly. "Oh God, I was so worried about you."

She hugged him tightly. "I was worried about you, too. He said he was going to kill you when you came to save me."

"None of that matters now." Luke pulled back to gaze down at her, his eyes searching her face. "Did that bastard hurt you?"

She shook her head. "No. I got away from him before he could." Her gaze slid to where Ryan still lay motionless on the ground below. She couldn't suppress a shiver as she turned back to Luke. "Is he..."

Luke's mouth tightened. "Yes. I didn't mean for him to go over the edge like that, but I had to get him away from you. He was going to kill you."

Heidi nodded. As much as she had wanted to get away from Ryan, she hadn't wanted things to end this way. But like Luke had said, Ryan was going to kill her. Part of her felt sorry for Ryan, but another small bit also felt relief that he wouldn't be able to come after her and Luke again.

Luke reached up to cup her cheek. "Where are your clothes?"

"At the cabin where he was holding me," she said. "It's not far from here."

Luke took her hand. "Okay. Come on then."

Heidi didn't argue, but led the way back to the cabin. She had thought it might be difficult to find considering how turned around she had gotten when she'd fled before, but she surprised herself by taking Luke right to it. Once inside, she immediately went to the pantry and picked up her clothes.

“What are we going to tell the police?” she asked as she pulled on her jeans.

“We can’t tell them what really happened, that’s for sure.” Luke said, then shrugged. “Or at least not all of it. We’ll tell them that he locked you up and that when you escaped, he came after you. I went to look for you and found you running through the forest, trying to get away from him.”

Heidi frowned as she put on her T-shirt. “But what are we going to say about what happened to him?”

“That he must have fallen down the ravine when he was chasing you.”

Heidi said nothing as she shoved her feet into her sandals. She didn’t like the idea of lying, but there was no way they could tell the cops what really happened. At least the story sounded believable enough. Just enough facts to explain what had happened, but not enough to seem like a fabricated story. She just hoped that the cops believed them.

“Ready?” Luke asked.

She nodded, eager to get out of there. On the way back to the access road, they stopped so Luke could get his clothes.

“The other were,” Luke said as he got dressed. “Did you ever meet him before?”

Heidi nodded. “His name was Ryan Ackerman. He was a ranger up at the Girdwood station. I went out to lunch with him once when I first got here.”

Luke looked up from tying the laces on his hiking boots. “And he thought you’d make the perfect mate for him.”

Luke hadn’t phrased it as a question, but she nodded anyway. “I tried to let him know that I wasn’t interested, but apparently he never figured it out. He told me that he followed me that day so he could deliberately attack me. He was going to pretend to rescue me, but you interrupted him.” She swallowed hard as a disturbing thought suddenly occurred to her. “If you hadn’t come when you did, I might have actually believed him.”

Luke took her in his arms and held her tightly. “But I did come, sweetheart.”

Thank God.

They stood like that for a long moment before Luke stepped back. “We should get going before Sukie comes looking for us.”

Heidi’s eyes went wide. She’d almost forgotten the girl! “Sukie’s with you?”

Luke gave her a sidelong glance as they made their way through the trees. “She said she wasn’t



good at giving directions and that she had to show me where Ackerman had taken you. I didn't buy it, but I didn't want to waste time arguing, so I let her come with me."

Heidi shook her head. "Her parents must be frantic."

"I gave Sukie my cell phone and told her to call them," he said.

"Good." Heidi sighed. "Sukie heard Ryan say that we're werewolves. I think I was able to convince her that he was crazy, though."

"I'm not so sure about that," Luke said, holding a tree branch out of the way for Heidi. "Before I came to find you, she asked me if I was going to turn into a wolf."

Heidi groaned. "Oh, crap. What did you say?"

"I told her that I wasn't, then left before she could ask me any more questions."

Smart. Heidi doubted that would dissuade the precocious girl. When she and Luke got back to his SUV, she was sure Sukie was going to have all sorts of questions for them. Heidi was still trying to come up with something to say that would make Sukie believe Ryan had made up the whole werewolf thing as they stepped out onto the access road.

It was a complete zoo. There were police cars everywhere and cops donning flak jackets and loading weapons. Sukie was the first to spot her and Luke, and the girl immediately ran over to them.

"Heidi! I knew Luke would rescue you," Sukie said, throwing her arms around Heidi and hugging her fiercely. After a moment, she pulled back to look up at Heidi. "You're okay, aren't you? That creep didn't hurt you, did he?"

Heidi couldn't help but smile at the concern in the other girl's voice. "No, he didn't hurt me. Luke got there just in time. Thanks to you."

Sukie grinned. "I've been telling the police everything that happened. They were just going to go look for you and Luke."

At the mention of the police, Heidi glanced up to see half a dozen uniformed police officers standing with Sukie's parents. Several others, including two detectives, were already making their way toward them with questioning looks on their faces.

Luke put his hand on Heidi's back, gently urging her forward. "Come on," he whispered in her ear. "The sooner we talk to them, the sooner we can go home. Remember, keep it simple. The less details, the better."

Heidi knew he was right, of course, but that didn't mean she was eager to talk to the cops. Especially since she had no idea what Sukie had already told them.

The moment Heidi mentioned the cabin and Ryan Ackerman, most of the cops headed off into the woods with weapons drawn, while the two detectives stayed behind to take their statements. For the most part, the questions they asked her and Luke were all straightforward. Heidi told them about Ryan grabbing her and Sukie, then briefly described how she was able to help the younger girl escape.

At that point, Luke explained how Sukie had seen him at her apartment building and told him what had happened to Heidi.

The blond-haired detective who had introduced himself as Chase Ericson eyed Luke thoughtfully. "And you didn't think to mention all this to the police officers who were at the Teeland residence?"

Heidi could see that Luke did his best to look chagrined. "I'm sorry. I know I should have, but I wasn't thinking straight, I guess." He glanced at Heidi. "I was so worried about Heidi that all I could think about was getting to her as fast as I could. Sukie jumped in the car with me to show me where Heidi had been taken, and it wasn't until we got here that I thought about having Sukie use my cell phone to call for help."

The two detectives frowned at that, but prompted Heidi to continue.

She told them how Ryan had dragged her off to the cabin, ranting and saying crazy things the whole time. She tried to keep the details of her escape on the vague side, but the detectives weren't buying it.

"Tell me again how you got out of the cabin," said Detective Ericson.

Heidi felt Luke's arm tighten around her waist. "Ryan left me alone for a few minutes, so I took a chance and escaped. The door was locked, so I went out the window," she said.

The blond detective lifted a brow. "The door was locked, but the windows were open?"

"No," she said. "I had to use a chair to break the window, then climb out."

He nodded thoughtfully "I see. And he chased you?"

Oh God, they don't believe me. "Yes," she said, trying to sound as sincere as she could. "I didn't think I'd get away from him, but he never caught up with me."

The detective wrote something down in his notebook, then turned his attention to Luke. "And that's when you ran into Ms. Gibson? As she was running away from Ackerman?"

Luke nodded. "That's right."

Ericson looked like he was going to ask something else but just then, several of the police officers who had gone into the woods came back. The two detectives went over to talk to them,

leaving Heidi and Luke alone. She listened in as they all compared notes.

After a few minutes, the blond-haired detective came back over to her and Luke. “Ms. Gibson, the officers just discovered Ackerman’s body at the bottom of a ravine not far from here. Do you have any idea how he might have gotten there?”

Heidi did her best to look surprised. “Body? Is he...dead?” At the detective’s nod, she shook her head. “He must have fallen or something when he was chasing me, I guess. I was running so fast, I didn’t notice.”

Ericson nodded. “You’re probably right. The autopsy will tell us for sure, but he was pretty beat up, so it fits.”

Heidi felt herself relax as Detective Ericson started to walk away, only to tense again when he stopped and turned back.

“By the way, I’m just curious,” he said. “How exactly did Ackerman end up chasing you through the woods completely naked?”

She glanced at Luke. They hadn’t talked about that. “Um...” she swallowed hard. “I’m not sure. He was acting crazy. I can only assume that he was planning on raping me.” That wasn’t really a lie. If she hadn’t gotten away from him, Ryan would have forced himself on her at some point, she was sure of it. She let out a little shiver at the thought.

That seemed to satisfy the detective because he didn’t ask any more questions.

“That’s all for now,” he said. “The paramedics will want to check you out. Once they give the all clear, we’re going to need the two of you to come down to the station and fill out some paperwork.”

“Of course,” Luke said.

As the detective walked off to talk to the other cops, Luke led Heidi over to where Sukie was standing with her parents. Anita Teeland and her husband, Bob, couldn’t thank Heidi enough for helping Sukie escape.

“I don’t know how we can ever repay you for what you did,” the other woman said, giving Heidi a warm hug.

“It was the least I could do,” Heidi told her. “Sukie got kidnapped because of me. I’m just glad she was able to get away.”

Anita gazed at her daughter lovingly. “Though I would rather she hadn’t come back here with Luke.”

Sukie opened her mouth to protest, but Luke cleared his throat. “I’m afraid that was my fault,

Anita,” he said. “I was so worried about Heidi that I didn’t even think about how dangerous it was for Sukie. I’m really sorry, but I just wasn’t thinking.”

“And I locked myself in his truck and called you as soon as he went to rescue Heidi, Mom,” Sukie pointed out.

“Yes, you did,” her mother agreed. “And right now, I’m just so happy you’re okay, Sukie, that I’m not even angry with you. Or Luke.” She smiled at Heidi and Luke. “The police said they’re done with their questions and the paramedics have already checked Sukie out, so we’re going to get her home. I’m glad you’re okay, Heidi.”

“Me, too,” Sukie said, moving forward to hug Heidi again. “Oh, and don’t worry about the whole werewolf thing,” she whispered. “Your secret’s safe with me.”

Before Heidi could reply, Sukie turned and hurried to catch up with her parents. Luke slipped his arm around Heidi, pulling her close.

“Do you think our secret really is safe with her?” he asked.

Heidi watched as Sukie climbed in the back of the minivan, then lifted her hand to return the younger girl’s wave. “You know, I do,” she said. Looking up at Luke, she saw that he was still frowning. “Luke, really, I don’t think we have to worry about her.”

He nodded. “I believe you. I was actually thinking about something else.”

It was her turn to frown. “What?”

“I just realized what that detective said.” At her look of confusion, he added, “They’re going to do an autopsy on Ackerman.”

It took a second to sink in, but when it did, Heidi gasped. “Will they figure out that he’s a werewolf?”

Luke shook his head. “I don’t know. I don’t think so. I’ll talk to my dad about it, but I would imagine that if they discovered anything unusual about his blood or DNA, they would probably just write it off as a genetic abnormality.” He wrapped his arm around her and pulled her close. “Regardless, nothing about Ackerman can be traced back to us, so our secret is safe.”

Heidi hugged him back. “Good. Because I just want this all to be over.”

He kissed the top of her head. “It is. I promise.”

## Chapter 12

“You know,” Heidi said, her voice a little breathless. “We really shouldn’t be in here doing this. Our guests are waiting for us.”

Luke chuckled, the husky sound sending little shivers all over her body. “Well, if you keep moving up and down on me like that, Mrs. McCall, they won’t have to wait long.”

She laughed, the use of her married name making her feel all warm inside. It wasn’t the first time Luke had called her “Mrs. McCall” since they had become husband and wife that afternoon. In fact, he had whispered her new name in her ear while they’d been on the dance floor just a little while ago when he’d suggested that they go someplace private so they could be alone. Heidi had been more than eager to be alone with him, too, so she hadn’t protested when he’d taken her hand and led her out of the ballroom to the small retiring room down the hall. The room was usually reserved for the bride and her attendants as a place where they could put their purses and go to check their make-up, but she and Luke had found another, more naughty use for it. Of course, when Heidi figured out what Luke was up to, she had protested at first.

“Anyone could walk in,” she had told him.

But after a long, drugging kiss and a husky, “I need to be inside you,” she had surrendered with a throaty purr.

Now, she was straddling her husband’s lap, her wedding gown bunched up around her waist while she rode up and down on his thick cock. Luke was right. He leaned close to kiss her neck. As fantastic as what they were doing felt, she knew they weren’t going to be in the room for much longer. She was going to be start coming any second. In fact, knowing that someone could walk in on them at any minute only served to tip her over the edge that much quicker.

Heidi would have screamed out her pleasure, but remembering where they were, she instead bent forward and closed her mouth over Luke’s so that her cries were muffled. He tightened his hands on her hips and let out a groan as he found his own release.

Lifting her head, Heidi gazed down at him. “Wow,” she breathed.

Luke grinned. “My thoughts exactly, Mrs. McCall.” He slid his hand in her hair and pulled her close for another intoxicating kiss before releasing her. “But I suppose you’re right. We should get back to the reception before someone comes looking for us.”

She leaned close to kiss him again. “I don’t know. Do you think they’d miss us if we just left now?”

He chuckled. “I think people would notice if the bride and groom left before they even cut the cake.”

She sighed. “You’re probably right.”

Reluctantly climbing off his lap, she smoothed the skirt of her voluminous satin gown, grateful it didn’t look too wrinkled.

“Did I tell you that you look beautiful in that dress?”

Heidi looked up to see Luke grinning at her. “I think you may have said it once or twice, but you can say it a few more times, if you want. I don’t mind,” she said, giving him a smile as she took in his tall form. “You look pretty darn good yourself in that tux.”

Actually, he looked sinfully handsome in it. Heidi watched him straighten his jacket. She couldn’t believe how in love she was with him. Or how perfectly everything had come together. She had moved in with him right after the whole episode with Ryan Ackerman. They had quickly put all of that behind them, something made a lot easier when the autopsy on Ryan had apparently come back normal. And Sukie had kept her promise to never breathe a word about their secret. To Heidi’s surprise, the girl never even brought it up when they were alone. It was like Sukie had vowed never to utter the word *werewolf* aloud again.

Of course, Heidi’s parents had been a little surprised when she had called them to say that she would be staying in Alaska permanently. But they had been very happy that she had found someone she loved so much. They hadn’t even made a fuss about bringing everyone up to Anchorage for the wedding.

Luke had asked her to marry him less than a week after she had moved in with him. She hadn’t even needed to think about it, but had immediately dragged him off to bed to show him exactly how much she wanted to marry him.

Walking over to him, Heidi wrapped her hand around the back of his head and pulled him down for a kiss. He was the most wonderful man in the world. How had she gotten so lucky? “I love you,” she said softly.

He cupped her face in his hand. “I love you, too, Heidi McCall. More than anything.”

Lowering his head, he kissed her again, a long, intoxicating kiss that left her dizzy. Despite the fact that they’d just made love a few minutes ago, she already wanted him again. And by the way his body was reacting to her, then Luke wanted her, too. She was just wondering if they might be able to hide out a little while longer when a knock sounded on the door. Heidi turned just as her matron of honor poked her head in the room.

“I thought you two might be in here,” Eliza said, giving them a knowing smile. “We’ve been looking all over for you. Everyone is waiting for you to cut the cake.”

Hunter appeared in the doorway to slip his arm around his wife, a grin on his face. “We can stall them if you want.”

Luke looked at Heidi, a sexy glint in his eye and a brow lifted in question, but before she could reply, Sukie appeared in the doorway. Dressed in a periwinkle blue gown similar to Eliza’s, she looked very mature.

“There you guys are!” the younger girl said. “Some of the guests were saying that you two had

already left for your honeymoon. But I told them that there's no way you would leave without cutting the cake and throwing the bouquet."

Heidi smiled at her bridesmaid. "We'd never dream of it." She looked at Luke. "Would we?"

"Never."

She laughed. "Shall we go?"

He grinned. "After you, Mrs. McCall."

**THE END**