



# *Lycan Lust*

*Can Brent convince Rindy that  
not all werewolves are monsters?*

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## Chapter One

Her scent faintly called to him, lulling him into a precarious state that teetered between domination and fascination. There was no doubt that she was his, but every time he'd closed in on her the past several weeks, she'd disappeared as if some magical force had removed every trace of her from the Earth. But, within a few days, he'd once again catch the sweet aroma of her, and then he'd continue on a trail that he would relentlessly follow until the day he found her or his heart stopped.

A pickup pulled out of a parallel spot in front of him just as he slowed down. He maneuvered easily into the spot that had a sign beside it that said one-hour parking. He smirked at the sign as he started down the sidewalk. Another parking ticket was probably going to be waiting for him when he got back. He'd just add it to the pile he had already racked up.

He had to find her. One could argue that he had no right to claim her, that she deserved to choose her mate, that she had the right to reject him. He disagreed. The simple truth was, she was his, and he was hers. This fact was dictated by Fate Herself, and as far as he was concerned, no force in Heaven or Hell could alter the silent decree that had been imbedded in him since birth.

He'd been part of a pack that had considered a woman—especially one's destined mate—property to be owned and commanded. He'd believed that himself at one time. But, now, he'd been alone for so many years, had longed for his mate for so long, a deeper desire culled from desperation made him yearn for more, need more. He wanted his mate to love him. He wanted her to respect him, fill his life with joy as he protected and cared for her. He wanted more than chattel he could order around.

The pack would ridicule him for such thoughts. Hell, the last few years he'd been with them, they'd ridiculed him about everything. He was just thankful that he'd been smart enough and had still held enough compassion that he'd understood their behavior to be a nasty side effect of the restlessness, an unease that gnawed at them all from the inside, and would never cease until they'd found their mate. He'd grown tired of their childish

behavior and refusal to accept what could not immediately be changed. Then, one day, he had simply walked away.

He'd realized he'd never needed them. But he needed her. A woman whose name and face was unknown to him, a woman whose simple presence in his life could bring him peace and happiness like he'd never known. He would find her. He'd never give up. And when he did locate her, he'd take her far away, and she'd learn to love him, because if she didn't, he'd be subjected to a lifelong existence of emptiness. That he could not tolerate. He would rather die than spend hundreds of years with a black void in his chest where his heart once beat.

He took a deep breath. Her scent summoned him as effectively as a Siren's call that he had no choice but to follow. She was close, closer than she'd ever been. He looked around. He hated the city. And Atlanta was one of the most smothering ones he'd been in while searching for her. He loathed the confinement, the stale air, and the ceaseless crush of thousands of bodies. He needed fresh, clean air and miles of wooded land. Seclusion . . . and a mate. And he had the perfect place tucked away in Michigan just waiting to welcome the return of him and his woman.

He walked down the sidewalk, past law offices, bakeries, clothes shops, and about a million other stores that carried anything and everything anyone could possibly want or need. As much as he hated the milling crowd, he had to admit the aroma of food coming from the various restaurants smelled tantalizing. He was hungry, but he refused to veer even an inch from the path her scent was leading him down. There would be plenty of time for eating after he found her.

His heart started thumping faster. He was getting closer. The thought of finally seeing his mate tensed his muscles in anxious excitement. Day was fading to dusk rapidly, and the sky was tinted pink by the setting sun. Tomorrow when the sun set, he'd be with her. He'd wondered millions of times what her name was, wished with everything inside him that he'd at least known that one small detail about her. A name he could whisper from his lips, a name that could linger in his mind as a promise of the life he would one day have—a life that would no longer be lonely.

Suddenly, fear beat through him. She was on the move again. He gritted his teeth and hurried his steps. He would not lose her this time. He followed her scent around a corner and caught a glimpse of pale hair as it disappeared through the side door of the back of one of the many buildings. He stood in front of the door and looked up. It was obviously an apartment building. Four stories of wrought iron fire escape stairs led all the way to the top, stopping at various places on each level.

If she had gone in there—he sniffed at the door, and she had—he'd have no problem pinpointing her location in the building. The sun sank into darkness seconds before he stepped through the door. The drab entryway consisted of little other than a wall of mailboxes labeled with a number for each tenant and a staircase. A door to the right was chained and padlocked. Taking the steps two at a time, he paused at the second floor. A long hallway ran from right to left, and across a small landing was another set of stairs that led to the third floor.

He smelled the air and followed the scent straight up the next staircase, and the next. On the fourth floor, he paused. With his eyes closed, he took a deep breath and turned left. He continued walking and sniffing the air until he made it to the end of the hall. Eyes now open, he stood in front of an old brown door. Paint was chipping off it in various places, and dents littered its ugly surface. The number four nineteen was tacked haphazardly toward the top middle, with the four hanging precariously sideways, threatening to plummet to the floor at any moment.

He laid his palms against the cool metal, and let his forehead rest momentarily between them. She was in there. As emotions bubbled to the surface, he fought the absurd urge to rip the ragged door from its hinges; stomp in, caveman style; throw her over his shoulder; and claim her as his own. The only thing that stopped him was the knowledge that he'd undoubtedly scare the shit out of her.

He took a deep breath, stepped back, and raised his fist to knock. Before his knuckles met metal, a loud bang followed by a cry sounded from inside. Without any thought other than to protect his mate, he kicked the door open. Greeting him from the open window over the fire escape was the most

luscious ass he'd ever seen, encased in black jeans. It took him a moment to recover his good senses enough to realize she was trying to escape.

She was hanging half out the window, and the chair lying on its side had obviously provided the loud bang he'd heard when it had fallen. In only a couple long strides, he stood directly behind her as she wiggled, trying to escape. He growled low in his throat, and his cock twitched at the site of her bent over in front of him. He circled her waist with his hands, his fingers not far from touching around its tiny circumference. She squealed and fought harder to get out of the window.

He easily dragged her back into the grungy apartment. She spun toward him, her eyes sparkled with fear and probably anger. The crystal-clear gray color stole his breath and his good sense, because he didn't even notice when she swung at him. She caught him in the nose, and the pain brought him back to reality with ease. She crouched, her hands clenched into fists, as she danced on the balls of her feet in classic boxer style. Holding her arms close in what he assumed was protection of her body and face, she kicked at him. Luckily, his wits had returned by that time, and he dodged a kick aimed at his balls.

Her pale blonde hair danced about her shoulders with each graceful bounce, and he ached to hold her close, just to feel the warmth of her body pressed against his. He held his hands up in a surrender pose. "Easy. I'm not going to hurt you."

"Yeah, sure." She spat the words at him. "That's what they've all said."

Had someone tried to hurt her? Who were they all? He eased back, and she watched his every move, until his calves bumped against the front of a chair that was probably the twin to the one she'd used for her attempted escape. He sat down slowly and rested his elbows on his thighs, palms up.

"I swear, I'm not here to hurt you." Her body language told him with certainty that she didn't believe him.

"Get out," she said through gritted teeth.

He shook his head. "I can't do that."

"Yes, you can. Go. Now!"

He shook his head again. "I'm not going anywhere without you."

She visibly tensed again. He knew she was going to run for it, but he couldn't let her go. Not now, not ever again. She spun away from him with a stealthy grace that impressed him, but he was faster. As she dove for the window, he launched from the chair, tackled her at the waist, and tucked his body around her as they rolled to the floor, protecting her from the brunt of the fall. She cried out, and she fought with a tenacity that was admirable.

He flipped her under him and pinned her to the floor with his bigger frame. She struggled until exhaustion finally took some of the fight from her. Her eyes were wide, clear, and intelligent. She was afraid of him, and he hated that, but he'd make it right.

"Hey. I'm not going to hurt you. My name is Brent Falls. I've been searching for you for a very long time. And I promise you, I will not harm you."

He barely held back a groan at the feel of her underneath him. He was hot, hard, and very ready to claim her. He fought for control and kept the turmoil boiling inside him from hardening his features. He didn't want to do anything that would appear threatening to her.

"You're one of them, aren't you?"

## Chapter Two

Rindy stared up at the man who pinned her to the dirty floor of the apartment she'd recently rented. She knew from the moment she'd set eyes on him that he was one of the bastards that had been chasing her for years. She'd never believed in monsters, had a wonderful, carefree, loving childhood, until the day they came . . . werewolves. She would have never believed they existed had she not seen them with her own eyes.

They'd come after her when she was just seventeen years old. They'd told her they were going to protect her and that she had an important role to play in their pack. But the words had barely left their mouths when they had attacked her family. They'd killed her mother and sister. She'd tried so hard to fight, to save them, but she'd been powerless against them. They'd been so strong, and her against three monsters had been no match. It had been hopeless.

Rindy remembered every detail of that night. The way her sister had begged for her life, the way her mother had pleaded for them to take her and spare her girls. And the way her mother had caught one of the bastards off guard and stabbed him with a kitchen knife. He'd smiled a smile that had sent chills down her back and had pulled the knife from his shoulder, sending it clattering to the tiled floor, right before his features contorted and hair had burst through every pore in his skin.

Rindy had stared in horror at the big wolf who'd been a man moments before, wondering if she had been dreaming. The beast had swung its head toward her slowly, settling his eerie blue eyes on her seconds before he'd taken her mother's neck between his jaws and bitten down. She'd never forget the sickening sound of bones breaking as she fled the house.

She'd run so fast, so hard. Still, she'd never thought she'd get away. Fortunately for her, there had been a bus stop half a mile from her house. And God had obviously not intended for her to die that day as there had been a bus at the stop, just readying to pull away. She'd made it without a second to spare and had seen the men running after the bus as it picked up speed and finally left them behind.



Since that day ten years ago, she'd been running. She had never stayed in one place for more than a few months. She'd felt them following her. She'd never allow them to catch her again. That was the one thing she owed her mother and sister. Their deaths had been her survival, and she wouldn't ever throw away the precious gift they'd given her. Yet, again, she was imprisoned by her worst nightmare.

"What do you bastards want with me? Haven't you done enough already?"

He was an extremely good-looking man, not that that mattered. Most of them had been. Such thick, brown hair, dark chocolate eyes, and golden skin seemed such a waste on a monster. Would he kill her? Would he rape her? She swallowed hard. She had to find a way to escape. She fought the panic threatening to overtake her.

"I don't understand. I haven't done anything." His brows furrowed, and he frowned.

She snorted. "You've been following me for years. I've been on the run since I was seventeen years old because of you bastards, and you say you haven't done anything."

He frowned harder.

She laughed. "Yeah, I know exactly what you are. You're a werewolf, and you're a monster and a killer."

"How do you know what I am?" His eyes turned darker, and his cheeks burned red.

She figured the blush was from anger because she couldn't imagine his kind ever being embarrassed. But what was he angry about? She was the one being held down like an animal.

She raised her chin. "Because your kind killed my mother and sister, most likely would have done the same to me, had I not escaped."

"Your mother and sister were killed by werewolves?"

She nodded and pushed her face toward him in defiance. "I hate you. Now get off me!"

She tried to buck him off but grunted in frustration when she realized he was just too damn heavy. Why couldn't she have been tall with some meat on

her bones? Instead, she had to be barely five foot and a hundred pounds. And though she'd taken extensive self-defense classes and karate, she wasn't a fool to believe she'd be a true match for a man of his size and strength. She'd only hoped her training would provide her enough of an edge to get away if she had to. Even that wasn't looking promising at the moment. She took a deep breath and blew it out in agitation.

"I did not hurt your family. And I'm sorry it happened. But I assure you it had nothing to do with me." He ran a finger down her cheek.

She shivered as his warm skin made contact. It was nice to be touched in a comforting manner. It had been so long since she'd had a hug or any kind of affection she'd nearly forgotten how nice it could be. *Are you insane?* How could she possibly enjoy anything from this man?

She looked deep into his eyes and found herself wanting to believe him, yet that small part of her that had been terrified for years, cautious about everyone and everything, wouldn't allow it. "Get off me, and get out!"

He sighed. "I told you already, I cannot leave. Not without you."

"I'm not going with you anywhere."

"What is your name?"

"Wh-what? You are asking me my name?"

He nodded and gave a lopsided grin that showed straight, white teeth. "Yes. Please tell me."

She thought about spitting in his face, or telling him to go to hell, or both, but instead, her lips spoke before she had time to stop the words from tumbling out. "Rindy Trenton."

Why had she told him that? What the hell was wrong with her? He'd followed her, broken into her apartment, and was holding her prisoner on the floor. And she'd told him her name. *Smart, Rindy, smart.*

"Rindy. I like it. It suits you." He sat up, his thighs pressing against her sides snugly, still holding her firmly to the floor. "Now, if I let you up, do you promise to be good?" He rubbed at his nose.

Good. She wished she'd broken it but knew she hadn't as it wasn't swollen or even bleeding. She'd have to work more on her technique. "I will never promise to be good."

He laughed. "That's my girl."

He got up and held a hand out to help her. She glared at him and got to her feet on her own. "And I'm not your girl, nor will I ever be."

He scowled, and she couldn't help but wonder if that had been hurt she'd seen for a fleeting moment in his murky eyes. Why would her never being his girl have any impact on him emotionally? They were strangers, and that's what they would stay. She didn't want to have anything to do with him. Werewolves were supposed to be made-up, not something from a nightmare that came true.

She'd known immediately he was one. She didn't know how exactly, but ever since her first encounter with the beasts, she'd been able to tell when one was near. She'd chalked it up to her God-given instincts. And hers had never failed to warn her of danger. The caution bells had practically been cracking they'd been going off so hard when Brent had grabbed her. Yet she did have to admit that while the mere thought of being within one hundred feet of a werewolf again was enough to send her into panic, his presence was more annoying than anything.

He'd frightened her when he'd yanked her in from the window, but he hadn't tried to hurt her, even when she'd busted his nose. It seemed out of character from her experiences with his kind. She'd come across a few since the initial attack, and all of them had been quite aggressive. She'd done a decent job of evading them . . . until now. Why had they been following her her entire life? *Now's the perfect time to find out, Rindy.*

"Why have you been chasing after me for the past ten years?" She leaned against the wall and watched him warily.

"I haven't been chasing you for the past ten years. I've been trying to find you for the past several weeks." He took a breath "Or my entire life."

She didn't catch the last sentence as he mumbled the words. "Why? I don't understand. I never stay in one place for long, and the minute I get the feeling someone is watching me—which is quite often—I jump on a bus, train, or plane and get as far away as I can as fast as I can. Start over in a new town, but I always end up being followed no matter where I go. And how do you keep finding me?"

“Your scent.”

“My scent?”

He slowly came toward her, and she stood up straight. “I won’t hurt you. I swear it.” He stopped inches from her and slowly trailed his eyes from her face to her toes and back. “You have a scent that calls to my kind.”

“You mean I’ve been followed because of the way I smell?”

He nodded. “Yes. But it’s not as simple as that.” He sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose before wincing. It was obviously still tender. “The ones who have had contact with you were supposed to protect you, not hurt you or your family. But I’m sorry to say that there are those of us who don’t always follow the rules.”

“Why would I need protected? The way I see it, the only thing I need protection from is you.” She glared at him.

“No. You will never need protection from me. And, I guarantee you, I am not like the others you’ve encountered.”

She rolled her eyes. “Yeah, sure. Whatever you say. I would really like you to leave now.”

“I’m sorry. I will not hurt you, you have my word, but I will not ever let you go again. I cannot. I hope one day you will come to care for me.”

Her mouth dropped open. “Are you insane? What do you mean you will never let me go? You are frightening me.”

### Chapter Three

When he found the rogues who were responsible for killing her family and chasing after her, he'd kill them all. She was his mate, and any werewolf that came near her would know by her scent, or lack of, that she was meant for another. Mates had two scents. The main scent was one that called to all lycans alike, but the mating scent was only recognizable by a fated mate.

His kind was supposed to protect any female who had the main scent, but apparently that had not happened. In recent years, many of the packs had gone rogue, deciding that any woman with the main scent was fair game. Many women had been raped, held prisoner, and even killed. Such acts against potential mates were forbidden and punishable by death. Most of the rogues were younger lycans who had trouble controlling their newly overwhelming urges, those who got high on their new strength and speed.

He was older and had had more than enough years to decide what was right and wrong, and what kind of man he wanted to be. He'd had some younger, wilder days and had done things he wasn't extremely proud of, but he'd never raped or hurt a woman. And he'd never hurt anyone else for that matter, unless it had been unavoidable. But God help the ones who'd been after Rindy. They were all dead, and they didn't even know it yet.

Pain ripped through him, cutting at his chest like an invisible knife. She was beautiful, Rindy, and so tiny. And, though he was angry at what she'd endured the past several years, he was proud of her for having the wits to survive and stay safe. He figured he'd managed to get the drop on her where other lycans had failed because he had two scents to follow her by. He understood why he'd lost her over the past several weeks' time and again now, though. Every time she'd hopped on a bus or plane or train, her scent had vanished. Yeah, his girl was smart and crafty.

"Rindy, I know this will be hard for you to understand, but now that I have finally found you, it will not be possible for me to allow you to be on your own again. It is ingrained in me to protect you. And, besides, I want to keep you safe. I don't ever want anything or anyone to hurt you again."

He reached his hand toward her slowly. Her cool eyes watched him closely, but she did not shy away from him in fear. He took a few strands of her blonde hair between his fingers and let the softness sift over his skin. He sighed. He wanted to kiss her, touch her, claim her, but he was smart enough to realize he'd probably end up with a swift kick in the crotch if he so much as tried any of that.

"I don't give a shit what is ingrained in you. I don't need your protection. I've done fine on my own." She crossed her arms across her chest and glared at him.

He found the gesture endearing and caught a smile before it made it to his lips, figuring she wouldn't find it amusing in the least. "Yes. You have done fine, but now you don't have to do it all on your own. Now you don't ever have to be afraid again. No one will hurt you again as long as I breathe."

"You aren't listening to me," she said through gritted teeth. "I don't need you. I don't want you here."

"I hear you loud and clear, Rindy. I think you are the one not listening." He stepped closer to her, so that her back was flattened against the wall. He closed his eyes for a brief moment as the warmth of her body seeped into him and her sweet sent assailed him. He opened his lids to find her watching him intently, measuring his every breath, his every move. "I am not leaving you alone. Period. End of discussion. Case closed."

She started to argue with him once again when he put his hand lightly over her mouth. "Shhh."

He sniffed the air. Son of a bitch. She cried out when he grabbed her and flung her to the sofa seconds before a wolf sailed through the window she'd tried to escape through. It landed on the wood floor and skidded sideways, its claws screeching along the way. Within moments, the wolf shifted into a man. He was a big man, as most lycans were. He had stringy hair and pale blue eyes. And since he'd just shifted from wolf form, he was completely nude.

Brent's fangs lengthened and claws pushed through his fingertips. He was older and able to partially shift. Younger lycans were only capable of complete change. Partial shifts had to be mastered as a werewolf matured.

The man focused on Rindy, who was sprawled on the couch, and sneered. "I see you've started the party without me."

Brent growled in warning. "I don't know who the hell you think you are, but you know that this woman is not meant for you. You also know it is forbidden to harm her in any way."

The man laughed. "Is that so?"

"Yes." Rage began Brent's blood boiling. "And I'm telling you the woman is mine."

Anger contorted the younger lycan's features. He looked at Rindy, then at Brent, and back at Rindy. He shifted to wolf form in seconds and lunged for Rindy. But before he made it, Brent tackled him in midair. The wolf yelped as Brent's claws sunk into its side, through flesh, and broke ribs. The wolf snarled and clamped its jaws around one of Brent's forearms. Brent raised his arm until the wolf was dangling by it from his teeth and slammed it to the floor.

The wolf let go of Brent's arm. Brent reached for the neck, intending to snap it, but an instant before he reached his target, the lycan reared up and clamped down on his thigh, taking him to the floor. Brent blocked the pain from his mind and pinned the wolf between his legs. He squeezed until his thigh was released, and the raspy breaths left the wolf's lungs for the last time.

Brent took the wolf's limp head between his hands and gave it one quick twist, breaking the neck. The wolf slowly shifted back to a man.

"Oh, my God! Is he dead?" Rindy sat on her knees and clutched the ratty arm of the sofa.

Brent turned to her. His thigh and arm burned like a mother, but they would heal quickly. "Yes. I'm sorry you had to see that."

"A-are you hurt?" She looked at his arm and thigh.

"I'll be okay. We need to get out of here in case there are more in the area." He held his hand out to her. "Come with me, please."

Apprehension marred her lovely features. He took a deep breath. "Surely you can see that I'm not going to hurt you, and that I will in fact protect you with my life."

One tear slid from the corner of her eye. “I don’t know what to think. I’m so confused. I can’t trust you. You’re what I’ve been running from for what seems my entire life.”

He took her pixie-like face between his hands and marveled at how small it looked cupped there. “You have not been running from me. There are good lycans and bad lycans, just like there are good and bad people. Unfortunately, you’ve only met bad ones. I am not one of those. Please, give me a chance to show you that I will not hurt you. Besides, wouldn’t it be nice to be somewhere that you knew you were safe for a change?”

He knew he had her. She was tired of running. He’d seen it in her eyes. “Where is it that I will be safe?”

“I have a place in Michigan. Come with me. Give it a try. If you don’t like it, you can leave.”

“Promise?”

“Yes.” He wasn’t exactly lying. He’d let her leave if she was truly unhappy after giving it a real chance. He just omitted the part that if she did choose to leave, he’d go with her.

“How are we going to get there? I don’t have a car or anything.”

“I do.” He watched her worry her bottom lip with her teeth. She was exquisite. He didn’t deserve her, yet he’d gladly get on his knees and thank God every single day for making her just for him. He just prayed that one day she’d give thanks that he’d been made just for her.

He knew he was getting through to her. The prospect of being someplace safe, someplace she didn’t have to look over her shoulder constantly was too appealing to turn down. Which was a blessing for him, as the alternative would be to carry her kicking and screaming against her will. And, as stubborn as his little Rindy seemed, he figured she’d be able to hold a grudge for a very long time, possibly forever. He didn’t want to be on the receiving end of that.

After several silent minutes, she shrugged. “Fine. But if you so much as look at me wrong, I’ll kill you.”

He grinned and watched as she pulled a backpack from a tiny closet by the front door.



She turned to him. "Are we going or what?"

"Yes." He checked outside the doorway before he let her walk through it.

"And stop grinning at me like a fool before I kick you in the balls." She huffed.

He stopped smiling on the outside, but on the inside, he continued to smile like the fool she'd accused him of being. He'd found her. She was beautiful, tough, and . . . perfect. He felt joy course through him. He wouldn't be alone any longer. He'd have a mate to love, to cherish, to protect. He'd have someone to hold at night, to hug, someone to talk to. He'd have someone to run with in the woods . . . maybe. He'd been so excited over finding her, he'd never thought of her reaction once he told her he wanted to change her.

Human lives were extremely short compared with those of lycans, and if she wasn't changed, he'd lose her when she died and face possibly hundreds of more years without her. That, he could not endure. He would convince her somehow. If she didn't agree, could he do it anyway? Could he live with the hatred she would no doubt have for him for forcing her to become the one thing she'd hated for years? He didn't think he'd have it in him to make her become what he was if she refused. If it came to that, he'd love her until the day she died. Then, he'd follow her into death. One way or the other, he'd spend eternity with her either as a werewolf or in the afterlife.

## Chapter Four

Rindy had been following Brent for several blocks now. She didn't miss the way he glanced over his shoulder every few seconds to make sure she was still behind him, although if what he said was true about her scent, she doubted he'd have any trouble finding her again if she did run. And why should she doubt him? It explained so much—why she'd never quite managed to get away from the werewolves chasing her and how no matter where she went, she'd once again find herself being pursued.

She looked at Brent's impressive shoulders. His back was wide and tapered to a narrow waist. His butt was not anything to dismiss lightly either. He was an extremely sexy man. But she wouldn't let that cloud her good judgment where he was concerned. He'd at least proved that he would protect her, and he obviously didn't want her dead or to cause her any harm—at least not at her apartment. Was she being an utter fool? Was he leading her into a trap? Her muscles tensed up in a fight-or-flight reaction to that nasty thought.

Yet she was so tired, tired of running, tired of constantly looking over her shoulder. What if he was taking her to a safe place? The yearning she had to be somewhere she could relax and not worry about who was after her burned so deep that she was willing to take the risk. If she was wrong, maybe it would be better to face whatever fate had planned and be done with it. If she was supposed to die, so be it. She'd had enough of the hiding, of the constant fear that churned in her stomach. She wanted some peace. Was that too much to ask for?

She didn't know if she'd ever be able to fully trust Brent, but she was absolutely certain of one thing. He was not like the other werewolves she'd encountered over the years. All the others had been instantly aggressive with her, just like the one had been that Brent had fought in her apartment. Brent, on the other hand, had been gentle with her, seemed to go out of his way to keep from scaring her. She just hoped she wasn't making the biggest mistake of her life.

After a couple more blocks, they finally made it to his truck. She was bone-tired. It was late, and all she wanted was some sleep. Brent opened the door for her, and she removed her backpack from her shoulder and tossed it in the backseat of the extended cab. The truck was charcoal gray. It had big tires, and all the glass was tinted. She climbed in and was surprised at how comfortable the seats were. Brent closed her door, walked around to the driver's side, opened his door, and slid behind the wheel.

"If we drive straight through, we should be there by late tomorrow afternoon." Brent started the truck and put it in gear.

"Okay." She snapped her seatbelt in place.

"It's nothing fancy, but I think you will like it."

"I'm sure it will be fine." Nothing could be as bad as some of the hole-in-the-walls she'd stayed in. If it was anything like his truck, she'd be in heaven. "As long as it has hot water and a comfortable place to sleep, I'll be happy."

He gave her a warm smile that made her heart thump a little faster. "I think you will be perfectly content then."

Once they made it on the highway, she settled back into the soft seat. He flipped the radio on a classic rock station, and Aerosmith quietly rocked through the cab. Up in the distance, lightning lit the sky in bright, intermittent flashes. She'd always loved storms. As strange as it may be, they'd soothed her, calmed the inner turmoil that always seemed to be swirling inside her.

"I love the rain." She sighed.

"Better enjoy it now. A few hours north, and all you will see is snow. Hell, in a few days after this warm front moves out, all you'll see here is snow." He glanced in the side mirror, turned his blinker on, and switched lanes. "I love it too, by the way—the rain."

She watched him for several moments, admiring his strong hands as they gripped the wheel of the truck. "Really?"

He nodded. "Mmm, hmm. I've always thought things seemed new, cleansed after a good rain. Not to mention, I love the smell of a good storm rolling in."

She smiled. "Yeah. Me, too." She frowned.

"What's wrong?" His voice was quiet.

She wondered if he was worried that she'd changed her mind about coming with him. "I still don't understand why you've been trying to find me. The night my mother and sister were killed, I was told that I have an important role to fill."

"Hey, let's not worry about that right now."

She noted that he appeared to be uncomfortable with the subject. Well, too damn bad. "I do worry about it. My whole life has revolved around this. Tell me what is going on."

"You won't like it, Rindy."

"I haven't *liked* running and hiding for the past ten years. I haven't *liked* feeling scared, and I certainly haven't *liked* living with the memories of what was done to my mother and sister."

Brent rubbed his hand over his face. "The reason you've been followed is because you have the scent of a werewolf mate. There is a mate that is destined for each of our kind. This mate carries two scents, a main scent that will alert any lycan of a potential mate and another scent that only the destined mate can smell. When we come across a potential mate, we know instantly that they are not meant for us if we cannot detect the second mated scent. We are supposed to protect potential mates. Mates are crucial for our species' survival. However, many of the younger lycans have gone rogue and believe they have the right to do as they wish with those who carry the main scent."

"Oh." She hadn't had a chance in hell of ever getting away from them if that was true. But a mate to something that she had loathed for so long? The thought terrified her. How could she be destined to be with the species that had murdered her family?

"I know this must be a shock, but look at it this way. Thousands and thousands of humans commit murder, rape, and other crimes every day, yet you don't condemn the entire human race, do you?"

She thought about that for a moment. No, she didn't. He was right, but she wasn't sure if she could ever convince her mind to think otherwise after despising his kind for so long. "No. I don't. But it's different."

"Why?"

"I don't know. It just is."

"It's not really. But I understand that it will take some time for you to see that."

She straightened. "If I'm destined to be a mate, then maybe you can help me avoid him. If he never finds me, I won't be forced into something I don't want. Because I have this feeling I would be forced, wouldn't I?"

"No respectable lycan would force you to do anything. But, you have to understand, your destined mate is imprinted with the need to protect you, to claim you. He would never do anything to intentionally hurt you."

"It sounds so cold to me. What kind of relationship would it be if we were only together because we were fated for one another? What about love and respect?" She let her head rest against the window beside her. The cool surface felt refreshing against her skin. "And what if my mate isn't respectable?"

"What about soul mates, love at first sight, true love? Those, to me, are fated things as well, and I think there is plenty of love and respect in those types of relationships. Why would it have to be any different?"

"I don't know. I just don't like the idea of being told who I have to be with." She closed her eyes, not missing the fact that he didn't comment on what it would mean if her mate wasn't respectable. She could feel the beginning of a headache coming on. She didn't want to think about any of this at the moment.

"Just because you are destined to be with someone, doesn't guarantee you will end up with that person. Plenty of lycans never find their mates. To me, it simply means that there is one perfect match somewhere, the other half of a soul."

"Yeah, maybe." Her lids felt heavy, and they began to close.

\* \* \* \*

She'd been asleep for close to five hours. Her head rested against the window, and she was so tiny, she reminded him of a helpless child. She was anything but. She had more fight in her than most men he'd known. He was more worried about her mental fragility. She'd seemed appalled and defeated when he'd told her she was a destined mate. She'd dealt with so much in her short lifetime. His heart ached for her. His mate should have been cared for, protected until he'd found her and claimed her. Instead she'd been hunted and abused.

She was going to flip out when she found out he was her mate. He'd almost told her. It had been on the tip of his tongue. Now he was glad he hadn't because he had a feeling that, at this point in time, that particular information would send her into a desperate flee for freedom every chance she got. He felt a bit guilty, but he hoped by the time she found out, she'd love him enough to forgive him.

Something had to be done about the rogues who were terrorizing potential mates. Mates were essential to their well-being, peace of mind, and survival, and they were being mistreated instead of protected. He'd killed several rogues himself, but he couldn't control them all. His friend, Anthony, had killed a few also, but still, they could only take out so many. If the rogues continued to hurt and even kill potential mates, their race would end up dying out. How hard was that to understand? The idiocy and narrow-mindedness of it all made him angry and sad.

How many more lycans would have to be denied their mates before the older lycans banded together and stopped the rogues once and for all? Dishonorable acts against potential mates may be punishable by death, but little was done to enforce the ancient law nowadays. And, as far as he was concerned, none of the bastards acting in such a disgraceful manner deserved to claim their own mates. He pitied any woman who ended up shackled to a rogue.

He wasn't certain how to stop it. The younger lycans needed to be brought up to understand the importance of mates. It seemed the older lycans had turned their backs on the younger wolves. Brent knew there

would always be instances when a lycan would have to be killed, but killing all who had gone rogue was not the answer, as those numbers were increasing. If things continued as they were without some type of values instilled in the young ones, there would be no new blood worthy of sustaining the lycan race.

Unfortunately, until something was done to help teach the young ones appropriate behavior, killing them remained the only answer. This saddened Brent, because many of the lycans who'd gone rogue were outcasts and had simply done the best they could to survive on their own.

## Chapter Five

Rindy yawned and stretched. “Where are we?”

“About three hours from home.”

Home? She didn’t know what home was any longer. She’d jumped from place to place so often, she’d never had a chance to stay in one spot long enough to call it home. “I need to use the restroom; can we stop somewhere?”

“Yes. There is an exit with a stop in about two miles. Are you hungry?” He looked at her.

For some reason, when he rested those chocolate eyes on her, she felt restless, hot. She’d never felt the feelings he seemed to inspire in her, and she didn’t much care for them. “A little.”

He nodded. “Me, too. We’ll grab a bite to eat as well.”

Before she knew it, he was pulling into the parking lot of what looked to be a truck stop, appropriately named *Mack’s Grub ‘n’ Gas*.

When the truck came to a stop, she unbuckled her seatbelt, opened the door, and slid to the ground. Her legs were a little wobbly from the long ride. The sleep had been a wonderful bonus. She hadn’t slept for so many hours straight in years. She’d been a light sleeper since the attack on her family, with every little noise jarring her abruptly awake.

She watched as Brent reached behind the seat and pulled out a long-sleeved, black shirt. He took off the shirt he was wearing, shrugged into the black one, and buttoned it. She tried hard not to admire the quick flash of broad, muscled chest that had been exposed during the change, but she failed miserably. He slid from the seat, shut the truck door, and walked around to the passenger side.

She started for the restaurant entrance, but Brent placed a hand on her shoulder. “Wait.”

“Why?” She was a little annoyed that he looked unruffled after the long ride. Even the half of his shirt that remained untucked—hanging just low enough to cover the holes in the thigh of his jeans from the earlier fight with



the werewolf—in no way made him look disheveled. She, no doubt, had not fared so well. She rubbed at her eyes.

“I don’t want you to go anywhere without me.”

“Um, I don’t think they will let you in the women’s room. And, quite frankly, I don’t want you there either. I’m perfectly capable of going to the restroom without assistance.” Like she needed him to watch her while she picked all the sleep crust from her eyes.

“Not what I meant. I don’t want you going off anywhere by yourself. Let me at least walk you to the restroom.”

She was too hungry and mentally drained to argue with him. She shrugged. “Lead the way.”

She followed him. Whereas someone else would probably not notice anything amiss once inside the surprisingly clean restaurant, he nevertheless towed her behind him by the hand, scanning their surroundings as they went. He’d sniff at the air every once in awhile as well. Must be nice to be able to smell danger; she could have used that trick a time or two. It would have given her even more of a jump on her stalkers.

They made it to the restroom door, and he opened it and boldly walked in, obviously not caring that it was intended only for women. Within moments he was back. He gave her a slight bow. “It’s all yours.”

“Gee, thanks, Dad.”

He gave her a bored look that told her he was not amused in the least. After using the toilet, she washed her hands and peered into the mirror. She felt like she barely knew herself any longer. So much of her old self had been lost in the chaos of trying to survive. The carefree girl she’d once been had turned hard and suspicious of the world. It made her sad. She wanted to laugh again, be safe again. She tossed the paper towel she’d used to dry her hands into the waste can. Useless dreams would get her nothing but heartache.

She took a deep breath and made her exit. Brent was waiting for her, hadn’t appeared to have moved a muscle since she’d gone into the restroom. “Ready to eat?”

He nodded and led her to a table toward the back that faced the door. He motioned for her to sit in the booth where her back would be to the door. He waited for her to sit and slid in the seat across from her. He was big. Of course, everyone seemed big to her, but he was exceptionally so.

She noted how he seemed to move with purpose, grace. The way he glanced at the entrance every few minutes seemed a casual, inconspicuous interest in his surroundings. She knew it was anything but. He was always on the alert for trouble. She recognized it easily as she'd lived most of her life doing the same.

"How's your arm and leg?" When the wolf had used Brent's arm and thigh in lieu of a favorite bone, she knew it had inflicted deep wounds. Had that happened to her, she was fairly certain she wouldn't have been walking without assistance. And the pain from puncture wounds was excruciating. She remembered that fact from when she was a girl, and the neighbor's beloved poodle—Lucky—had decided to clamp down on her ankle one day when she had been walking home from school.

She barely kept a wince subdued just thinking about all of the pain those petite teeth of Lucky's had caused. The infection she'd gotten from the bite hadn't been fun either. The wolf's fangs had been huge. But Brent hadn't so much as favored his leg or arm.

"They are healing."

"You were bitten pretty badly. Do you need stitches, maybe some antibiotics?"

His dark eyes rested on her. She had a sudden urge to squirm under his gaze, but she remained still, refusing to convey the effect he had on her. She'd learned long ago to never show weakness.

He rolled his sleeve up to reveal the puncture wounds from the bite. "See. I'll live."

She leaned closer. The wound was already closing up and looked days old rather than hours. She ran a finger over the puckered skin. "How is that possible?"

"We heal much faster than humans. In fact, if I shift to wolf form, the wounds will be completely healed when I shift back."

That was something she hadn't known. "Are you immortal? Like a vampire?"

He threw his head back and laughed as the waitress dressed in jeans and a T-shirt sat two glasses of water and two menus down on their table. The sound startled Rindy because she wasn't expecting that type of reaction, but the low timbre was rich and comforting.

Apparently, the waitress was not unaffected by his laugh either. She appeared to be in her thirties and was quite attractive with big, green eyes and shiny black hair. She watched Brent and admired him openly. A small stab of jealousy shot through Rindy and startled her way more than his laugh had. *No, Rindy. It isn't jealousy. It's annoyance.*

"What can I get you to drink?" The waitress glanced quickly at Rindy, but soon turned back to stare at Brent.

He raised a brow at Rindy. Yeah, what she was feeling had to be annoyance, annoyance at the waitress acting as if she weren't even there. She couldn't really blame her for checking Brent out. He was gorgeous and had quite an impressive presence. Any breathing woman would do so, but it would be nice if she didn't act as if Rindy weren't in the room.

"I'll take iced tea, please," Rindy said before picking the menu up and ducking her head behind it to hide her irritation.

"Coffee for me," Brent said.

"Would you like any cream or sugar with the coffee?" The waitress treated him to a sultry smile.

"No. Black."

"'k. I'll get it, but you let me know if you need anything else, anything at all, sugar." She winked at him.

Rindy watched the waitress saunter off. "Yeah, don't worry about me. I'll take sweet or unsweet tea," she muttered then rolled her eyes. "Good Lord."

"What?"

"Let me know if you need anything else, anything at all, sugar." Rindy mimicked the waitress' Southern drawl, which seemed unusual for someone so far North.

"She was just being nice, Rindy."

“Uh-huh. She was being way more than nice.”

“Jealous?” Brent smiled.

Her knees turned weak when he grinned at her. “Um, nooooo. It just must get irritating if you have to put up with that everywhere you go. Which I’m sure you do. Not to mention that she treated me like the invisible woman.”

Damn it. She’d slipped up, and by the smirk on his face, he wasn’t going to let her slide either.

“Does that mean you think I’m good-looking?” He leaned forward to rest his elbows on the table.

“Don’t flatter yourself.” She itched to smack that smug grin right off his full lips.

He chuckled and went back to reading his menu. After a few moments, he laid it on the table. She peeked at him over her own menu, and he was watching her.

“I’m not embarrassed to admit that I think you are very good-looking—beautiful in fact.” His eyes never left hers.

She could feel her cheeks burning and ducked her head back behind the menu. “Yeah, that’s because men are pigs,” she mumbled and had to tamp down the urge to throw her glass of water at him when he laughed at her.

They ordered, and Rindy’s annoyance with the waitress grew as she fawned all over Brent. A few times, she thought Brent would have to wipe the drool off him from the woman.

Ten minutes later, the waitress delivered their hamburgers and fries. The heaping plates of food looked and smelled mouth-watering. They both dug in.

“Do you have any family?” She stuck a fry in her mouth after she asked.

He paused for a moment. “Not any longer.”

“What happened to them?”

“I left my family years ago. They and I disagreed on things, and I felt it was time for me to move on.”

“You just left your family because of a disagreement?” She sat up straighter. How could someone do such a thing? She’d give an arm and a leg to have her family back.

“It wasn’t a simple disagreement. You have to understand that my family was not a family in the traditional sense that you are familiar with. My family was more of a pack. I was raised with several other males. Most were not my blood relatives. My mother died when I was young, and my father instilled certain values in us. Most of which I came to be unable to abide by once I got older.”

“Oh. Like what?” She sipped at her tea.

“One example is that he believed our mates were our property, that they were mere belongings that were supposed to do what we commanded. They were considered little more than a means to reproduce.” He took the last bite of his burger.

“That is horrible.” How could anyone think such a thing? And she felt her heart ache for any woman who was unfortunate enough to find herself in the hands of those monsters.

“Yes. I agree. I believe that a mate is to be cherished and loved. But I will not lie. I do believe it is my job to be the protector. It is my job to care and provide for my mate. But I also sincerely wish to make my mate happy. And I pray that my mate will come to love and respect me.”

Why was he staring at her so intently? She felt as if he was trying to convey more than just his feelings on the subject. She did admire him for having the strength to break from the barbaric thinking of his family. Maybe Brent Falls was a good man. Maybe he was nothing like the others she’d encountered. However, she couldn’t allow herself to forget that when it came down to bare bones, he was still a werewolf. And she could never allow herself to fully trust one. Could she?

“So, I take it you do not have a mate, then?”

He shook his head. “I have a mate. We all have a mate somewhere.”

“So, you haven’t found her yet?” She sat a little straighter, waiting for his answer.

“I think I’m very close to knowing her.”

“Oh.” Why did that seem to bother her so much? She should be happy that he was going to find a mate. “Well, I wish the best for you and her.”

“As do I. I have been lonely for many years. I cannot tell you how much I have longed to find her.” He reached across the table and briefly squeezed her hand.

The shock that surged through her at his touch nearly made her gasp. His eyes darkened, but also seemed to faintly glow. He’d felt it, too. *My goodness, girl. He just told you he’s close to finding his mate, and you are getting hot and bothered over him touching your hand.*

She took a sip of her nearly empty—unsweet, as it turned out—tea to soothe her suddenly parched throat, wiped her mouth with a napkin, and tossed the crumpled tissue on the table. “I’m ready when you are” squeaked from her.

He pulled enough money from his pocket to cover the bill and allow for a generous tip. He stood and held his hand out for her. Something inside her urged her to take it, but she didn’t. She walked past him, and he followed her to the truck. He made sure she was safely inside before closing the door and walking around to get behind the wheel.

He backed out of the parking lot, and within moments they were back on the highway. “Next stop, home.”

There was that word again. *Home*. How she wished she had one to call her own. She watched the mile markers fly by and the snow pick up as they got closer and closer to their destination. She missed the rain from the earlier part of the trip, but she couldn’t deny the beauty of the white blanket covering the land and the fluffy caps on the trees.

## Chapter Six

Brent slowed and engaged the four-wheel drive on the truck before he turned off the main road and started down the driveway. The snow had gotten deeper and nearly reached the bottom of the doors.

“Hang on.” He waited until Rindy clutched the ‘oh shit’ handle by the top of the door and gave the truck some gas.

After about fifteen minutes of fishtailing in the truck, he finally guided it to a smooth stop in front of the cabin. “Are you okay?”

“Yes. Is this it?” She peered out the front window.

He nodded and watched her reaction to seeing his—their—home for the first time. “It’s not much, but I think you will find it is comfortable.”

“It’s beautiful.”

He’d built the cabin himself, had cut each tree from his own land with his own two hands. It had taken him years, but it had been worth every second. “Wait there.”

He slid out into the knee-deep snow and went around to the passenger side of the truck. He opened the door, reached behind the seat, and slung Rindy’s backpack over his shoulder. When he reached across her, undid her seatbelt, and scooped her from the seat, he nearly groaned at the feel of her against him. She was as light as a feather, and her scent and the warmth of her body made him ache to kiss her.

“Hey! I can walk on my own.” She squirmed to get down, but he held onto her firmly.

He laughed. “No sense in us both getting soaked. Anyway, the snow would probably come to your waist.” He tapped her gently on her cute little nose.

“No short jokes,” she scoffed.

He carried her to the front door, fished his key from his pocket, and unlocked the deadbolt. He let her slide slowly down his body, wondering if she could feel what she did to him. “I wasn’t making a joke, merely a statement. I like your size.”

She sucked in a breath when he pushed some of the pale, golden strands of hair behind her ear. He couldn't resist the urge to sniff her, and he leaned close to her ear before inhaling her scent deep into his lungs. His heart pounded, and his skin grew hot while his cock demanded to claim her. He cupped her face and was encouraged by the way her pupils dilated at his touch. She was not unaffected by him, and that pleased him more than anything.

Her full lips parted when he rubbed his cheek lightly against hers. He had to kiss her. He couldn't deny himself that one small pleasure any longer. He placed his mouth a breadth from hers. "Rindy." Her name rasped from his throat in a desperate plea for her acquiescence.

She must have understood what he was asking by simply uttering her name. "Yes."

He took her mouth gently, wanting to savor his first taste of her, and groaned. Her sweetness hit his blood like a drug. He cupped the side of her face with one hand and her nape with the other, pulled her closer, and deepened the kiss. She gasped, and he took advantage of the moment to dip his tongue inside. Her tongue touched his tentatively at first, but it grew bolder with each stroke, nearly matching the aggressiveness of his own.

He wanted to devour her, ached to be inside her. But he knew she wasn't ready, yet would it be so bad of him to touch her just a little before he stopped? He slid his hand from her nape to cradle the back of her head. His fingers tangled in her thick mane of hair and anchored her to him. He glided his other hand from her jaw down the side of her neck, over her shoulder, and down her back. She rested her hands on his chest, and he trailed his fingers lightly down her ribcage, back up, and around, grazing the bottom of her breasts. Fire shot through him and overtook him, and savage need blinded him to all reason. He shoved her against the wall and blanketed her with his body. He growled as he kissed her and rotated his hips against her, leaving her in no doubt of his desire for her.

His breathing came in pants, and pure lust tore through his body as his hunger for her grew. Instinct to claim her chased all chivalrous thoughts from his mind. He had to have her. He devoured her mouth while he snaked



his hand up under her shirt and pushed at the lace of her bra, until one small but perfect breast was exposed to his touch. The delicate nipple was budded into a tight peak, and his mouth watered at the thought of tasting it.

He left her lips, bunched her shirt in his hand then lifted it, and bent to fasten his mouth over her breast, sucking the nipple deep. She cried out and arched against him. Her skin was nearly as hot as his own, and he was so lost in the touch, taste, and scent of her, it took him awhile to realize her small hands were pushing against his shoulders.

“Please, Brent. Stop,” she gasped through ragged breaths.

He let her breast pop free of his mouth and got his own breathing under control before he pulled the fabric of her bra back in place and her shirt down. Her gray eyes were wide, and he slowly placed his hands on the wall, resting them on either side of her head.

“Rindy?” Damn. Even her name on his lips shot fire to his groin.

Her breaths came in gasps, and she didn’t answer him, just stared at him like a lost, wild animal.

“I’m sorry. I got carried away. I only meant to kiss you, but once I tasted you . . .” He shook his head. “I’m sorry,” he whispered.

“Can you show me where my room is now?” Her voice sounded small, fragile.

He sighed, backed up, and took her hand, knowing she wouldn’t accept it if he simply offered his hand to her.

\* \* \* \*

Rindy’s body quivered. She’d never been kissed like that before. In fact, her kissing experience had been limited to a few clumsy attempts by boys at school. Brent was no boy, and his touch had made her feel things she’d never felt before. Her body ached for something she did not understand, and it confounded and intrigued her.

The cabin was gorgeous, and she’d never seen any place as stunning. The snow-capped trees that made up the thick woods surrounding the cabin were

at least eighty feet tall and towered over the log abode. She had imagined how lovely the sight would be if she sat on the wraparound porch.

It was no less impressive on the inside. The furniture was simple, yet comfortable- looking. Rich burgundy, green, and blue colored the rugs, couches, and chairs. And the woodwork was incredible. Everywhere she looked were hand-carved pieces, a table here, a chair there.

He guided her down a hallway past two doors on the left and came to a stop at the end in front of another door on the right. Her room was just as pretty with a bed that looked to be hand- made from logs, and matching nightstands and dresser with more of the same rich-colored blankets and rugs dotting the room.

“This is breath-taking.”

“Thank you. It took a long time to get everything just right.”

“You did all of this yourself?”

He nodded. “Yes. I built the cabin and all of the wood pieces you see.”

“Y-you built all of this?”

He smiled. “Yes.”

“People would pay a lot of money for your talent, Brent. Do you know that?” She could not believe that he’d done all of this. It was amazing.

“I don’t know about that. I wasn’t worried about what other people thought.” He furrowed his brows. “Well, maybe what one other person thought.”

He must be talking about his mate. She was beginning to think whoever she was, was going to be one lucky girl. Not only could he create some of the most gorgeous things she’d ever seen, but he was sexy as hell, and his kisses weren’t bad either.

“Well, it is stunning.” Brent Falls was one talented man.

He walked to a door beside the dresser. This is your bathroom. There’s another one down the hall, the second door on the left we passed. The first is my room. “Are you hungry again?”

She shook her head. “Not yet. I’d like to take a bath, if you don’t mind. After that, I might be.”

“Okay. I’ll find something to cook for us.”

“You cook, too?” How had he not found his mate yet? He was almost too good to be true.

He gave her a lopsided grin that made her feel a little tingly. “Not all males are useless, you know.”

“Yeah, I guess.”

He chuckled, and she laughed. It felt really good to laugh. He watched her with those smoldering eyes for a few moments before he left.

He called over his shoulder. “I’ll see you in awhile.”

“Okay.”

By the time she’d unpacked and taken her shower—which was in the biggest walk-in shower she’d ever seen—she was getting hungry. She’d towel-dried her hair, and it hung in loose waves around her shoulders. She’d thrown on a pair of her favorite faded jeans and a black T-shirt, slipped on some socks and her sneakers, and was ready to explore some more. She walked down the hallway and into the living room. A pair of sliding glass doors was in the far corner, and she went to check the view out.

“Oh, my.” A hot tub sat on one end of a huge deck that overlooked the forest. It was a stunning view, unmarred by the smog and buildings of the big cities she was used to hiding in. She’d prefer a place like this any day over a crowded town, but disappearing was much easier within a throng of people. She’d have been a sitting duck in a wide-open place like this.

“Hey.”

She nearly jumped when Brent put his hands on her shoulders. She hadn’t heard him come up behind her. She could see his reflection in the glass. He was so much bigger than her. She felt a little intimidated, but, peculiarly, his size also made her feel feminine.

“Hi.” How could she be guarded and drawn to him at the same time? It didn’t seem normal to her.

“I have dinner ready if you’re hungry.”

She turned around to face him, was startled when he didn’t move, and she came up against his chest. His muscles were hard, and his warmth immediately soaked into her. She had an unexplainable urge to run her

fingers over his chest and shoulders and up to his jaw, which was covered with dark stubble. "Yes, I'm hungry."

His eyes glowed for a moment before he answered. "I'm hungry, too."

His whispered words slid over her like warm honey. She wanted to kiss him again, to stand on her toes and put her mouth against his soft, firm lips, but she resisted. Barely. After a moment, he turned, and she followed him to the dining room, which was an extension of the kitchen.

"Wow, I know I keep saying it, but this whole place is amazing." She was impressed with the up-to-date appliances and hand-carved cabinets.

He pulled a chair out from the dining table. It, too, looked hand-made. "Did you make this as well?"

He nodded.

"Your talent is endless." She ran her hand over the smooth surface of the table.

"You might want to hold back on the compliments until you taste the food." He sat beside her.

He'd made grilled salmon, baby potatoes, and green beans. She forked a fluffy piece of the fish into her mouth. "Mmm."

"I take it you like it?"

"Yes. It is scrumptious." After she'd cleaned her plate, he picked up the dishes and carried them to the sink.

"Let me do the dishes. It's the least I can do after the wonderful meal you cooked."

"No. You sit and relax. I have dessert."

He brought two bowls back with him and sat one in front of her before sitting with his own. It appeared to be homemade apple cobbler. She spooned a bite into her mouth. It was delicious.

"Where did you learn to cook like this?" She took another bite of the sweet, fruity pie.

"I've had a lot of spare time to learn many things." He watched her eat. "Maybe after you're done, we can take a dip in the hot tub."

"Oh, um, I don't know. I don't have a bathing suit."

He wiggled his eyebrows. "You don't need one. It's just us out here."

Warmth shot through her and straight between her legs. “I don’t think so.”

“You can wear shorts or a bra and panties. That’s just as good as a swimsuit. Trust me. Sitting in the tub outside while the snow is falling in the freezing cold, and the steamy water laps over your skin, keeping you toasty warm, is an experience everyone should have.”

She really did want to try the hot tub out, but she knew it was a bad idea if Brent was involved. She was losing confidence in her ability to keep him at a distance. Every time he touched her, her resolve melted a bit more.

“I’m kind of getting tired. I think I’m going to go to bed. But, first, I insist on helping you clean up.”

He washed, and she dried. Within fifteen minutes the whole place was spick-and-span, and she headed to her room. “Good night.”

“Sweet dreams, Rindy,” Brent called.

## Chapter Seven

He was in her dream. He'd tried to stay away but hadn't been able to help himself. Lycans were able to visit their destined mates in their dreams once they'd found them, and that fact had proved too much of a temptation to resist. Brent chased Rindy through the trees as she laughed. She moved graceful as a doe. He caught her and tumbled them both to the soft leaves under the shade; he rolled her under him, and her eyes shined up at him full of trust. Oh, if she could only look at him that way while she was awake.

"Rindy, let me kiss you, love."

She wound her arms around his neck and drew him to her. Their lips met in a kiss born of passion and desperation that had been denied for far too long. He tangled his tongue with hers, and she moaned his name. It was like music to his ears and heart. He cupped her breast in his palm and kneaded it. All the while his cock grew hard, straining to be freed, begging to be buried deep inside her hot sheath. He skimmed his hand over her hip, across her flat belly, and under the waist of her jeans.

He growled when his fingers nestled in the soft curls that protected the prize he sought. She rotated her hips, nudging him lower, and he slid inside her. She cried out as a storm built inside him, demanding to be freed to unleash its fury, demanding he claim her. His canines grew, and he nipped at the delicate skin between her shoulder and neck while she rode his hand. His need beat at him, heated his skin so hot he thought he'd go up in flames. He reached down and freed his cock from his jeans, but just as he yanked hers to her knees and settled between her thighs, she disappeared.

Brent jerked upright in bed. He was covered in sweat. He'd been so close to having her, and his cock throbbed and ached in protest. He took a deep, calming breath. She had awakened thus ending the dream. His acute hearing—ten times better than a human's—picked up the rustling sounds of her moving about the house. He should let her be, but he yearned to see her, just to look at her to make sure she hadn't been just a dream and was really here. The cold water he splashed on his face and chest before he went to find her did little to cool his need for her.

His breath caught in his throat when he saw Rindy sitting in the hot tub. She appeared to be naked. The back of her head rested on the lip of the tub, and her eyes were closed. Her creamy skin was pink from the heat, and he licked his lips as he watched random snowflakes fall onto her and melt. He slid the glass door open without making a sound, and hooked his thumbs in his boxers. They slid down his legs to the deck seconds before he stepped into the water, the sound of the rumbling jets masking his arrival.

Brent sat across from her. His fingers itched to trail over the slim line of her throat, and down to cup the small breast that had fit so perfectly in his hand. It wasn't long before she opened her eyes, and let out a startled squeal.

"Brent!" She dipped lower into the water and glared at him.

"I couldn't sleep. I was having a dream, and it ended before I wanted it to."

She gulped. "I couldn't sleep either."

He scooted closer to her. "Were you dreaming, too, Rindy?"

"Stop it." Her face turned from a light pink to deep scarlet.

He trailed a finger down her cheek. "Why? I know you can feel this pull between us. I'm not the only one."

"It doesn't matter."

He tipped her chin up. "It matters very much to me."

"I can't do this." She started to get out of the tub, but quickly sank back under the water when she no doubt remembered she was naked.

"Turn around." She demanded.

He shook his head. "No."

She closed her eyes for a moment. "I can't do this. I get so confused around you. You make me crazy."

He inched closer to her. "Why does that have to be a bad thing? You make me crazy, too. The difference is, I like it when you make me crazy."

She started to speak, but he placed one finger over her lips.

"Kiss me. Please. Just kiss me."

He thought she'd refuse, but after several minutes of looking back and forth from the stairs that led out of the tub to him, she scooted closer. His breath caught in his throat when she pushed her fingers through his damp

hair. His temperature rose to the point that he thought the water in the tub would start boiling at any moment. He dipped his head toward her and claimed her lips before she could change her mind.

She wound her arms around his neck, and he wrapped his around her waist and pulled her tight up against him. Her hot, wet body was pressed up against his. His cock hardened and hurt worse than when he'd awoken from the dream. He growled low in his throat and kissed her with the pent-up passion he'd been denied for years. He leaned back against the wall of the tub, pulling her with him. Her thighs rested across his, and he cupped her ass in his hands, plastering her tightly against him as he ravished her mouth.

"Rindy, I have to have you. You make me burn. I can think of nothing but being inside you."

"Oh, Brent." She kissed him and retreated. "I'm scared. I feel so hot and achy. I don't understand the feelings I'm having. I've never had them before."

He eased his fingers over one smooth thigh, and rested his palm over her mound. "Is this where you ache?"

She bit her bottom lip and nodded. He guided her hand to his cock, and she gasped. "I ache in the same place for you. Let me show you how we can ease the ache together."

Passion burned in her eyes, but so did doubt and fear.

"I promise I won't hurt you. Trust me, Rindy. Please, I'm begging you."

She chewed her bottom lip and frowned. "I don't understand why you affect me so. We've just met, yet I feel as if I've known you for a long time."

"I feel the same way. I swear I will make it good for you." He kissed her neck, and she wiggled closer to him, tilting her head to give him better access.

"Brent, I feel so strange. When you touch me, it's as if my skin is heating from the inside out. I feel restless." She leaned back and moaned as he continued nibbling on her sensitive skin.

"I know." The taste of her was driving him wild. "But I also know what will make you feel better."



He trailed his tongue along her shoulder, down her chest, and swirled it around a nipple that barely peeked above the water. The pink tip hardened against him, and he bit down gently on it before laving it.

She rested her head on his shoulder and strained toward his touch. “Show me, Brent.”

Her whispered words shot through him and straight to his groin, and he wasted no time taking her mouth in a demanding kiss. He dipped his tongue deep, tangling it with hers. Her scent and taste flowed through him, his cells drinking her in as if they were dying of thirst and she were a cool, clear stream. He’d be hers until the day his heart beat its last thump. She kissed him back, and her sighs and moans drove him wild. He needed her with a ferocity that awed him, but he wanted to take it slow for her. He ran his hands over her thighs, spread them wide, and pulled her over him so she straddled his lap.

His cock nudged at her heat, but he held back, and his body quivered with the effort. He wanted to make this good for her. “Tell me your heart and body call for me as mine do for you.” He whispered the words against her ear.

“I feel as if a might shatter into a million pieces at any moment.” She groaned.

She leaned back over his arm when he trailed his mouth over the column of her throat down her chest, and settled on her breast once again. She bucked wildly when he sucked her deep into his mouth. He rolled her nipple around his tongue and nipped at it gently, her cries urging him on. He ran his hand down her side, over her belly, and down farther until his thumb rested on her clit, where it drew lazy circles around the small nub.

“Brent! Please. I need, I need—Oh!”

Her body quivered. She was so close. He spread her wide with his fingers and sank into her. When he hit a barrier, a mixture of lust, awe, and fierce protectiveness swamped him. He took a slow, deep breath and flexed his hips once, breaking through. A growl rumbled low in his chest. He was buried to his balls in her, and he clenched his teeth to hold still after she sobbed.

He held her close and kissed her cheek. "It's okay. It won't hurt any more. Trust me, love."

Her muscles clenched so tightly around him he thought she might strangle him. It was heaven. He shook with the effort it took to stay still to allow her the time to adjust to his size. Although the pain he'd caused her had been unavoidable, he hated hurting her. Her fingers clutched at his shoulders, and she pressed her face against his chest.

He rubbed her back. "Relax, Rindy."

He tilted her chin up and took her mouth in a slow, lazy kiss. Within moments, her tongue tangled with his and the kiss turned aggressive, demanding.

Her inner muscles relaxed, and he withdrew slowly from her before burying himself once again. He sucked in a sharp breath when she panted and tilted her hips to accommodate him. "That's it, love."

He took her mouth again, and she kissed him while he pumped into her, panting with every thrust, meeting each drive of his hips. He increased his strokes until she bounced on him in perfect rhythm, her breasts swaying against his chest with their movements. Her muscles tightened around him once again, and he reached between them to massage her clit.

"Brent!"

"Don't fight it. Just go with it. Let go, Rindy. Let go."

She cried out as her orgasm shot through her and him both. His balls tightened, and his cock hardened even more, stretching her tighter around him. He growled, gave one last thrust, and joined her in ecstasy. His seed pumped into her with each spasm of his release, and he held her close while she clung to him, whispering words of praise in her ear. His heart sang in joy.

\* \* \* \*

Her whole body felt weak as she lay against him. She straddled Brent's hips, and he was still inside her. She'd never been with a man. She'd never met a man she'd wanted to sleep with before now. His long fingers stroked her back, and the water in the hot tub bubbled over them. She'd been

dreaming of him earlier, of him touching her. When she'd awoken, she'd been restless.

"Brent, we shouldn't have done this."

He hugged her to him. "Why?"

"Because you have a mate out there somewhere. I feel like the other woman at this very moment."

"Rindy, I have to tell you something." He rubbed her arms.

"What?" She had a sinking feeling he was about to say something life-changing, possibly life-shattering.

"You are my mate. That is why I've been following you. I didn't tell you because I wanted you to give me a chance, get to know me for who I was instead of what you thought I was."

She tried to stand, but he wrapped his fingers around her waist, keeping her anchored to him. "No. Don't say that. It can't be true."

"It is true. You and I are destined to be together."

"How can you be sure?"

"I told you that your scent calls to my kind, but what I didn't say was that you also have another scent. That scent can only be detected by your mate. Me. I know, without a doubt, that you are my mate."

She shook her head. Tears pooled in her eyes. She thought back to the things he'd said and done since they met. Why hadn't she figured it out? All the signs had been there. His protectiveness, the way he'd told her he'd never leave her. She'd been so sidetracked by everything that had been going on since she'd met Brent, she'd failed to see it. He'd done all but said the words to her.

"Listen to me. Please." His whispered plea froze her.

"You lied to me." Yes, she should have figured it out, but she still felt betrayed and hurt.

"No. I didn't. I just didn't tell you everything because I knew you would run. You know it's the truth. You would have never come to Michigan with me, and I would have been forced to chase after you."

He was right. Had he told her that she was his mate back in Atlanta, she would have run. This could not be happening to her. She couldn't deny that

she was starting to care for Brent, but he was a werewolf. She knew deep down he was a good guy, but her mind had trouble differentiating the man she'd just made love to from the monsters that had killed her family.

"I don't want to be with you just because we are fated to be together. What about love?"

"Don't you get it? I do love you. Fate cannot force love. It may be able to force us together, but it cannot dictate my feelings or yours for that matter. But I do love you. I think I've loved you from the moment I was born." He cupped her cheek. "I've dreamed of you, longed for you, prayed for you, and when I finally found you, I knew there could never have been a more perfect woman than you created for me."

"This is too much, too fast. I can't deal with all of this right now." She tried to leave once again, but he stopped her.

"There's more. I want to change you. I want you to be like me. Lycans live much, much longer than humans. I don't want to have to watch you die."

"You want to make me into a monster?" As soon as the words left her mouth, she wished she could take them back. She'd hurt him.

He let her go and slid out of her body. The instant he left her, she missed him. How could she feel that way when he'd betrayed her?

"I'm not a monster, and neither would you be. I've told you before, there are good and bad lycans, just like humans. I consider myself one of the good guys. I love you, and I hope that one day, you can love me back enough to want to be with me as much as I want to be with you. But you have to know that I cannot ever let you go. You are a part of me now, Rindy." He gave a ragged sigh and leaned back against the wall of the tub.

"I don't know if I can ever become like you. And, as for the love, I cannot lie. I do care for you, but I'm frightened, I'm tired, and I'm angry that you didn't tell me all of this. I feel betrayed, Brent. I need some time to think." And she still wanted him, but she couldn't be with him until she figured all of this out.

He nodded, and she hurried out of the tub, grabbed her clothes, and ran back to her room. What was she going to do? She liked this place. She liked

spending time with Brent. She liked feeling safe. She liked not running. But the thought of becoming a werewolf scared her to death. Would he try to turn her even if she refused? She couldn't do it. She would feel as if she were betraying her mother and sister by becoming the same thing that had killed them.

She had to get out of here.

## Chapter Eight

Brent's fur ruffled in the slight breeze. He stood under the trees, staring up at the full moon. He'd always found it amusing that most humans thought lycans could only change during a full moon. They controlled when they shifted, not the moon. He'd needed to run after he'd told Rindy that she was his mate. When he'd told her he loved her, the look on her face had broken his heart. She didn't love him. He believed her when she'd said she cared about him, but he wanted more.

What would it take to get through to her? Was it even possible? Or had she been too deeply scarred by past experiences to be able to see that he wasn't the same as the bastards that had killed her mother and sister? He was so deep in thought he nearly missed the soft footsteps leading away from him. He sniffed the air. *Rindy*. She was trying to leave him.

He howled in denial and ran after her through the softly packed snow. He could give her space and time, but he couldn't let her go. He'd never forgive himself if something happened to her. She was his responsibility, and he'd never let anyone or anything hurt her ever again. When he got close, he caught another scent. He was not the only one chasing Rindy. He growled and increased his speed.

Just as he reached her, a gray wolf jumped on her back. She sprawled to the ground and cried out. He heard a loud pop and wondered if she'd broken a bone or merely sprained something. He hoped the latter. He leaped in the air and hit the gray wolf from the side. It let out a yelp as they tumbled several feet away, snow spraying in every direction. When Brent regained his footing, he glanced at Rindy. She was sitting up now, holding her knee.

He lowered his head, laid his ears back, and growled at the son of a bitch he was about to kill. The gray wolf arched his back, and the hairs stood straight up along its back. Brent leaped into the air, came down hard on the gray wolf's back, and clamped his teeth on its neck. It struggled under him, but Brent knew the wolf had no chance. Just as he heard the snapping of neck bones, Rindy screamed. He tossed the wolf's lifeless body aside and turned to see two more wolves circling his mate.

*Get the hell away from my mate, you bastards!* Brent knew his words would be laced with venom, even telepathically.

The biggest wolf of the two lifted one side of his mouth to release a low growl, showing off a huge fang. *We've been after this bitch for too long to just let her go now. I wonder if her pretty little neck will snap as easily as her mother's did.*

Brent's blood boiled with rage, but he refused to let his anger make him do anything rash that might get Rindy hurt. He had to get the wolves away from her, and unleashing the fury swirling deep in his chest that begged for release wasn't the way to ensure Rindy's safety.

\* \* \* \*

Rindy watched in horror as two wolves surrounded her. She'd instinctively known the dark brown wolf was Brent, and although he'd killed the first wolf that had attacked her, she didn't know if he'd be able to take on two more at the same time. Brent walked slowly toward the other two wolves, teeth bared, low growls emitting with each step.

Just as she thought she and Brent both would surely die, another wolf broke through the thick trees. It was black and huge. It stood beside Brent, and they both advanced on the two wolves circling her. The two wolves seemed to realize they were in for an ass-kicking, so they turned and fled as Brent and the black wolf closed in.

She clutched her throbbing knee as Brent and the black wolf stared at her. Brent shifted back into his human form, and she could barely keep her eyes from his magnificent nude body. He knelt beside her.

"Are you all right?"

She nodded. "Yeah, but I twisted my knee pretty bad."

"Let's get you back home so I can take a look at it." He scooped her up and carried her toward the cabin.

She looked over his shoulder, and the black wolf was following them, now with a golden wolf bringing up the rear.

"They are friends," Brent said, as if anticipating her question.

"I'm glad they were here. I was worried that you were going to get hurt." She sniffed. "And it would have been my fault. I'm sorry."

"Hey, don't worry. I would have been okay. I can take care of myself, although I can't say I'm happy that you were trying to run away. Rindy, you should have known better than to take off by yourself in the woods after dark. It's too dangerous."

"I know. I wasn't thinking straight. I really am sorry. Please don't be angry with me."

"I could never be angry with you. You might make me crazy over some of the things you do, but I can't find it in me to be mad at you—although it did cross my mind that you might need a good spanking."

"I have never been spanked in my life."

"There's always a first time for everything. Besides, you might like it."

She sputtered. "I don't think so. And if you try it, I'll punch you in your nose again."

He chuckled. "That's my Rindy." By the way, the black wolf is Anthony and the golden wolf is Karen, his mate. They live a few miles up the main road. Their property borders mine."

"Oh. Are they coming to the cabin?" She glanced back again at the two wolves following them. They were pretty spectacular, but not as spectacular as Brent.

"Yes. Anthony and I are going to hunt down the other two wolves after I'm sure you are safe."

"Why?" She didn't like the thought of him being in danger.

"Those were the wolves that killed your family. I'm going to make sure they never hurt you or anyone else ever again."

Her stomach clenched, and she felt as if she might throw up. "They are the ones that murdered my mother and sister? But why are they still after me?"

"Because they are sick and twisted, and they think they have a score to settle with you since you escaped them. Don't worry. I'll take care of it."

"But I don't want you to get hurt." She held on to his neck tighter.



He smiled. "I won't get hurt, at least not too bad. I promise. I have to do this. For you, and for my sanity."

"Aren't you cold?" She shivered, her damp jeans biting into her backside.

"No."

"But it's freezing out here, and you are naked." She shivered again.

"I'm not cold. Lycans have a higher body temperature than humans."

"Oh." She snuggled against him. He was pretty warm now that he'd mentioned it. How convenient.

He carried her up the stairs, into the cabin, and across the living room, where he deposited her gently on the couch. "I'll be right back."

When he returned several minutes later, he was wearing a pair of sweatpants. Damn. He looked good in everything. He eased her shoe and sock off and rolled her jeans up.

He pressed around on her knee and made her bend for him while she winced in pain. "Sorry. I had to check it over."

"It's okay. I'll live," she said through clenched teeth, thankful that he was done with his examination.

"You twisted it pretty bad, but it's not broken. Just bruised and swollen. If you stay off it for a couple days and keep ice on it, you should be as good as new."

He went to the kitchen and returned with an ice pack and gently laid it on her knee. He pulled a throw from the back of the couch and draped it over her. The warmth seeped into her. A tall man with coal black hair and a red-headed woman walked in behind him. They were both wearing jeans and T-shirts but were barefooted.

"Rindy, this is Anthony and Karen."

"Hi," Rindy said. Anthony nodded. Rindy thought Anthony was an impressive man, and Karen was pretty and tall.

"Karen is going to stay with you while Anthony and I go after the other wolves." Brent gave Rindy a quick hug.

Rindy grabbed his arm before he stood and pulled him toward her. She hugged him and placed a light kiss on his lips. "Be careful."

He gave her a deeper kiss. "I will."

Karen hugged Anthony. He wrapped his arms around her and kissed her tenderly, and she framed his face with her hands. "Be careful. If you get hurt, I'm going to kick your butt."

He smiled and kissed Karen on top of the head. "You ready?" Anthony asked Brent.

"Yeah. Let's go." Brent followed Anthony to the door, and they both disappeared.

"They'll be okay." Karen patted Rindy's hand.

"I hope so."

"So, are you Brent's mate?"

"That's what he tells me." Rindy sighed.

"Hmm. Doesn't sound like you are overly thrilled with the idea. Don't worry. I wasn't either, but I grew to accept it pretty quickly. Especially when I realized I would get to spend the rest of my life with Anthony." Karen watched Rindy with clear blue eyes.

"I don't want to be a werewolf."

Karen snorted. "What, and I did? I didn't have a choice in the matter, though. I was bitten by a rogue pup. Anthony would have never forced me to turn had it not happened. But I know now that I would have wanted him too anyways, eventually."

"But don't you find the whole fated thing hard to swallow?" Rindy asked.

"How so?" Karen tilted her head to the side.

"I mean, just because two people are fated to be together, doesn't mean they have to love one another. That is sad. Who wants to be in a relationship without love?"

"Are you saying you don't love Brent? If so, don't worry; it will come. You know, I think fate kind of knows what She's doing. I don't think She's going to throw two souls together that are not compatible or meant for one another. I think mates already love one another. They just have to figure it out. But I believe in soul mates—or at least I do now." She chuckled.

Rindy frowned. Karen had a point and sounded as if she shared Brent's take on the whole fated thing. Surely fate wouldn't condemn two incompatible souls to an eternity together. Was she letting the past tarnish

her feelings for Brent? She didn't deny she cared for him, so why would it be so hard to love him? And then she thought about everything since they'd met. He'd been kind to her, gentle with her. He'd never pushed her into anything, and, yes, he'd omitted the whole truth from her, but he hadn't done it to be conniving. She would have run a thousand miles away from him at the time had he told her she was fated to be with the one thing she'd spent so many years despising.

He took care of her. He protected her. He hadn't forced the change on her. And now her early doubts were doused in certainty. Certainty that he would never force her to turn if she chose not to do so. If such self-sacrifice wasn't love, then she didn't know what was. He did love her. And . . . she loved him.

She smiled. She couldn't wait to tell him, but could she become what he was? She still wasn't certain about that, but maybe they could be happy for the time being until she could accept such a thing.

"Do you think you could help me to my room? I'd like to take a bath, get out of these damp jeans, and lie down for a bit." Rindy sat up, and placed the ice pack on the coffee table.

Karen helped Rindy to her room. She knew she wouldn't sleep. She was too worried about Brent, but she needed time to herself. Time to think about the choice she was now faced with. She tried to put herself in Brent's shoes. How would she feel if she were faced with years and years of loneliness, finally found the one person she was supposed to spend her life with, and he eventually died, leaving her to face even more years of loneliness?

Loneliness was a hard pill to swallow on its own, but to have been loved and to have loved, only to lose it? She still ached for her sister's laugh and her mother's arms to hold her. If she didn't choose to let Brent change her, she would one day subject him to the same pain when she died. Could she willingly put him through that?

## Chapter Nine

Rindy had tried to sleep, but worry over Brent's safety gnawed at her. She'd tossed and turned, and every time she'd come close to dozing, she'd jerk awake. She sat up and hobbled to the door, down the hallway, and to the living room. Karen sat on the sofa with her legs tucked under her. She was reading a magazine.

Karen put the magazine down when Rindy got close. "Hey. How's the knee?"

"Hurts like hell, but I think I'll survive." Rindy tried for a smile, but it felt forced.

"Just think, when you turn, if you get hurt, all you have to do is shift to wolf form. Once you change back to human, all your wounds are healed."

"Yeah. Brent told me. I have to admit, that seems pretty handy." Rindy limped to the couch and sat down on the soft cushion at the opposite end from where Karen sat.

"Can I get you anything?"

"I would like something to drink if you wouldn't mind." Rindy didn't think she'd ever get used to other people offering her help, but she had to admit, she liked it.

Karen stood. "Not at all. What would you like?"

"Water is fine."

"Water coming right up."

Rindy watched the graceful way Karen moved. She wondered if all lycans moved that way. It would be logical to think so since they were part predator. But Karen had been human like herself. Had being turned changed who she'd once been?

Karen came back with two cold bottles of water. "Here you go." She handed a bottle to Rindy.

"Can I ask you something?" Rindy unscrewed the top of the water and took a long sip of the cool liquid.

"Shoot." Karen downed half her bottle and leaned back on the couch.

“Are you still the same? I mean, are you still the same person you were before you changed?” Rindy screwed the top back on the bottle and sat it on the end table.

Karen laughed. “God! You sound so much like me. I was so worried that I would become this monster when I changed. I thought I would hurt people, lose who I was.”

“You didn’t?” Rindy waited for her response.

Karen leveled Rindy with a gaze that could only be interpreted as confidence personified. “No. I am still very much the same old Karen I was before I turned lycan. Yes, I have better hearing—way better—improved eyesight, speed, and strength, but mind and soul—the same. I admit the first time I changed, it was terrifying and awing all at once, but Anthony was there with me and helped me through it. Since then, I’ve never looked back. I feel freer, more confident, and happier.”

“Oh.” Rindy sighed.

“No. It’s better than ‘oh.’ I cannot tell you what joy there is in running through the snow- covered forest floor in the middle of the night with your mate by your side, your fur blowing in the breeze. It is magical; it is amazing.” Karen smiled and closed her eyes as if imagining what she’d just described.

“Do you, um, do you . . . never mind.” Rindy could feel the heat burning in her cheeks.

“Let me guess. You were going to ask if we have sex in wolf form. Yes. We do. And, I will be honest, it took me awhile to come to terms with that. But once I did it? Well, you will just have to wait and see.”

“How did you know that is what I was going to ask?” Rindy’s cheeks were still burning.

“Because, I told you, you’re a lot like me. And I had all of the same worries.”

Karen started to say something else, when the cabin door flew open and slammed against the wall. After Anthony dragged Brent’s unconscious body through the door, Rindy jumped up and grimaced when she landed on the knee she had forgotten was twisted.

“What happened?” Rindy limped over and gingerly knelt beside Brent, trying hard to keep her eyes averted from Anthony’s nude body.

Rindy pushed the tangled hair off of Brent’s face and gasped. His eye was swollen shut and black, and he had four long, deep gashes down his cheek and neck. The wounds were bleeding heavily. She looked up at Anthony, then quickly looked back at Brent, waiting for an explanation. If she weren’t so upset over Brent’s condition, she’d probably die from embarrassment, although she couldn’t deny Anthony was one fine-looking man.

“Brent changed to human form to lure the other two wolves out while I hid. Sometimes, they will attack us in human form because they have somewhat of an advantage that way. We only meant to draw them out, and Brent was going to change back once they took the bait. Unfortunately, one of the wolves came from nowhere and tagged Brent. But, rest assured, Rindy, those two will never bother you again.” Anthony’s voice was low and strained.

Karen carried a throw to Anthony and looked him over from head to toe as if checking to make sure he was unharmed. He took the throw and knotted it around his hips.

“Will he be okay?” A tear slid down Rindy’s cheek.

Anthony grunted. “Should be. If we can get him awake, he can shift. After that, he’ll be as good as new.”

“Can we get him on the sofa so he’s at least on something soft?” Rindy asked.

“Yes.” Anthony bent and picked Brent up with little effort and carried him to the couch. He deposited him gently on his back.

Brent mumbled under his breath, but his eyes remained closed. Rindy’s stomach knotted and she felt queasy. He’d gotten hurt because of her. He’d gone after the monsters who’d killed her family. Yet, as much as it galled her to admit to herself at this point with Brent lying unconscious and hurt, she’d felt utter relief when Anthony told her the bastards were dead. The turmoil that had swirled inside her for years had eased. Did it make her a bad person for feeling relieved that the lycans had died? At this point she really didn’t care. They had deserved it after what they’d done to her mother and sister.

But Brent hadn't deserved what he'd gotten. And she'd wrongly accused him of being a monster. He wasn't anything like the lycans that had killed her family. She trailed her fingers over his cheek. "Can someone get me a washcloth, soap, water, and some towels?" Rindy pulled the soft throw Brent had covered her with earlier from the back of the sofa and draped it over him.

Karen left the room without saying a word while Anthony stood by the glass doors, staring outside. If Rindy wasn't mistaken, he looked remorseful. Surely he didn't feel bad for killing such monsters. Yet how would she feel if she had just taken human lives, even if they had deserved it?

"Thank you, Anthony. I'm sorry you had to clean up my mess." Rindy sucked in a breath when Anthony trained his green eyes on her. The man was intense, lethal-looking.

"You're welcome. Just do me a favor?"

"Name it." She owed him, and he knew it, but what was he going to ask of her?

"Take care of the pup there. He's a good guy." He nodded toward Brent and turned his eyes back to the glass doors.

"I will," she whispered.

She watched as Anthony slid the door open and stepped outside right before Karen came back with everything Rindy had asked for.

Karen glanced toward the glass doors and sighed.

"Will he be okay?" Rindy asked.

"Yes. He gets a little withdrawn when he has to put rogues into place. It's not easy to kill anything, but sometimes it has to be done for everyone's safety." Karen dipped the washcloth into a bowl of water, wrung it out, and handed it to Rindy.

Rindy squirted a dab of soap on the cloth and rubbed it together until a thin lather appeared. She gently cleansed and rinsed Brent's wounds while he lay motionless. She took the dry towels next, dabbed at the cuts with one, then folded another and propped it under his neck to catch any more of the blood that might seep from the injury.

“Why isn’t he waking up?” Rindy frowned, and took one of Brent’s hands in her own. She stroked the back of his hand with her fingers, playing with the dark hair sprinkled on his skin.

Karen patted Rindy’s shoulder before gathering the washcloth, bowl, soap, and used towel. “He’ll be okay, hun. Our men are tough. You’ll see. Just give him a little time.” She smiled and left the room.

Rindy brought Brent’s limp hand to her mouth and kissed his palm. She held her cheek to it and closed her eyes. “I’m sorry you got hurt for me, Brent. I would have rather those bastards lived than see you like this. It’s all my fault.” The words were hard to get out over the lump in her throat.

He’d risked his life for her. He’d wanted to remove the threats of the wolves from her. And, when she’d seen him lying on the floor at the cabin door motionless, a strange ache had started in her chest, was still there now. How had she gotten so attached to him in such a short time? Yet it had happened. He had become important to her. And that revelation opened her eyes like nothing else could have. She knew what she had to do, however frightening it may be to her. She’d only gotten a small taste of the fear of losing him, and it had been near to knee-buckling. The thought of the pain she’d have to endure had he actually died was too intense to allow her mind to linger on.

“It’s not your fault, love,” Brent whispered.

“Brent!” Rindy scooted closer to him, and he wrapped his arm around her, hugging her to his chest.

“I’m okay. Just got knocked a little cuckoo.” He eased up into a sitting position with her still clutched to his chest. “Does this mean you really do care for me?”

She sat back and smiled. “Don’t get cocky, mister.” She sniffed.

He grinned and then winced. “Son of a bitch, but that bastard clocked me a good one.”

“Yeah, he did.” She reached for his face, wanting to smooth away the pain, but pulled her hand back before it made contact, worried she’d hurt him more.



Brent eased off the couch, just as Karen walked in. "See, Rindy, nothing to worry about. He'll be good as new in no time."

"Is Anthony still here?" Brent asked Karen.

"He flew the coop, but he's close. He never lets me get too far away." She wiggled her eyebrows.

"Tell him thank you for me." Brent hugged Rindy again.

"Sure will. And now that it appears you are going to recover, I'm going to get out of here." Karen walked to the glass door and slid it open.

"Thanks, Karen. For . . . everything." Rindy called.

"No problem. Anytime you want to talk, let me know." Karen stepped out the door and closed it behind her.

Brent stared at Rindy, and her heart thumped hard at the way his chocolate eyes nearly burned a hole through her, turning her insides to jelly.

"What is *everything*?" Brent asked.

"Oh, um, just girl talk."

"Not *girl* talk." He laughed, or at least attempted to do so, but didn't quite manage through the claw marks. "I'll be right back."

Brent walked to the front door. His back was wide, and his shoulder muscles rippled with his movement. He had the most perfect, to-die-for butt she'd ever seen. He disappeared, and five minutes later, he was back, with the black eye and gashes to his cheek and neck completely healed. That was one incredible trick. She could only imagine how convenient such a feat would be, especially with the way her knee was throbbing at the moment. Other parts of her were beginning to throb as well, with his glorious body on full display to her.

Brent kneeled in front of her. He gently stretched her calf across his thigh, and inspected her knee. "How's this feeling?"

She shrugged. "It's been better, but I'm okay."

"I'm sorry you got hurt. I should have protected you better." He massaged her calf, and she nearly forgot she even had a knee when his warm fingers worked their magic on her skin.

"It wasn't your fault. I ran away. But it was my fault that you got hurt. I'm so sorry." She looked down.

He pushed her chin up so he could look her in the face. "It was not your fault. I'm supposed to protect you, and I didn't do a very good job of it."

"The ones that killed my family are now dead because of you. I think you did a very good job of it," Rindy whispered.

"Yes. I knew Anthony would not let them get away. They didn't stand a chance. If that bastard hadn't gotten that one lucky tag on me, I'd have killed them myself." He clenched his jaw, and the muscle there ticked.

"I'm glad you didn't have to do it. But, nonetheless, I'm sorry you got hurt because of me."

"Stop it. I do not want you to feel guilty. I chose to go after them, and I take full responsibility." He kissed her on the lips.

She wrapped her arms around him and pressed herself against his chest. He was warm, and she never wanted him to stop kissing her. His mouth did wicked things to her, made her feel naughty and wanton. And, at this moment, she wanted him to make love to her again.

"Brent," she whispered into his mouth.

He pulled away from her just far enough to break the kiss. His breathing was as ragged as her own, and he held her close and pressed his cheek to hers.

"Will you be okay here by yourself for a few hours?" His voice was quiet and laced with unspoken promises of pleasure.

"Why?"

"There's something I need to do." He gave her a little squeeze. "You'll be safe here. I promise."

"Okay." Had she said or done something wrong? Where was he going? Had he changed his mind about her?

"I'll be back before you know it." He kissed her, and as he did it, his tongue tangled with hers in a sweet but scorching kiss. "Dream of me again while I'm gone, huh?"

"Wh-How did you know?" She gaped at him.

"That's another thing lycans can do with their mates. Share their dreams." He kissed her forehead and trailed his lips down her cheek to her neck, where he nibbled for a few moments. "I was very disappointed when

you woke up. Until, that is, the hot tub.” He nipped her earlobe, and heat spread throughout her whole body.

“I guess it’s a good thing I didn’t dream much before,” she said.

“Yeah, I noticed that.” He scowled. “I didn’t like it.”

“It’s hard to dream when you only nap for an hour or two at a time. I was too anxious most of the time to sleep for more than that. I guess now I’ll have to be careful about what I dream of in the future.” She grinned.

“Please, don’t.” He gave her one last lingering kiss on the lips and stood. “I’ll be back.”

She watched him walk down the hall, and when he returned, he was dressed. He kissed her once again, and she watched him leave. She looked down at her knee and snorted. Apparently, he wasn’t too worried about her running while he was gone. She wouldn’t have anyway, but her injury made it impossible.

“Please come back to me,” she whispered. “I love you.”

## Chapter Ten

Brent drove for two hours before he made it to his destination. There were two things he had to do. He understood the pain and loneliness Rindy had carried with her for so long. He had to find a way to heal her so she could move on or she'd never be able to be with him one hundred percent. The deaths of the three lycans that had killed her mother and sister would go a long way in healing her, but he wanted to go a step further.

He'd called his lawyer on the way to tell him what he wanted done, and since he paid the man enough to keep his gold-digging wife in furs and jewelry for the next twenty years, the matter was expedited. After he'd signed the papers, he had two more stops—the bank and the jewelry store.

When he'd awoken to Rindy's beautiful face earlier after he'd been knocked unconscious, he knew he had to have her in his bed from then on. He had hardly been able to stand sleeping in his room knowing she was only down the hall. And when they'd made love in the hot tub and he realized she'd been a virgin . . . He closed his eyes for a moment while the fierce emotions of love and protectiveness washed through him like tidal waves.

He'd been humbled, proud, and honored that he'd been her first. And he'd be her last. He parked the truck in the bank parking lot and was back out in ten minutes flat after making the transfer. The jewelry store was only a couple blocks from the bank, so he opted to walk. He spent over an hour at the store before making his purchase and smiled as he jogged back to the truck with the small box tucked in his jeans pocket.

He started home and decided on one final stop. Two hours later, he was driving down his lane. The snow was still deep, but it didn't require four-wheel drive. Excitement stirred in him, and he tamped into submission the fear of possible rejection that threatened to take over. He had faith that everything would work out. After parking the truck and killing the engine, he grabbed the bags and papers and made his way to the front door.

When he entered the cabin, he didn't see Rindy anywhere. The house was dark and quiet. "Rindy?"

She didn't answer, and his heart sank. Had she ran away again? She couldn't have on that knee of hers. Yet maybe he hadn't given her enough credit. Rindy was smart and could find a way if she wanted to. He couldn't rely on his scent because the whole house smelled like her: feminine, sweet, sinful.

Just as despair began to overtake his breaking heart, he cocked his head to the side and heard rustling water. She was in the bathtub. He took a deep breath, and, while whistling, he set everything up for when she got out. The urge to go and jump in the tub with her was nearly too much, but he wanted everything to be perfect. And that meant waiting to make love to her again until he talked to her.

After ten minutes of thinking about her wet and naked in the tub, he had almost said to hell with all his plans and joined her. Thankfully, seconds later, the door to her bedroom opened. She limped down the hall, and he met her as she got to the living room. He'd never seen a woman that could make a pair of sweatpants look sexy as hell.

"Brent. You're back. I didn't hear you come in." She looked tired.

He scooped her up. "I'm quiet that way." He nuzzled her hair. It was still damp and smelled like lavender. "You shouldn't be walking on that knee." He placed her in a chair at the dining room table.

She looked around at the lit candles and plates. "Something smells good. What's all of this?"

"Something special for a special lady." He pulled her hand to his mouth and kissed the smooth skin.

He popped the cork in the champagne, poured them each a glass, and put a piece of lasagna from the takeout containers on each of their plates, along with some golden-crustured garlic bread.

"This looks good." She took the napkin lying beside her plate and laid it across her lap.

"It's from my favorite Italian restaurant, *Cristiano's*. They have the best Italian food I've ever eaten." He cut a huge chunk from his lasagna and popped it in his mouth.

Rindy took a daintier, but healthy bite. “Mmmm. It is very good. I didn’t realize how hungry I was until now.” She picked up her champagne and took a sip. “This is good, too.”

He smiled at her. “I’m glad you like it. Now eat up because I have another surprise for you.”

“There’s more?” Her brows rose in a question.

“Yep.” He loved that she never expected anything from him. And yet, she deserved everything. He’d give her the world if he could.

When they finished eating, he scooped her up again and carried her to the couch, where he sat her down, careful not to bump her knee on anything. He went to the entryway, retrieved the papers from the small table by the door, sat beside Rindy on the couch, and handed them to her. “These are for you.”

She looked down. “What are they?”

“I set up a trust called the Trenton Women’s Fund. It is for women who have been abused, who are on the run, or who have nowhere else to go. It provides assistance and shelter to women who are alone, afraid, and have no one to turn to, no one to help them. I thought it would be a great tribute to you and your mother and sister.”

A tear slid down her cheek—and another and another, until they fell steadily on the papers in her hands. She hiccupped. “You did this for me?”

He took the papers from her, set them on the coffee table, and pulled her to him. He hugged her and sighed at how right she felt pressed against him.

“Of course I did. Who else would I do it for?” He rubbed her back in slow, soothing circles. “Don’t you know by now I’d do anything to make you happy?”

“But where did all of that money come from?” She hiccupped again.

“Rindy, I’ve been around for awhile. I’ve got enough money to last several lifetimes. I wanted to do this for you.” He kissed the top of her head.

She pulled back and looked up at him. “It’s too much, Brent.”

\* \* \* \*

He reached into his pocket, pulled out a jeweler's box, and flipped open the top. She gasped. "Oh!" Twinkling up at her was the most gorgeous ring with a huge ruby in the shape of a heart surrounded by clear, sparkly diamonds.

He got on his knee in front of her. "This is for you, because no matter what happens in the future, I want you to know, you always have my heart. I love you, and I always will. I want to be with you for the rest of my life." He smiled up at her. "And, nothing, my love, is too much."

She covered her mouth with a trembling hand. "I don't know what to say. It's beautiful."

"Not close to as beautiful as you. Say yes, love. Please, just say yes." His eyes glowed as he stared up at her.

She nodded. "Yes. And, Brent, I love you, too."

He laughed, pulled her to him, and hugged her hard. He took the ring from the box and slid it on her left ring finger. It was a perfect fit.

She looked down at the ring. "How did you know my size?"

"Don't underestimate what I know about you, Rindy. I am very aware of *everything* about your body." His lopsided grin made butterflies dance in her tummy.

He kissed her, and she began to melt. His tongue teased hers, and she tunneled her fingers through his hair and held him to her. For the first time in a long time, she was happy. Against all odds, she loved this man. And she had no doubt that when he said he'd always love her, he meant it.

When his arms came around her, the years of fear and loneliness washed away. She felt cherished, safe. And loved. She shivered at the thought of what might have happened had he never found her. She'd have spent the rest of her life running. She'd never given much thought about finding that special someone to share her dreams with because she had never allowed herself any. Now she could feel her soul calling to Brent. She could feel it healing, and it felt good.

"I want you so bad, Rindy." He buried his nose against her neck, and his ragged breaths warmed her skin. "I want all of you." He lifted his head and stared deep into her eyes. "Do you understand what I'm saying?"

She nodded.

“Have you thought about it?”

She nodded again.

“You’re killing me here. What have you decided?”

She lifted her face to kiss him on the cheek and pressed her lips against his ear. “I’m sorry I ever called you a monster, Brent. You are nothing like the ones that tormented me for years. And I know now that my mother or sister would never expect me to walk away from the man that I love.” She kissed his neck. “I want to be with you always.”

His tensed muscles relaxed instantaneously under her, and a sigh escaped him. “Thank God.”

He picked her up, carried her to his bedroom, and sat her on the edge of his huge wooden bed. He kneeled in front of her and put his head in her lap. “I swear I’ll do everything in my power to make you happy.”

She massaged his scalp, and he groaned. “You’ve already made me happy. I can’t remember the last time I was this happy. And I’ll try my best to make you happy. It’s been so long since I’ve had any type of companionship. I won’t ever take what we have for granted.”

He sat up and kissed her gently on the lips. “You’re my dream come true.”

She smiled. “I’m sure I want to do this Brent, but I can’t lie. I’m afraid. Will it hurt?”

He took her hands in his and rubbed his cheek against them, the stubble scraping deliciously against her skin. “It’s only very painful when a lycan turns someone who is not his mate. It will hurt a little, but not much. And I will make sure you are focused on other things.”

She thought of Karen, and how she’d said a rogue had turned her. She felt bad for the pain she must have suffered. She looked down at Brent’s lopsided grin. He was sexy as hell, and she wanted his mouth on her. “Okay, then. I trust you.”

She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him toward her, but he stopped a breadth before their lips met. “I want us to take things slow this time. I want to see, touch, and kiss every single inch of you.”



He sat back, still on his knees, and tugged her shirt over her head. He reached out and cupped one of her breasts that was now bared to his view. "No bra. That's my girl."

She tried for a smile, but the heat washing through her was too intense. Instead she gasped when his fingers slid over her nipple and tugged at it gently. She grew wet between her thighs, and she squirmed. He dipped his head and took the nipple he'd been playing with into his mouth, his tongue stroking her until she thought she'd scream. He did the same to the other nipple and dragged his cheek across it, the stubble of his beard deliciously scraping her sensitive skin.

She clutched at his shoulders, the need and urgency building deep in her. He kissed her stomach and navel before hooking his fingers in her sweats and panties, and pulled them down her legs. He ran his palms up her calves over her thighs and back. He kissed her knees, lingering on the injured one as if he could make it better with his kisses, and pushed her back on the bed until she was lying flat. He removed his shirt and unbuttoned the top button of his jeans and straddled her hips.

His lips met hers, and his tongue drove deep into her mouth, mating with her, claiming her, stoking her to a fevered pitch. She gave him everything he asked for, taking her pleasure in return. Her fingernails dug into his back, pleading for more. He stroked her ribcage and cupped her ass, lifting her up further on the bed so her feet were no longer dangling over the side.

As he sat up, he looked down at her with glowing eyes and licked his lips. "I cannot wait to taste you."

She followed his eyes as they trailed down, down . . . until they rested between her thighs. Her cheeks burned nearly as hot as her body. He shifted so his thighs were between hers, and spread her wide.

"I have never seen a more beautiful sight in my entire life. I will never get enough of you."

"Brent," his whispered name left her lips.

He bent and placed his mouth on her where she ached to have him most, and she gasped when he inhaled deeply.

“You smell so fucking good, Rindy.” As if to leave her no doubt that he meant every word he said, he took another deep breath.

His tongue danced along her slit, lapping at the juices he was enticing so easily from her. She squeezed his shoulders, and he gently nipped one of her lips, and tugged it gently before curling his tongue around her clit. The pressure built inside her, and she knew she was almost ready to fall over the edge. She wanted him inside her, needed him inside her, where he belonged.

She pulled at him, but he continued eating at her, plunging his tongue deep and rolling it around her core until her orgasm pulsed through her. She screamed out, and he slipped his jeans off. Before the last waves of her climax were gone, he slipped inside her, and she shattered again, right on the heels of the residing aftershocks of her first release.

He rolled his hips slowly, dipping into her, slipping out, and returning. He kissed her again, and his tongue mimicked the motion of his lower body. Incredibly, she felt the heat building in her for the third time. She wrapped her legs around his lean hips and met each thrust with a tilt of her pelvis. He growled low in his throat between each drive of his cock, and she answered him with sighs and moans.

Right before she tumbled over the edge again, he pulled out of her and flipped her to her stomach. He dragged her hips back, and before she could fully comprehend what had happened, her sheath clutched around him once again as he plunged into her with bolder strokes. He arched over her as he rode her, his chest pressed against her back, his arm wrapped around her waist. He pushed her hair to the side, kissed her neck, and she fell over the edge just as his teeth sank into her shoulder and his body tightened, his seed pulsing inside her.

His bite was a mixture of pain and pleasure. “Brent!”

A low growl sounded next to her ear, and he held her to the mattress. Her breathing came in short pants, and she cried out when sheer ecstasy rushed through her. She would be forever his, and he would be forever hers.

He eased his teeth from her flesh and released his hold on her. His head rested against her shoulder. “I’m sorry I held you down. I had to make sure

you didn't move against my teeth. I didn't want to rip your skin open." He kissed the place he'd bitten her. "Are you okay?"

It barely hurt. She was a little surprised by that, and even more surprised that it tingled with pleasure that made her want him all over again. She turned over, so she lay under him. He was propped up on his elbows, careful to keep his weight off her. She was glad for that, because he was a big guy, and she figured all that glorious muscle had to weigh a ton.

She nodded. "I'm fine. It hardly hurts at all."

He let out a breath as if he were holding it, waiting for her answer. He kissed her, letting his lips linger on hers. "Good. I love you."

"I love you, too." She laughed when his cock grew hard again against her leg.

He kissed her. "This is no laughing matter, ma'am." He nudged against her thigh.

She smiled. "You're right. It's no laughing matter at all."

She wrapped her arms around his neck and her legs around his waist, and held him as he sent her up in flames yet again.

## Chapter Eleven

“Brent! Please. I’m scared. Make it stop!” Rindy watched as thousands of blonde hairs erupted through her skin. She itched everywhere, and her body was so hot, her flesh hurt.

“Rindy, look at me.” Brent held Rindy.

She was sitting on his lap pressed against his chest. She looked up into his dark eyes, and even through the pain, she could see the regret and fear burning deep in them. “Brent?”

“It’s okay. The first time is a little painful, but after that, it will be nothing. I promise.” He hugged her to him and rocked slowly back and forth. “I’m so sorry for doing this to you.”

“It’s okay.” She barely got the words out over the wave of nausea that ripped through her.

Suddenly claws shot through her fingertips, and she gasped as every muscle in her body spasmed and tensed. She screamed and thought death might be better than going through this.

“Listen to me.” Brent’s words were laced with desperation. “Just remember after this one time, everything will be better, and we will be together for a long, long time. It won’t hurt anymore. Focus on the life we will have, running in the woods, playing, chasing one another. Making love.”

His words soothed her. She closed her eyes and let his voice take away the pain. Every time she felt a wave of discomfort, she focused on Brent and what he was saying. Suddenly, she was standing on the living room floor staring at Brent in his wolf form. He was gorgeous. His thick, brown fur was the same color as his hair, and his eyes were the same familiar ones she loved. He sniffed at her.

She looked down and saw paws where her hands used to be. Her legs were covered in blonde fur. She felt calm, peaceful. The pain was gone.

*Better?* Brent’s voice floated through her mind as if he’d spoken out loud.

*Brent? Oh my goodness. Are we talking telepathically?* She had an overwhelming urge to giggle, but the sound came out as a growl.

*We have to be able to communicate some way. You ready to try out your new body?*

She took a few tentative steps. *This is amazing.*

*You haven't seen anything yet.* Brent playfully nipped at her and ran out the front door with her hot on his tail.

He'd been right. She hadn't seen anything. As they ran through the trees in the pitch black, she could see perfectly. Her eyesight was amazing, and she could hear everything. She ran until she was too tired to do so any longer. She and Brent played and chased one another for hours. She was exhausted by the time they made it back home.

Home. She had a home. She couldn't believe how much her life had changed. They both shifted back to human form, and he immediately took her into his arms and kissed her hungrily.

"You are the most beautiful wolf I've ever seen." He nuzzled her hair.

"You're pretty gorgeous yourself." She hugged him to her.

"Is that so?" He grinned.

Now she knew where the phrase *wolfish grin* came from. "That was astonishing, Brent." She laughed up at him.

"I know. I never knew it could be that amazing myself, and I've done it thousands of times. But that's because I had never shifted with you. Everything is better now that you are in my life." He frowned.

She reached out and traced his frown with her fingers. "What's wrong?"

"I've been thinking. I would like to build a shelter here for young lycans to come to. I'd like to show them how a real family can be, teach them the importance of protecting potential mates. And provide them some place they can call home. But I don't want to do anything you are uncomfortable with." He watched her from under half-closed lids.

She smiled. "I think that is a wonderful idea."

"I mean, I have hundreds of acres, and we could build it far away so that—What?"

She laughed and reached out to hug him. "I said, I think it is a wonderful idea. I'm not worried. I love that you want to help others, and I know you will keep me safe. I bet if you ask, Anthony and Karen would like to be involved as well."

"Damn. I love you. You make me so happy."

“Same goes for you. I never thought I’d ever be this happy either. I love you.” She kissed his cheek and rubbed her lips over the stubble. “I’m beginning to really like this.”

“My stubble?”

She nodded. “Mmm, hmmm. It is very nice, and I like how it feels on my skin.”

He kissed her again. His tongue dipped into her mouth and tangled with hers. “I like how your skin feels on me.”

Her laughter died when she saw the desire burning in his glowing eyes. His erection pressed against her belly, and she grew wet between her legs. She reached down and stroked him, kneading his sack gently. He growled and arched his hips toward her.

“I think I’d like to feel you on me right now, Rindy.”

“Please.” She stroked him again, and he closed his eyes for a moment before taking a deep breath and picking her up.

“You know I can walk?”

“Yeah, but it’s so much more fun this way.” He tossed her over his shoulder and slapped her on the ass.

“Hey!” She laughed. “I’m going to get you for that.”

He carried her to their bedroom. She had moved into it the same night he’d given her the ring. He laid her on the bed as if she were a feast and he was about to devour her. She felt delicious and wanton, and her inflamed body strained toward him.

“I’m counting on you getting me.” The words rasped from his throat.

She sat up on her knees and crooked her finger at him. “Come here.” She patted the place on the bed beside her.

“My pleasure.”

“Yes. It will be.” She chuckled when he growled. “But I have a feeling it will be mine as well.”

She’d never grow tired of this man who loved her so much, and they would always be there for one another. This, she was certain of. She allowed the happiness to wash through her and reached for him. When her mouth

slid over his cock, he growled his pleasure. She'd barely gotten to taste him when he flipped her on her back and nudged at her entrance.

"Hey! I wasn't done." She giggled.

"No, but I almost was."

She started to protest that it wasn't fair, but he flexed his hips and slid into her with one smooth thrust. All thoughts fled as heat chased them away. She held on to him as he made love to her, and as she did, she reveled in the knowledge that neither of them would ever be alone again.

The End

## *About the Author*

S. K. Yule lives in a tiny Midwestern town with her husband and dogs. She is the author of Bestselling Paranormal Romance Novels, *Darkest Hours* and *Darkest Desires*, and Bestselling Paranormal Romance Novellas, *Jericho's Revenge*, *Lycan Lover*, and *Demon Scorned*.

She became a fan of monster movies at a very young age, and after reading her first paranormal romance several years ago, she fell instantly and irrevocably in love with the genre. The genre immediately sparked a desire to write about two of her favorites in life; love and scary things that go bump in the night.

For more information on S. K. Yule please visit: <http://www.skyule.com>.