



KEEPERS OF THE VEIL:

THE MATING

By

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Cover Art by Alex DeShanks, 2010

ISBN 978-1-60394-458-8

New Concepts Publishing

Lake Park, GA 31636

www.newconceptspublishing.com

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Chapter One

With an ease that he'd been born with, Lucius transformed in seconds into his wolf form. He kept a sharp eye on the gathering of rogue wolves that emerged from the forest, their hot breath misting before them in the cold winter air. He'd seen them before and many more just like them. He knew that their arrival wasn't just happenstance. They desired entrance into the territory he was guarding. But they weren't going to get it, no matter how many times they tried. As one of the keepers of the veil, it was his duty to keep them, and those just like them, out, away from the decent society of wolves.

After a nod from the leader of the group, the rogue wolves surrounded him on all sides.

Lucius growled a menacing warning, gathering his strong back legs beneath him as he made ready for the impending assault. He knew that when they attacked him, they would converge all at once.

Before they could make the first move, however, he threw himself on the nearest wolf with a loud and viscous snarl. He took the wolf down, digging his claws deep into the earth beneath him as he tore his throat out. The instant his first opponent was no longer a threat, he whipped around to take on the next.

He took down the wolves, one by one, until, at last, the only resistance left was their leader.

Lucius walked around the leader, intent on disregarding the intense pain from the injuries the fallen wolves had inflicted on him, especially the deep slash he'd received across his throat as he drew closer to the leader.

The other wolf's gaze blazed a deep shade of red as he watched Lucius move steadily closer and closer.

He spoke to Lucius in his mind. "*You have bested the others, but you will not defeat me.*"

The thought had barely formed in his mind when the rogue leapt at him, sinking his teeth into Lucius' throat. Lucius had expected the attack, had anticipated it and braced himself. He hadn't counted on the weakness from his wound slowing his reactions, though. He leapt to counter the assault just a few seconds too late. The rogue managed to sink his teeth into his flesh. Fortunately, his counter move had prevented him from clamping down on his jugular. If that had been the case, that would have been the end of him.

As it was, the rogue still managed to nick the artery and tear out a chunk of flesh as Lucius twisted away, whipped his head around, and countered by sinking his teeth into the throat of the rogue. His timing and speed were better that time. He managed to clamp his own jaws firmly on the rogue's jugular, using the force of his jaws like a vice, slowly but surely cutting off the blood and oxygen supply until the rogue began to weaken.

Just when he thought he had the bastard, though, the rogue abruptly lurched away from him, managing to tear loose from Lucius' hold. He'd been feigning, Lucius realized furiously, and he'd fallen for it, allowed his own weakness to encourage him to loosen his hold before he should have.

Fortunately, it wasn't a fatal mistake. Once free, the leader of the rogue pack scampered off, whimpering pitifully along the way.

Lucius felt triumph seeing the leader of the rogues run away with his tail tucked between his legs. But his sense of victory was short-lived as he swayed on all fours. He'd been critically injured on his throat and the leader had gone for that very injury. He'd gone for the kill. Although his kind healed quickly, he wouldn't be able to fight off another attack if any more unwelcome wolves came up any time soon. He had to go.

He took off in the direction of another keeper. He had to keep telling himself that he had to walk, he had to keep going, no matter how bad he felt. Protocol said that if he was badly injured that he needed to get another keeper to take his post. But as his blood continued to ebb from his wound, he grew weaker and weaker and more confused as he walked through the woods, trying to reach out with his mind to another wolf. After what seemed like hours, he stopped and took a look around, unsure of his surroundings. He had one last thought before he passed out--the area alpha was going to kill him for not being at his post.

* * * *

Tonya was headed down her back steps on her way to do some planting in her greenhouse when she thought she heard a strange sound. A few seconds later, her earlier suspicions were confirmed when she heard the vague sound again. The odd noise seemed to be emanating from somewhere in the dense forest beside her house.

She stopped her descent and looked at the forest to see if she could spot what was making the noise. With a hand over her eyes to shade them from the early morning sun's glare, she tried to peer through the trees to locate the source of the sound. She saw nothing.

Thinking that it might have all been her imagination, she was about to go back to what she'd been about to do when she heard the sound yet again. It was like a mixture of a groan and a howl. Suddenly intrigued by the noise, interested in finding out what was making it, she walked down the remainder of steps that led to her lawn. She'd only just moved back to the old house that had been in her family for generations. She hadn't seen it since she'd been a child, but she had some fond memories of playing in the woods by the house and didn't feel any unease as she moved toward them.

Tonya tucked the leather jacket she was wearing tighter about her as she made her way across her lawn to the thick gathering of trees next to her home. She wished now that she'd gone ahead and bought the XXL instead of the XL jacket. The larger one fit better, but she just hadn't been able to bring herself to buy it. She'd thought for sure she'd get back to the gym and the jacket would fit better before winter. But she'd had to move and hadn't had time to work out, let alone the money to pay for the gym anymore since she'd lost her home to foreclosure and lost her job security as a landscaper for the wealthy. She'd tried to stay motivated though. It wasn't hard with memories from her childhood with other kids calling her Tonka instead of Tonya because she'd been so much bigger than all of the rest of the children and the harsh realities of her single life staring her

dead in the face. She hadn't had a date in two years and she hadn't had sex in three. It was hard because she had urges but she didn't want to get naked with anyone when she felt so bad about her body.

The moment she entered into the shadow of the trees she could feel the temperature drop dramatically. Carefully selecting what looked to be a deer trail through the trees, she made her way over fallen ones and other forest floor compost. She didn't stop until the noise came to her again. Now that she was closer to the source, she was able to deduce where the source of the sound was. It was in an area that was only a few yards away.

She was more cautious now, now that she could better hear the sound, cautious because she still couldn't identify it, but, held captive by her curiosity, she was unable to leave. She drew closer to a large decomposing log that kept the source of the sound just out of sight. As soon as she crept close enough, she carefully looked over the top of the log. What she spied on the forest floor on the other side of it slammed her heart into her throat, forcing it to close up in fear. Despite the chill of the early morning air, sweat broke out all over her body, sending chill bumps rippling all along her flesh, heightening her sense of awareness. The largest wolf she'd ever seen in her life was only a few feet from her, lying perfectly still. Its head rested on the ground at an odd angle. As she watched, her body now completely frozen in terror, the wolf attempted to get to its feet, issuing the grunting, growling noise she'd heard before.

Tonya couldn't fathom how this wolf had found its way into the woods by her home. There was the possibility that some idiot had tried to tame it as a pet. The only other thing she could fathom was that it had escaped from a zoo. Wolves weren't native to this area, but she didn't want to think about any of that at the moment. No, there were more important things to think about, like getting the hell away from it and back to the safety of her house.

Unable to focus on anything but the wolf, afraid that if she didn't keep her eyes on it that it would be all over her in seconds, she noticed that his fur was covered in blood. Either he was injured or . . . she almost couldn't stand to think it . . . it had just recently attacked and eaten something. She wasn't planning on hanging around to find out which.

Taking a measured step backward in the hopes that she might could sneak back home before he was alerted to her whereabouts, she mentally assured herself that as soon as she made it back to the safety of her house that she would get the phone book out and make a call to a professional that would know exactly how to deal with this wild beast. She'd make sure to have them get their asses down to her house quick to collect this wolf, that way, if he actually was hurt, he'd get the proper attention he needed, and, if he wasn't injured, he wouldn't be running around stalking her as his next meal.

She was so caught up in her thoughts of escape, caught up in breathing as shallowly as she could in an effort not to be noticed, that when a branch broke beneath the sole of her shoe, she couldn't help but think it seemed to resonate throughout the forest.

In the wake of the unbelievably loud cracking of the branch, the wolf's head went up like a shot.

She'd just thought she'd been frozen in terror before. This time she was sure she turned to stone when she saw him move and thought she would shrivel up and die on the spot when, as she watched in abject horror, he turned around and looked directly at her.

His hauntingly golden gaze pinned her to the spot, never wavering as he awkwardly got up on all fours.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck," Tonya couldn't help but quietly hiss as she mentally lit a fire under her ass and turned and ran as fast as her slightly overweight body would let her. Now was not the time to think about all the times she should've run on her treadmill instead of reaching for a snack, but she couldn't help but wish she had.

She was not a trained wildlife ranger or animal handler. She wasn't what she'd consider an outdoorsy kind of person, aside from her love of gardening. So, it was of little surprise to her when she realized that she had absolutely no idea how a person was supposed to act if they saw a wolf in the wild. She was pretty sure, though, that she wasn't supposed to run. When she'd been a little girl her mother had told her not to run from strange dogs. She had a feeling that that rule most likely applied to wolves as well, but she really hadn't had the time to rationalize the situation. Before she'd even had time to realize what was happening, instinct had taken complete control over her body.

Running as quickly as she could through the myriad number of damnable trees that blocked the most direct path to her house, she couldn't prevent the urge to glance back to see if the monstrously huge beast had given chase. She looked just in time to spy the wolf bound in one fluid motion over the log that had separated them. Perhaps that was evidence enough to destroy the likelihood of him being injured, but she still didn't want to rule out that possibility. At least if he wanted her and was only operating at a fraction of his potential, then she had the chance of escape. She didn't think it was likely that she, a domesticated human, had the ability to escape a wolf, a wild beast that was used to running and was built for speed, when it was functioning at full capacity.

She whipped her head back around and continued her flight with more vigor, if it was possible. Just when she started to think that he might not have cared about the crazy human running like an idiot through the woods in front of him, she heard the distinct and disturbing sound of him giving chase, the swish of the underbrush as he tore through it, the sound getting louder and louder as he closed the pitiful space she'd managed to create between them much too rapidly to suit her.

Somehow she managed to pick up speed yet again as her shoes came into contact with her lawn, and she prayed she wouldn't perform a slip and slide through the grass that was covered with early morning frost. Perhaps she had just needed the right motivation to really haul ass or perhaps it was the fact that the safety of her home was in sight. She couldn't be sure which. All she did know was that she had to get in her home before he had the chance catch up to her. A flurry of relief coursed through her as she dashed over to her stairs attached to her back porch. She wasted no time in racing up them, leaping up them two at a time. Her old step aerobics teacher would've been proud.

She made quick work of running down the porch and was so relieved to have made it to her house without incident that she couldn't stop herself from flinging her door open wide. *Home free*, her mind screamed with relief. She'd barely had the chance to get the toe of her shoe through her door, however, before a great force slammed into her from behind, jarring her with such force that she thought her jaw popped as her teeth clacked together before it propelled her more fully into the house, sending her into a brief state of flight before she slid hard across the coarse fibers of the carpet of her living room floor.

She had tried to stop herself from falling with her hands but had been unable to stop her descent and journey across the room on her face. Subsequently, pain lanced through her entire being, and she was certain that the rug burn she felt indicated that half of her face was missing. Before she had time to fully register what had happened, though, something caught her shoulder and tossed her on her back.

When she opened her eyes and found herself face to face with the beast from the forest, she instinctively began to burrow the soles of her shoes into the carpet, working hard to find purchase as she tried to put as much distance as she could between herself and the wolf that now towered above her. Apparently, she'd been preemptive when she'd opened her door and thought that she'd made it home Scot-free.

She immediately froze when he moved closer, sniffing the air around them. Fear gripped her in its noose, forcing her throat closed. She was too afraid to even breathe as she waited for what would most assuredly happen next.

Chapter Two

The wolf continued to come closer, slowly stalking her, and then placing its legs on either side of her as it kept coming so that it hovered over her threateningly, its eyes never wavering from hers.

She tried not to cringe when his face came closer, scared that it might set off some killing instinct in the beast, but he was so close she could almost feel the warmth of his body, so close she could almost feel his breath from his nostrils as his chest labored to drag air into his lungs.

Sticking his nose past her hair and into the arch of her neck, Lucius inhaled deeply of her womanly scent. It had been so long since he'd taken a woman. He'd never been with a human woman, though, had never wanted to. Maybe he wasn't thinking clearly because of the battle haze and his blood loss, but he couldn't shake the feeling that this woman was different somehow. There was something about her, something about her scent, that seemed to call to him, that intoxicated him like a drug, that stirred the beast within him. He knew that he shouldn't have followed the woman. He knew he should have found his way back to his territory, but, for some indefinable reason, he hadn't been able to help himself. He hadn't been able to stop his beast from taking control and running after her because as soon as he'd caught her scent, he'd been . . . ensnared, and then he'd turned around and he'd seen her.

The abject fear written all over her face had done nothing to diminish her beauty, had done nothing to tarnish the glory of her smooth tan skin, her long auburn hair, her wide green eyes, her comely lush figure. Normally, it would have bothered him for a woman he was interested in to be afraid of him. But he'd been too consumed with how she'd made him feel to let that bother him. Of course she was afraid. She saw him as a wolf. She didn't see him as a man or as what he really was, a werewolf. She just thought she was afraid now. She'd be scared shitless when she found out what he really was.

Inhaling her scent again, his eyes rolled back in his head. She was perfection. But breathing her scent wasn't nearly enough to satisfy him. No, he wouldn't, couldn't stop there. He had to taste her.

Tonya couldn't help but flinch when she felt the wolf drag the rough pad of his hot, wet tongue along the skin of her neck. Her breath caught in her throat and she closed her eyes, expecting him to bury his razor sharp teeth into her at any minute now that he'd had a taste of her. It wasn't that she thought that she was particularly tasty, but why else would he have chased after her and now be licking her? She sharply exhaled the breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding when he ran his tongue along her neck a second time before pulling back and lifting his head and looking her dead in the eye.

She tried with all her might to look away. Looking a wild animal in the eyes was probably the worst thing she could do at the moment, but she quickly discovered she was unable to drag her gaze away, completely powerless against some unseen force at his command. The wolf's golden gaze had ensnared her and now he held her captive in his

thrall. The all-consuming fear that had gripped her slowly ebbed as the beast did nothing but stare at her.

Suddenly, without warning, the wolf's back legs gave out on him and he fell, half on top of her.

Trying hard not to pass out herself from shock, she used tremulous arms that shook to lift the animal's enormous head that had fallen on her stomach and saw that the wolf didn't have its eyes open. Placing a hand on his chest where she thought his heart might be, she felt the distinct rhythm of his heart beating fiercely beneath it. As she removed her hand, she saw that it was covered with the wolf's blood. Taken aback at seeing so much blood, she knew immediately by the look and feel of it that it was fresh and couldn't possibly be from another animal but from him. So she made quick work of getting herself out from beneath the wolf's prone form.

There was no doubt in her mind that he'd blacked out from a loss of blood. She knew he wouldn't hurt her, well, not right now at any rate. An overwhelming need to help the animal consumed her, even though she knew very well that she was insane to even entertain the idea, but, then again, it had been an insane morning. Perhaps she was just going with the flow of things.

At the moment, he was out like a light, but she knew that he would eventually rouse up at some point in time. Although she was crazy enough to want to help him, she wasn't crazy enough to allow him the opportunity to wake up and wander around unrestrained. Vaulting up her stairs to her bedroom, she grabbed one of her thick leather belts off a hanger in her closet and took it back down to where the wolf, thankfully, still lay unconscious. She examined the belt for a minute. It wouldn't do her much good to put it on him if she didn't have some rope or something to tie to it to keep him from moving around.

After a few seconds, an idea came to her. Racing to a side door that was connected to her garage, she flew through it and down the length of her car until she came to a screeching halt at her trunk. It was loosely tied together with some twine because it had started to refuse to stay shut some months earlier. Quickly untying the twine, she opened her trunk and removed the thick length of chain that she kept in it just in case her shitbox of a car died on her and she needed a tow. Not wanting to take the time with worrying with shutting her trunk back, she ran back into the house, hopeful that the beast hadn't woken up in her absence. Thankfully, he was still passed out when she came back in, although how he could be with the way she noisily panted for breath over him was beyond her.

Using the belt she'd collected like a substitute collar, she wound the metal chain through it and then secured it at the wolf's neck as quietly and carefully as she could possibly manage, trying her best not to disturb him. The last thing she needed was for him to wake up before she'd finished what she was doing. After she'd finally gotten it fastened securely around his neck, she took both ends of the chain and wrapped them around a nearby column. It was thick and should hold up to him if he woke up and started pulling at it. Well, at least she hoped it would. If it could support the house, surely it could keep him held at bay even if he was monstrously huge and nothing but pure muscle.

She realized a little belatedly that the chain was too thick to just tie into a knot. She would need something to keep it together. She would need a lock. She wouldn't

have to look far for one of those. She'd recently bought one and put it on her snack cupboard to abstain from indulging. Now the only problem was she needed to remember where she'd put the key. She'd walked around the house and put it in hiding place after hiding place, hoping that she wouldn't be able to remember where she'd put it.

In order to locate it, she tried to retrace her steps, starting with standing in the kitchen where she'd opened the lock and gotten the key out of the package. She'd gone to her bedroom first and hidden it in her closet. She walked quickly up the stairs and headed back to her closet. While in there, she remembered she'd thought it was too easy and too close to the bed, just perfect for late night snacking, so she'd taken it to the bathroom. As she walked to the bathroom she recalled that she'd hidden it in the back of the toilet right next to her money stash, but she'd decided that that was also a terrible hiding place because she went to it all the time to stash money away and she'd be seeing the key all the time and know exactly where it was when she wanted a snack.

She left the bathroom when she remembered that she'd gone to her garage after that, thinking that surely it was the best place to put the key because it wasn't even in the house. She made her way downstairs and out to her garage. As she looked around at the utility shelves lining the walls, she thought hard on where she'd put the key. There were lots of boxes partially unpacked from her recent move and cans of oil and rows of old unidentifiable junk. She could've put the key under any of it. She stepped back away from the shelves and looked at them over and over again. A red hat caught her attention. That's where she'd put it! Snatching up the hat, she was filled with relief to see the damn key to the lock. She just hoped against hope that her romp through the house hadn't given the wolf the time to recover enough to wake up. Once again she jogged back into her house. If she'd known before that the best motivation for exercise was fear, she would've been a lot thinner by now, or maybe not. She was a chicken. She didn't really like being scared.

The wolf was still unconscious when she walked past him and toward her snack cupboard. She made quick work of taking off the lock. Setting the key on the counter where she could see it, she ran over to the chain she'd wrapped around a column and put the lock through several links before snapping it closed. It wasn't nearly as thick as the chain, but it would have to do. She didn't have anything else. Pulling at the lock to be sure it wasn't going to open, she found that it didn't budge. Next, she tested the chain, pulling it away from the column. It didn't come loose. Having convinced herself that the belt, chain, and lock wouldn't allow him to run around, at least not for the time being, she went back upstairs to her linen closet and took out a few of her hand sized cleaning towels. She'd need them to clean off the blood on him before she could see how hurt he was. She wet half of them in the bathroom sink, leaving the rest of them dry, and made her way back to where the wolf still lay before getting down on her hands and knees and getting to work.

Now that she wasn't totally and completely consumed with debilitating fear, she actually saw him for the first time and realized that he had injuries all over his body. It looked as if he'd been attacked. Whatever it was, it had really done a number on him. She felt bad for him, felt bad that she'd thought he'd attacked someone or something when he was actually the one that was hurt. He hadn't done anything to her to warrant those feelings. Maybe he was someone's pet like she'd thought earlier? It was just hard

to think of him as being domesticated when he was so big and wild looking. But then, he had licked her on the neck, much like she'd seen dogs lick their owners. Of course they tended to lick the hand or the face. And he hadn't growled at her or bared his teeth the way she'd seen wolves do on T.V. when they were going to attack or when they were defending themselves. But then he might have lost so much blood he might not have been in his right mind. Whether he was somebody's idea of a pet or whether he was wild, she knew she needed to keep up her guard. She needed to be cautious of him.

After she'd cleaned the blood off of him and gotten the chance to thoroughly examine his wounds, she discovered that, although the injuries on most of his body were red and angry looking, most of them seemed to be healing, which was strange since the fresh blood suggested that they were all new. But, she wasn't a doctor so she shrugged that off. She couldn't ignore the injury to his neck though. It was very bad, so bad she hated cleaning it, afraid that it might hurt him, or worse, he'd *wake up* because it hurt him. A sick feeling came over her when she realized that something had tried to rip the wolf's throat out. Something had tried to kill him.

Blood continued to ooze from the wound. She held one of the dry towels to it, applying pressure to try to help stop the flow. When it didn't stop she knew that if he woke up, she didn't want to be sitting right next to him. She needed something to hold the towel to him. She sat back on her heels and thought about that for a second. Although she'd always wanted to have a first aid kit in her house for emergencies, she'd never bought one because she'd never had the spare cash to spend on it, so she didn't have any bandages of any kind.

What did she have that she could possibly use like a bandage to hold the towel to his injury to stop the blood flow? She could get another towel, a full length one, and put it around him. But her bigger towels weren't that long and he was so big that she didn't know whether she'd be able to tie it once she got it around his neck or if it would stay even if she did manage to get it tied when he woke up and started moving around. Then an idea came to her. Right next to the towels in the linen closet were a lot of old sheets that had been covering the furniture in the house when she'd moved in. She could use one of them. She got up and went back to the linen closet.

By this time, the adrenaline from what had happened was beginning to wear off and she was starting to feel how tired her body was from running around her house like a mad woman. She wasn't in any kind of shape to be dashing all over the place. But she couldn't stop to rest just yet. She needed to finish what she'd started. She had no idea how much time she had before he became conscious again, but he might not regain consciousness again at all if she didn't do something about all the blood he was losing.

Grabbing one of the sheets beside the towels and then getting a pair of scissors from her medicine cabinet in the bathroom, she took them downstairs. Standing beside him, she cut one long strip out of the sheet and then set the remainder and the scissors on the floor beside her.

The wolf hadn't moved the whole time she'd been cleaning him up and she couldn't tell that he'd moved at all when she hadn't been in the room. She was relieved to see, though, that his chest still rose and fell steadily, which meant that he was still alive. But she had another problem. She was going to have to lift his head to get the sheet around his neck.

Nibbling her lip a little worriedly, she sat back on her heels, the piece of the sheet in her hands, contemplating what she was about to do. Well, if he hadn't woken up when she'd cleaned him, surely he wouldn't wake up when she moved his head a little. The big problem she had with that was that she didn't want him to wake up when she was close enough for him to take a chunk out of her. After debating what to do for a minute, she decided that she'd just have to do it and get it over with really quickly and try hard not to move his head that much, just pick it off the floor a little so that she could slip the sheet under and around his neck.

Her stomach was a knot of nerves and her heart beat rapidly in her chest again. She didn't feel scared and anxious like she did when he was running after her in the woods, but she didn't exactly feel like she wasn't in danger anymore. She would feel better as soon as she got him bandaged up and she didn't have to be so close to him anymore. It was a shame she felt that way since he was so beautiful and his long dark gray fur was so soft. She couldn't help but admire him, his body rippled with muscle. If she'd seen him in the wild from the safety of her locked car, she knew the only thing she would've been thinking about was how majestic he was and how she wished that she had the money for a camera so that she could take a picture of him.

But, as it was, she wasn't looking at him from a safe distance in the protective bubble of her vehicle. She was right next to him. And she'd never dealt with a wild animal before in her life, had never touched one. It seemed wrong somehow, as if she'd tainted him, as if he was some magical creature and she wasn't good enough to touch him. It was as if she took something away from him. She shook off the notion. As soon as she got the sheet on him and tied, she could get back to feeling normal. Well, as normal as she could possibly feel with a wild thing tied up in her house.

Using one hand, she tried to lift his head off the floor. It was much heavier than she'd thought it would be and then she remembered how she'd used both hands to pick his head up off of her when he'd passed out. She'd nearly pulled a muscle trying to use one hand. Obviously, she was going to need both hands. But how was she going to get the sheet under his head if she was using both hands to lift his head?

This was one of those times when it would come in really handy to have a man in her life. If she had one, she probably wouldn't have been in this situation to start with because she would've told him to go check out the noise in the woods. But, she didn't have anyone. She was all alone and had been for a long time. And, although she'd gotten used to it, it still hurt to admit to herself that she had no one to help her.

Setting the sheet down on the floor beside his head, she looked from his head to the sheet and back again. She'd just have to try to move his head onto the sheet. Pushing half of the piece of sheet as close to and a little under the edge of his neck as she could, she then used both hands to gently pick his head up, watching his eyes the whole time to see if what she was doing was waking him up. His eyelids never fluttered, however, and she managed to set his head somewhere close to the middle of the sheet. Grabbing up the two ends of it, she placed the towel she'd been using to stop the blood flow over his neck wound and then tied the ends together.

When Tonya finally got to her feet, she leaned this way and that in an attempt to stretch the tight muscles of her lower back and legs as she examined her handiwork, feeling a measure of pride. The feeling soon faded as she became aware of how tired and

sore her body felt. It was as if she had spent all day at the gym. It was then that she got a good look at herself. She couldn't help but grimace at the state of her clothes, covered in some of the wolf's blood. She consoled herself with the fact that she felt better knowing that she'd done what she could for the wolf. She had no idea what on earth she would do with the animal when and if he did manage to wake up, but she could handle that when it happened. Right now, she needed to focus on herself, and what she desperately needed was a shower.

Taking one final long look at the wolf, admiring how beautiful he was in his sleep, she left his side and made her way up the stairs to her bathroom to get freshened up.

Chapter Three

Lucius slowly but surely rose out of the dark abyss that had overtaken him. Weak and thoroughly disoriented, he took a look around him at his surroundings. He didn't know how he'd come to be here. The last memory he could summon was of him running after a human woman he'd seen in the forest. After that, he was drawing a complete blank.

Shaking his head in an attempt to collect himself, he heard the distinct rustle of a metal chain. It was then that he recognized the feel of the weight of the chain attached to something that felt like a collar around his neck. He grunted irritably. The scent of the woman still lingered in the air. This was obviously her house. He must have managed to follow her inside before he'd passed out. He remembered the fear he'd seen in her eyes when he'd spotted her in the woods. Although she'd been afraid, she hadn't removed him from the house, but she hadn't trusted him entirely, otherwise she wouldn't have chained him up. Even though he was irritated at being tied up like a dog, he supposed he could understand why she'd done it, why she'd wanted to take precautions with him.

It was painful but Lucius stood himself up on all four feet. He knew without looking at them that his injuries had already begun the healing process, but the deep wound at his throat would need more time to heal. He didn't like how the wound left him feeling weak.

Needing to know where he was, he attempted to shift into his human state. A ripple of unease coursed through him when he discovered that his weak state was preventing him from shifting. The uneasy feeling deep in his gut at the seriousness of his situation increased tenfold when he attempted again to shift. He growled loudly in frustration at not being able to change, the sound resonating off the walls of the room he was in. Moments later, as he pouted in silence, his ears pricked to attention when he discerned the sound of hasty footsteps on the floor directly above him.

Lucius was unable to catch his breath when the human woman he'd seen before came hurriedly down the stairs, her body encased only in a small white towel that covered her from mid-breast to just barely beneath the tops of her thighs, held in place by a single hand at her ample bosom. Her long dark hair was still damp and reached down to the middle of her hip.

Taking a deep breath as she walked across the room and moved tentatively closer to him, the beast within him came burgeoning to life as the scent that was undeniably that of his mate filled his lungs. And there was no doubt in his mind that this human woman before him was indeed his true mate. That was why he had chased her, because he'd realized it when he'd been in the forest and her aroma had filled his senses, right before he'd turned and first seen her. It was all coming back to him now, the chase that had led into the house. He recalled he had been unable to deny himself a taste of her skin. The memory of it created in him a hunger to savor the rest of her, especially the area between her luscious thighs, the thighs that were exposed to his greedy lustful gaze.

“You’re awake,” Tonya said when she stood in front of him just beyond where she thought he could reach her. The sound of her voice a little less cheerful and more leery than she’d intended. She felt a little guilty for how she was treating him and how she felt about him, but it wasn’t as if she had a choice or as if he could sense any of what she was feeling.

Lucius hadn’t needed to hear her voice to sense her uncertainty, the turmoil within his mate. His growl of frustration had alarmed her. The last thing he wanted was for his mate to be scared of him, and so he extended his neck as far as the restraints would permit him and managed to nudge her hand with the tip of his nose.

Seeing that he didn’t seem to want to hurt her, but he seemed to want to touch her, Tonya edged infinitesimally closer, not enough to where she thought she could get hurt, since she could see the end of his reach, but enough to where he could put the tip of his nose in the palm of her hand.

She was close enough that he could reach her with his tongue, and he couldn’t resist swirling it along her fingers.

Tonya smiled warmly at him and got just a little bit closer. When she moved, bending toward him a little at the waist, it was just enough to make her towel gape.

The movement of the towel drew Lucius’ attention away from her hand, and he was able to see just a little bit of the apex of her thighs because of how she was leaning. Unable to tamp the powerful desire that overcame him to see more, he grabbed a hold of the towel with his teeth and pulled it off of her.

It only took a second for Tonya to realize what had just happened. “What the . . . ?” she said right before she let out of loud yelp of surprise. “Oh my god! My towel!” she shrieked and immediately tried to cover herself up with her hands. But her hands were nothing compared to how much of her was exposed, and her face burned crimson with embarrassment. “Give me back my towel!” she yelled indignantly at the wolf.

He sat back on his hind legs, the towel still clenched tightly between his teeth as he grinned from ear to ear. He couldn’t help but think that his mate was really beautiful when she was angry. Her eyes lit up light emeralds, and, he thought to himself, letting his hungry gaze wander down the length of her body, he couldn’t wait to get better and claim her for himself.

“Bad, bad, bad!” Tonya admonished the wolf as she reached to retrieve her towel. But when she went to pull it away from him, he didn’t let go of it. It was hard to try to cover what was important and still pull on the towel as she tried to cover her breasts with one hand and cross her legs to cover her stuff, but she yanked a little harder when she tried to take it away from him again. “Now . . . let . . . go . . . of it!” she said through gritted teeth, getting more and more hostile by the minute.

Lucius refused to let go of the towel. He was enjoying this way too much to let it end so quickly.

After a few minutes, Tonya had had enough. Her anger overrode her humiliation over her nakedness, and she used both hands to pull on the towel.

In response, Lucius leaned back on his hind legs and dug into the carpet with his front paws.

Tonya pulled and pulled and still only managed to just barely move the wolf's head with all of her struggles. "Bad!" she shouted at him, as if saying it again would remind the animal that it was in the wrong.

All the struggling was making his mate's breasts bounce up and down, and that, along with his eyes following suit, was enough of a distraction to make Lucius loosen his hold on the towel that they were having a tug of war with.

With a powerful yank, Tonya managed to wrestle the towel free, whooping in triumph before landing unceremoniously spread eagle on the floor on her ass with the towel over her face and her hands behind her to catch herself. Pulling the towel off of her face, she rolled to her knees and started getting up.

Bent over in front of Lucius was the inviting site of his mate's naked ass. Fortunately, she'd gotten close enough when she'd fallen down that he could reach it. Leaning with her feet slightly apart, there was just enough space between her legs that he could see her pussy. He dove face first through the space between her legs and attempted to lathe the seam of her pussy lips with his rough tongue.

Tonya had almost straightened up when she felt something separate her ass cheeks, the unmistakable feel of a wet nose and hot tongue alerting her to the fact that the wolf had just taken the opportunity to try to shove his face in her ass and had missed and licked her pussy instead. She shrieked in horror, nearly jumping out of her skin as she leapt away from him. After the way he acted, so easy with her, aggravatingly playful even, she had to believe that he was someone's pet. Standing up, she wrapped the towel around herself, pursing her lips in irritation at him because he seemed to be very pleased with himself as she glared at him.

"Bad!" she said, shaking a finger at him. Her brow furrowed and she frowned at him when the word seemed to have no affect on him. "Very, very bad," she said, continuing to wag her finger at him. "Obviously, I'll have to keep a close eye on you," she informed him hotly, but he looked at her so adoringly she was unable to maintain her anger, and a smile tugged at the corner of her mouth. "I know that I'm thirty and that I don't have a boyfriend, but that doesn't equate to desperate to me."

Lucius wanted to howl for joy. It was good to know that his mate didn't have another man in her life. Not that something as insignificant as that would prevent him from taking her and marking her as his one and only true mate as soon as he was able to take his human form again. That small taste of her that he'd managed to get from between her thighs had him panting for more, a lot more, like slamming her down on the floor and thrusting his cock into her tight pussy.

Tonya backed away a little as the wolf's gaze swept up and down her body. "I know you'd best not be trying to decide just how long you think it would take to devour me."

Lucius didn't try to tamp the hungry growl of desire that welled up inside of him. She would get eaten, all right. It just wasn't the way she was thinking. He was going to sate his hunger by eating her pussy, and he didn't plan on stopping until she climaxed against his lips.

She sighed in exasperation and put a hand to her forehead, her eyes glazing over slightly. "You are losing your marbles, Tonya," she admitted to herself. "First, instead of calling animal control, you actually tie up and take care of a wolf that came from God only

knows where, and then you speak to him as if he could understand anything you're saying." She stopped her tirade when she reached the foot of the stairs. Glancing back, she stopped and said, "I'm going to get some clothes on. I'll come back to see how you're doing in just a little bit. Try to be good, wolf, and not break anything before I get back."

As his mate climbed back up the stairs, Lucius followed her every movement with unblinking eyes until he was unable to see her comely legs anymore. Needing to rest more than anything else at the moment, he laid down on the carpet. As soon as he regained his strength he would shift and mark her as his mate. He closed his eyes, hating the wait, even though he knew it wouldn't take long. He had never really had a lot of patience.

Throwing her used towel in the dirty clothes hamper on the inside of her bedroom door, Tonya walked over to her dresser and grabbed her brush before sitting down on the edge of her bed. Her hair was almost dry now, making it easier to get the tangles out than if she'd tried to do it when it was damp like she'd intended to when she'd gotten out of the shower, before she'd heard her mysterious wolf growling loudly downstairs, before she'd gone to check on him, before he'd thought it would be great fun to rip her towel away from her. Her hair neat, she replaced her brush on her dresser and opened a drawer to remove an old comfortable pair of pants and an overlarge shirt, thankful that she'd removed the tag from it years ago so that she didn't have to be reminded about what size it was.

After pulling on her clothes, she left her bedroom and went back down to check on the wolf. She hadn't heard him make any more noise while she'd been upstairs this time so she assumed he'd been resting in her absence. After having sustained such serious injuries she was surprised he'd had the energy to want to play with her earlier. When she reached the foot of the stairs, she saw he was laying on the floor right where she'd left him, his ears at attention, obviously listening to her every move.

Seeing her in his peripheral vision, he picked his head up off of his paws to get a better look at her.

She stopped just short of reaching him so that she could admire him better. He truly was the most beautiful wolf she'd ever seen, not that she had a lot of experience in that area, but she felt certain if she saw a thousand wolves after him that she would feel exactly the same way. She noticed his golden gaze tracked her every movement as she walked over to her kitchen counter.

She'd been right in vowing to keep a close watch on him. It had taken her completely by surprise when he'd dove in between her thighs and accidentally licked her pussy. But what disturbed her more about what had happened was not that it had happened but how that slight touch of his coarse hot tongue had made her feel. She was embarrassed to admit it to herself, but it had actually felt . . . dare she say the word? She mentally groaned and wiped a hand over her face. It had been good, too much so for her mental well being. Well, she supposed what that really meant was not that she was a sick pervert that enjoyed it but that it had been far too long since she'd had a man in her bed and the slightest touch was a reminder of that. The fact that an animal could awaken sexual feelings with what was only an innocent lick truly showed how far she'd fallen.

Folding her arms in front of her chest, Tonya looked down at her mysterious wolf. She'd had every intention of working outside in her greenhouse today, but now she had a

problem with that plan. She couldn't leave this wolf all alone in the house. What if he got it in his head to start ripping up the carpet? What if he could reach the furniture? She re-examined the chain and the furniture arrangement of the room. Maybe he couldn't do that, but he did have very sharp claws. If he decided to do some damage, she had to be there to keep it to a minimum. Of course, she had no idea how she would stop him since telling him that he was bad hadn't worked, but she thought she could probably think of something if the need arose.

She looked back at the center of her thoughts and something suddenly occurred to her. "Oh, I can't believe how thoughtless I am. You've been hurt and in this house for hours and you haven't had a thing to drink. Just give me a second to find a bowl or a dish that will hold a good amount of water. While I'm at it, I guess I should also work on rounding you up a bite to eat. That way you won't be tempted to try to eat something you *shouldn't*," she said meaningfully.

Before she could move into the kitchen to look for something that would hold water, the wolf she'd been staring at stood up on its hind legs. A strange and brilliant blue light swirled violently around him, like blue flames, blurring his form. There were loud sounds, as if bone was popping and breaking, as if something was snapping and crunching. Her heart beat at her ribcage like a trapped bird and for the second time that day she was frozen with fear when, in the next few seconds, a man stood where a wolf once had.

And the man who stood before Tonya was unlike any man she had ever seen before. It took great effort to keep her mouth from gaping wide open in shock as she looked him over from head to toe. He was the most handsome man she'd ever seen. He was a golden tan with black hair sprinkled with gray highlights that framed a square jaw, accentuating his straight and noble nose and firm kissable lips. He had to have been over six foot tall because she was around five foot seven and in order to see his face she'd had to tilt her head back. He was completely naked except for a piece of a sheet around his neck that hampered the view of his broad barrel chest but she was thankful that was the only part of him undisclosed as her suddenly heated gaze traveled down six pack abs, a narrow waist, and then further still to catch sight of his thick hard length. The fact that he was standing before her, naked as the day he was born, and as long and hard as a stallion ready for breeding forced her gaze back to his face quicker than lightning. When she looked him in the face again, her gaze met his, and it suddenly dawned on her that his eyes were the exact same shade of gold that her mysterious wolf's had been. Her gaze drifted down to his perfectly sculpted mouth. Her mouth had gone as dry as the Sahara, and she found it difficult to swallow.

With great reluctance, she managed to tear her gaze away from the sight of his sinfully delicious lips and looked him in the eyes once again. She must have hit her head harder than she thought when the wolf had pounced on her earlier. Nothing was making any sense. And the gorgeous man in front of her wasn't helping. If anything, he was making it worse because he was making her brain melt like butter.

It took her a minute to remember how to form words. "What ... is ... going. . . on?" she stammered a little drunkenly. Hearing her voice, it sounded very strange and far away, but she still recognized the fact that she sounded like an imbecile, but she was unable at the moment to piece together coherent thought, so how could she behave like anything else except for like an idiot? Right in front of her, the impossible had just taken

place. A wolf had transformed into a magnificent looking man, a man that she had the sudden overwhelming urge to fuck senseless.

His smile was blinding in its radiance as his golden gaze broke away from hers and traveled down until it rested on her breasts.

Tonya's nipples immediately tented her shirt in response.

The wolfish grin of his lips spread across his entire face at that sight before he sought her gaze once more.

"My name is Lucius," he told her before reaching up to pull off the belt that she had put on him.

"Lucius?" she mumbled dumbly, still in a state of shock.

He responded by letting the belt and the chain that was still attached to it fall unceremoniously to the carpet. There was a thick muted thud as they hit. The items went unnoticed, though. His attention was entirely focused on his mate as he took the few short steps that would bring him to stand a hairsbreadth from her, as he inhaled a deep fortifying breath, taking in her unforgettable scent.

Tonya swallowed convulsively when she saw the burning hunger in Lucius' golden gaze. It was the exact same look that he'd had when he'd been a wolf. "What the hell are you?" she asked in a hoarse whisper

"I am what your kind refer to as a werewolf. But I am more than that. I am also your mate. As for the water and food you mentioned before, I won't be needing any of that. What I would like, though, is the taste of you on my lips," Lucius said as he stepped closer to her until his bare chest brushed the tips of Tonya's breasts through the material of her shirt.

Her breasts responded immediately by beginning to throb and ache with need.

Tonya wasn't really sure why everything seemed to be starting to spin around her like a top. Perhaps it was due to the fact that she hadn't had anything to eat or maybe it was because the appearance of Lucius had fried all of her circuitry. Whatever the case, she had no idea what was happening when she suddenly fell against him and the world became nothing but a black void.

Chapter Four

Lucius quickly caught Tonya and pulled her into his embrace as her body went limp against him. Shifting her in his hold, he hefted her up, positioning her so that he carried her in his arms and she was flush against his chest. Taking her over to the only couch in the room, he placed her gently down on it. Laying down on the couch next to her, he pulled her up against his length. Trailing a curious digit along her smooth cheek, he couldn't help but shake his head. When he'd imagined shifting into his human form in front of her, he hadn't pictured her passing out. That had been completely unexpected. But, then, he hadn't really known what to expect. He'd been so consumed with her, with making her his, that he'd overlooked some finer details, like how she was going to react to what he really was.

Lucius waited for a few minutes for her to rouse up, but his impatience got the better of him. Moving closer, he raked his lips roughly across hers, the touch igniting a fire in his loins. "Tonya, mate of mine, awaken from this insufferable slumber."

As her eyelids fluttered open, she writhed against him. Taking a look around before focusing on his face again, her eyes were wary when she spoke. "I can't believe it. I just fainted," she said in dawning astonishment, speaking more to herself than to him. "That's never happened to me before, not in my entire life."

Lucius cupped her cheek in the palm of his hand, brushing it with the pad of his thumb. "I believe that the fault for that lies with me. Seeing me leave my wolf form and enter my human form was a bit of a shock."

Things were just barreling completely out of control. She didn't think she could handle any more surprises. "Well, it's not exactly like I see a man transform into a wolf every day. I'm sure it would do more than shock just about anyone," she said a little more testily than she'd intended, pulling her face away from the thumb that was caressing her cheek. Even though his touch felt fantastic, she'd just been overloaded with all the crazy she could handle for a while. Seeing him shift had been the breaking point.

"Don't be upset, mate."

"I'm trying not to be but you have to understand, laying here next to you is hard for me to comprehend when just a short while ago you were a wolf," she said and then paused before continuing. "I think you need to leave now," she said quietly.

"You want me to go?" he asked, trying hard to keep his voice even. He didn't want to give away the tumult of emotions she'd set off inside of him. He'd put too much on her too soon. He was going to have to leave her because if he wasn't careful, she wouldn't accept him as her mate at all. He didn't want to go, but he realized that this was something that he needed to do for her. He needed to give her space, give her time to process everything that had happened.

She nodded, looking down at her hands as she wrung them nervously, unable to look him in the eyes. She was worried if she did, he might see how confused and vulnerable she was at the moment. All it would take to sway her, to convince her that she was wrong in making him leave, was his touch. There was something almost electric

about it. It was like every time his skin came into contact with hers, a deeper connection was made. She didn't understand it. She didn't understand any of it. So she needed him to leave so she could think, even though, as crazy as it sounded, she desperately didn't want him to go.

"Alright. I will leave but only because you asked me to. But I won't go very far. Now that I've found you, I will never leave you. You are my mate, and as long as it takes, I will wait for your acceptance."

Tonya closed her eyes tightly shut. She felt him get up off the couch. She could hear him walking away. It took all of her willpower not to shout at him to stay, but she knew it was for the best. Having him so close addled her wits, and she needed all of them to try and straighten out what had happened.

When the door shut, she jumped all over. He was gone. She suddenly felt like crying. Why did she care so much about someone she didn't know at all? How could she feel so strongly about him?

She opened her eyes and looked at the door. The sun had started to set but there was still enough light to see outside the window and it wasn't hard to see the wolf through the glass, silhouetted by the fading light. He reared his head back and let out a haunting howl before he took off.

Was he gone forever? He'd told her he wouldn't leave, but how could she believe anything he said? How could she believe what had happened today had all really happened? She sighed and turned over and saw the belt, chain, and makeshift bandage she'd put on him lying on the floor. Well, she couldn't say with evidence like that that it had all been in her imagination.

* * * *

Tonya could almost have convinced herself that her loneliness had made her lose her mind except the wolf lingered. Actually, she could almost convince herself that she was crazy anyway and that everything had happened except for the part about the wolf turning into the most handsome man she'd ever set eyes on.

That part seemed almost like the stuff of fairytales, as if her mind had snapped and she'd somehow twisted the tale about the frog prince into a wolf prince.

Except she hadn't kissed him.

And she knew each time she met the wolf's gaze that he wasn't merely a wolf. She saw his hunger every time she looked up and saw him outside her window, and it wasn't the hunger of a wolf.

She finally decided, crazy or not, that she accepted what she'd seen and that it was real. The question was, could she accept him?

She wanted to, but she was afraid and she wasn't good at dealing with fear. Every time she reminded herself he hadn't hurt her, or even really tried to, when he was in wolf form, she would also remind herself that he *could* have, and that he might decide he wanted to.

Could she trust him?

Did she want to?

* * * *

Lucius knew he was risking his alpha's wrath by lingering near Tonya's house instead of patrolling his position as he was supposed to—not that he hadn't been patrolling. He had been, but his focus on was Tonya, not his duty to his alpha.

He couldn't bring himself to go far, though, or stay away long, not now, not when he needed her to realize that she was his mate, when he needed her to acknowledge it.

Impatience began to eat him as the days passed, though, that and a fear he hardly acknowledged—that she was human and might not feel the pull as he did. Could she ignore it when he couldn't?

He didn't know but that began to eat at him more and more—the suffocating fear that he had found his mate among the humans, in a woman who would not, or could not feel it as he did.

Despite his vow to give her the time she needed to come to terms with what he was and what he'd told her, he found himself at war with his beast. His beast wanted to claim her and *make* her accept.

* * * *

Tonya was so wrapped up in her inner struggle that she lost track of the time that had passed and yet she realized a lot of time had passed, for the days and nights were getting colder and colder. When she finally looked up one night and saw him at her window, staring in at her with sad puppy dog eyes, she knew she'd lost the battle. He was out in the cold and it was snowing. Crazy or not, she couldn't stand it anymore!

It had been hard coming to grips with what had happened, especially since it had all happened so fast. But she realized right then that she was no longer scared of him and she couldn't deny the feelings he'd stirred inside of her. He must feel strongly or else he wouldn't have stayed out in the cold waiting to talk to her every night. Surely he must?

Shaking her head at herself, wondering if she was going to regret it, she got up and went to let him in so that they could talk about what happened and how she felt, so that she could find out what he really felt for her.

She opened the door, a blast of frigid air stealing her breath. Before she could recover enough to speak, she found herself face to face with Lucius in his human form. Suddenly, the cold wasn't the only thing making it hard for her to catch her breath. She opened her mouth to speak but she never got the chance.

Lucius had been patiently waiting for Tonya to accept him as her mate, to open her door and her heart to him. When he saw her open the door for him, he was sure that that was exactly why she'd opened it. And he hadn't wanted to waste any time in pouncing on her.

Lucius took Tonya in his arms and brought her fully against his length, relishing the feel of her soft lush figure against his own. He'd been patient long enough. Now he wanted his woman, his mate, and nothing and no one was going to stand between them ever again.

Waltzing her backwards into the house, he shut the door and locked it before turning to claim Tonya's lips in a searing kiss. He felt her become rigid in his arms, but as he continued to rake his lips against hers, lathing her lips with the rough pad of his tongue, her defenses gradually began to melt, useless against his sweet invasion. He forced his way into the cavity of her mouth and used his tongue to explore its warm depths as he savored the first true taste of his life mate. When she began to kiss him in return, he

couldn't contain the growl of pleasure that grew inside of him, making his beast long to be set free. The touch of her soft hands along his skin as they traveled up his chest to grasp at his shoulders compelled the wolf within him to howl in triumph.

He pressed his lips harder against hers as he suckled her tongue. He ground the length and breadth of his steely cock along her hip, forcing a moan from her.

It was hard to find her way out of the sexual fog that he'd clouded her mind with, but, somehow, she managed it and pushed him away. "I'm mad at you!" she snapped as his head descended, his mouth intent on catching hers. "You nearly scared me to death that first day—chasing me into the house! *And* you took unfair advantage, I might add!"

"Well, I'm pretty fucking angry with you, if you want to talk about feelings," he mumbled as he nibbled at her mouth with his teeth, nipping and suckling at her lips with a voracious hunger. "But that doesn't change the fact that I want you, that I need you."

"I'm serious, I'm angry," Tonya murmured as he continued to weaken her resolve to stay mad. She tried to recall why she'd been mad.

"I am also serious," he mumbled in a mock serious tone against the nape of her neck, detouring from her lips to suck love bites all along her neck.

His assault on her flesh left her gasping for breath, with little or none of the oxygen making its way to her brain for necessary thought processes. Heat coiled around them as he ran one hand down the length of her spine to grab a hold of her ass, drawing her up against his erection with almost bruising force.

Having temporarily satisfied his desire for the taste and feel of her neck, he sought her lips yet again, slanting his mouth firmly against hers and delving his tongue deep inside to taste her, to impart a taste of himself.

The caress of his tongue against hers, the searing heat of his mouth, was mind numbingly intoxicating. She soon found herself frantically grasping at his shoulders, striving to writhe in sync with him, to match his cadence in order to draw their bodies closer together, to rub, to merge with the electric current that moved back and forth through them.

"We shouldn't be doing this. We shouldn't," she managed to whisper when he finally tore his lips away from hers to make his way down along her neck again and then up to nibble at the lobe of her ear.

"And just why is that?" he asked when he broke away for a second.

That was a very good question. To her great misfortune, she was no longer able to remember the answer.

She'd hardly had time for that fact to register, however, when he thrust her roughly against the front door he'd shut and locked only moments before. Wrapping her hair around one hand, he used it to tilt her head back, grating his hips against hers, effectively pinning her to the door. The pull of her hair caused her scalp to smart, but she was so taken aback that she didn't even try to resist him, acquiescing instead to his pull quickly enough to prohibit anything more than a slight tingling. Even if what he was doing had actually caused pain, she wasn't entirely certain she would've noticed it for more than a second seeing as how he followed the movement of her head and covered her mouth with his the moment her lips opened in bewilderment.

Lucius' claiming of her body was more akin to an assault than it was a caress. The intense demand of his mouth on hers appeared equal parts reprimand and heedless,

rapacious need that prevented any cognizance of the prospect that he might be administering pain, and yet as rough as his touch was, he didn't hurt her, at least there wasn't any pain that she was conscious of.

She *was* completely aware, however, of the wet warmth of his mouth, the wild, animalistic taste of Lucius that spread through her entire being with each caress of his tongue against hers that culminated in her body like the offspring of flame and lightning, making her blood percolate in her veins and causing all of her nerve endings to sizzle and rustle with energy and acute sensation. She could feel their reciprocal need give life to the surge of heat that rose between them, encompassing them in a haze of desire. She was acutely aware of the size and power of Lucius' hands that clutched her firmly against him, the magnitude of his shoulders, the tremendous rigidity of his chest and the breadth of his cock rubbing repeatedly against her sex.

She was fully aware of the fact that he was only trying to torment her with his cock since it wasn't where she wanted it, conscious of the longing to crawl up him and enfold his narrow waist tightly with her legs to have that piece of him where she really wanted it. She soon came to realize that she was sinking further and further into a drunken haze of yearning.

He broke away from her mouth, inhaled an abundance of much needed air, and then lunged for her neck, winding a hand underneath her shirt to cradle one breast in his palm.

She tingled all over with awareness at the graze of Lucius' rough palms and coarse fingertips along her skin in passing. Blood raced to her nipples, causing them to become taut and so sensitive that the first touch of his hand ignited a fresh surge of goose flesh and a subsequent shudder through her.

Lightly massaging the breast he'd seized, he nibbled a trail of kisses down the column of her throat until he came to the union of her neck and shoulder.

An audible gasp was ripped from her throat when she felt the pinch of his teeth as they sank down into her tender flesh. A harsh tremor undulated through her.

He soothed the pain away almost apologetically, lathing the area with his tongue before lifting his head to acquire her mouth again, pulling at her lips with an almost insatiable inclination before plunging between them with the thrust of his tongue to pillage and plunder her depths.

The hand that had been stroking her breast moved downward.

Tonya felt a pull at the waist of her pants and the tension was alleviated when Lucius separated the zipper with his hand, reaching in to cup her sex for a minute before probing further still to caress the damp seam of her sex. Her heart blasted into her ribcage, beating furiously with heady excitement as he separated the folds of her sex and caressed the warm, wet flesh near her core.

He issued a sound of satisfaction low in his chest as he savored her readiness for him. Extracting his hand after only a few seconds of tormenting her, he altered his position suddenly, shoving at her pants as he tore away from her mouth and descended to snare a swollen bud between his lips, tugging at it through the material of her shirt.

Anxious to have his lips on her naked skin, Tonya pulled her shirt up.

He let go of her just long enough to seize the hem of her shirt and drag it over her head.

This shirt wasn't like so many that she wore. It wasn't one of her favorites that didn't touch her anywhere. It was more fitted and consequently the snug material got stuck on her arms and bound them like shackles over and behind her head, which only served to annoy her. She tried not to analyze why the shirt was so snug. But she soon stopped fighting to get free of the garment when he captured the swollen nipple he'd been tantalizing through the material with the insanely fabulous pull of his mouth. In response, a wave of sensation wafted over her, hot, currents of electrical energy like a conflagration sought out her core, forcing the muscles of her sex to quiver with the savage need of his possession.

She was able to release her arms from their prison just as Lucius shifted to her other breast to christen it with the captivating caress of his tongue. She was forced to grab on to his shoulders for a few seconds to steady herself, but then she ran her hands across his broad shoulders and well-defined back to luxuriate in the feel of his smooth skin. Her lungs labored for breath and she felt fevered from the exploration of his mouth, intoxicated by it, and yet overwhelmed by the need for him to continue. The second his mouth broke away and trailed a hot line of kisses upwards again, however, she sought out his lips fervently with her own.

Her pants, that had just barely been adhering to her waist, fell to the floor, falling just enough to encase her lower legs. She struggled to liberate the lower part of her legs from imprisonment for a minute but completely forgot all about that fight a second later when he ground his hips against hers, pushing his turgid flesh with almost bruising force against her. She arched her hips in response to his thrusts, trembling inside for more, for the touch of him where she needed it the most.

Issuing a feral growl of restless yearning, he captured her ass and picked her up until their bodies connected better. For a second, she was still confined by her pants and then she was able to free one foot and enveloped him in her legs.

"Dammit!" he grumbled when he found the barricade of her panties. Cupping her sex with one hand through her panties, he finally got tired of the barrier and shoved through a leg opening to caress her pussy lips with fingers that trembled slightly.

Frustrated beyond belief herself, Tonya took one hand from about his neck to grab a hold of his cock as she attempted to force it through the opening that his hand had located.

Lucius hissed in pain as the elastic hem sawed at the sensitive flesh of his cock and quickly grabbed the offensive underwear and ripped open the seam at the crotch.

Tonya gasped when he impaled her with the turgid tip of his cock and heaved upward, hoisting her body and spearing her flesh at the same time.

With a snarl that sounded much more like wrath than passion, he slanted his mouth over hers before she had time to recover, pushing her up against the door behind her and lancing her with his spear until the combination of the weight of her body and his resolve had him buried deep inside of her.

The waves of delectation that coursed through her demolished all other thoughts. She folded her arms snugly around his neck and tried her best to hold on as he hammered into her body, caressing that particularly wonderful spot inside of her with such unerring exactitude that it sent her plummeting toward the summit within seconds and then over the peak. She muttered a low moan of rapture as the first spasm of release ripped through her

body, trembling with the force of it. "Lucius!"

He growled low in his throat in reply, setting a quicker gait when he felt her quivering with release until he, too, was ensnared in the throes of a climax. When it finally passed, he leaned against her weakly for several seconds, letting his head rest on her shoulder as he panted raggedly for breath. Collecting himself after a few minutes, he pulled out of her and placed her on her feet and looked down at her.

Seeing that her eyes were closed he said, "I know you had better be awake because making love to you one time hasn't nearly done enough to satisfy my hunger for you." Lucius arched his hips against hers to illustrate with his still semi-aroused cock how he would be more than willing to take her again very soon.

She moaned a little at the feel of his cock, putting her arms around him and pulling him close before forcing her now heavy eyelids to open. "If that's the case then I think you should allow me the time to eat. I need sustenance to maintain my energy."

With great reluctance, Lucius pulled away from her.

Tonya's gaze swept over his form. When she stopped her visual quest to stare hungrily at his impressive cock, it jerked.

"If you truly do want to eat then you had better not look at me like that," he warned, amusement threading his voice.

Tonya averted her gaze and then bent over to pick up her clothes that were strewn across the floor. "I'm going to go upstairs to freshen up. I'll be back in a little bit if you want to stick around and talk."

A wolfish grin spread across Lucius' face as his woman disappeared up the stairs. He had absolutely no intention of ever leaving.

Chapter Five

Tonya took a robe out of the closet in her bedroom before heading to the bathroom. After using the bathroom, she grabbed a wet wipe from a box on the sink countertop and cleaned herself with it. Before she exited the room, she took a second to examine herself in the mirror, which she was usually so loathe to do. She couldn't help but think that the person in the reflection that stared back at her had the appearance of being well loved. Her mouth was slightly pink and a little swollen from Lucius' fire brand kisses. Her cheeks were flushed a deep shade of pink, as well. Seeing her bedraggled hair, she attempted to straighten it a little with her fingers before giving up and reaching for her brush to get the deed done. She didn't want it to look as if she was primping, but she didn't want him to see her look sloppy either.

Before she made her way back down, she took another glance at herself. It was hard to fathom that she'd actually had sex with Lucius. Never in her life had she went to bed with a man that she didn't know and certainly never with a werewolf. But with him it was different, and she had a feeling that even if she'd tried, she wouldn't have been able to refuse him. There was no doubt whatsoever that he was beyond extremely attractive to her, but there was more to it than simply attraction. As strange as it sounded, even to admit it to herself, being with him felt . . . right, like there was something missing from her life, something that left an immense void in her, and he filled it. Was it possible that she could be what he kept calling her, his mate? She'd never really believed in anything like that before. Humans didn't mate for life. But, then again, he wasn't entirely human.

Tonya made her way back down the stairs. She found Lucius standing near her couch just as she'd left him, in all his naked glory. With a will all their own, her eyes located his thick cock, which, amazingly enough, was still semi-erect. Dragging her gaze away with an effort, she came to stand next to him. "I'm going to scavenge for food. While I'm doing that, if you're interested, my bathroom upstairs has a shower in it," she told him.

"I could use a shower," he admitted.

As Lucius walked away, headed for the shower, Tonya couldn't help but notice the rigid curves of his ass as they flexed when he walked, feeling suddenly more famished than she'd felt before, but not for food, which was really a first for her. How was it possible that he didn't appear to have an ounce of fat anywhere on his body?

Remembering how she had touched and tasted his sculpted body ignited a burgeoning need in her pussy to have his cock buried deep in it again. And how could she *not* feel that way when the man's body practically bulged with muscle and all he could talk about was wanting her? Mentally shaking herself, she tried to tell herself that she needed to keep her mind out of the gutter, at least for a few minutes, as she went into the kitchen to quickly make herself a bite to eat. To keep up with Lucius, she was going to require a lot more energy and the fuel to make it.

By the time Lucius finally made it back, Tonya had managed to microwave some odds and ends she'd located in her fridge. As he came into the kitchen, she couldn't help but notice that he was entirely at ease with his nudity. But then, she supposed, most men, whether they looked good or not, were quite alright with running around naked. It was always women, like her, who didn't really like it. Standing at the counter, she took a few bites of her food as Lucius stood in front of her.

"How was it that you came to be in the woods by my house, Lucius?" Tonya asked between mouthfuls.

Lucius' expression was grave. "I fought a gathering of rogue wolves. I was able to defeat all of them save one, their leader.

"Okay," she said, letting that information process for a second. "That's why you were in your wolf form when I first saw you?"

"I favor fighting my battles with my teeth and claws as opposed to my fists. While in my wolf form I was severely wounded, and when it came time for me to fight their leader, he managed to weaken me further still, so much so that I didn't have enough energy to shift into my human form until a few hours after I'd met you."

Having finished eating, Tonya turned around and took the dish she'd been using to the dishwasher. When she turned around it was to discover that Lucius had come up close behind her.

Her pussy clenched spasmodically as he pierced her with his hungry golden gaze. Never in her life had another man looked at her the way he did. It made her feel as if he was thinking about devouring her.

With one hand Lucius untied her robe's belt, allowing it to fall open.

She ought to have felt so unattractive in contrast to him as to feel the need to cover up her own faults, but the only thing she saw in his eyes when he looked at her was appreciation. It came to her as a bit of a surprise when she realized that she'd never seen him look at her with anything else in his eyes. It defied all sense and logic, but he actually wanted what he saw.

He grabbed the back of her head with one hand, slowly easing closer, as if he was afraid he'd startle her and she'd bolt.

Tilting her face to allow him better access, she thought she heard him swallow. He came so close that she felt the warmth that radiated from him, heard his ragged breath, felt his hot breath against her skin. Inhaling his essence, the thrill of the moment threaded its way through her veins before she even felt the whisper touch of his mouth against hers.

Tasting her almost tentatively, he plucked at her mouth with his lips.

Thoughts began to flood her mind, thoughts of Lucius as a man, thoughts of Lucius as a wolf. Without realizing it, she tensed up, but the second she felt him hesitate, felt him begin to retreat, she realized that she had accepted him for who he was, not what he was. She needed him and followed his withdrawal like a plant seeking the nurturing warmth of the sun, exploring his mouth just as he had hers. His lips were firm, just like the rest of him, hard and uncompromising. He tasted like heaven.

Pulling away, he scanned her eyes when she looked back at him, seeking evidence that she truly accepted his touch. He found it. "Tonya," he whispered hoarsely, lunging for her again, forcing her to the floor on her back, claiming her mouth in a hungry onslaught that sent a wave of sensation plummeting through her, igniting heat, initially in

winding tendrils that worked their way through her nerve endings as they picked up speed inside of her, burgeoning rapidly. She was enveloped in a sexual haze that felt as if it carried her outside of herself, and yet, more than ever before, she was conscious of her body, keenly aware of it as a receptacle overflowing with the most wonderful sensations conceivable.

She felt his heat as it radiated from him, felt the luxurious pressure of his weight, felt the solidity of his form, felt the uncompromising strength of his hard muscles. Her hands and mouth were the only things unhindered, at liberty to touch anything, and they did touch everything, from the hot essence of him as he rediscovered her mouth with ardent thrusts of his tongue, to the silky feel of his hair between her fingers, to the searing heat of the skin on his back and shoulders.

He severed their connection suddenly by pulling away before grabbing her robe and hastily tugging it off in his impatience.

His heated gaze swept over her with such thoroughness that it was almost like it took in everything all at once, but she wouldn't have the time to let any doubts that had previously plagued her seep into her mind.

Settling one hand in the middle of her back, he drew her to him and matched the length of their bodies from their chests to their hips.

Feeling erupted through her like an explosion at ground zero as all the nerve endings in her body felt as if they instantly responded to his touch, the combination proving to be more than her now feeble brain could handle all at once.

She slipped under the tidal wave of sensation, lost her connection with everything, even her own body. A savage ecstasy assailed her when he touched her, from his mastery of her senses, competing with the sexual delectation of skin against skin, completely independent of that rapturous deluge of her senses and yet, in itself, all at once entwined and inseparable.

She didn't try to examine it. She couldn't. All logic and reason had deserted her. She was a prisoner to her instincts, and she luxuriated in the delight to her senses as well as the knowledge that she had lost control. The slightly rough feeling of the coarse hair that was scattered liberally on his wide chest and flowed in a narrow path to his groin stimulated her flesh as it tormented her hot skin with every graze of his body. The pebbled hardness of his nipples as they rubbed up and down and all around, teased the softer tissue of her breasts. His cock, having swollen until it had nearly the rigidity of steel, felt almost as if it pulsed with a life all its own as he ground his hips against hers in a impatient cadence that created an echo in her core, summoned it, invoking heat, making her wet for him with urgent desire.

She vaguely became conscious of the fact that she moaned his name with each catch of her breath, repeating it ceaselessly like an incantation that would give her something she wanted with desperation, fulfillment, and, more than that, a sense of completeness that release by itself couldn't provide her with.

He rained down kisses on her, honoring her lips with the graciousness of his presence, giving her the taste of him that she hungered for the second he capitulated and looked for appeasement elsewhere. Next, he skimmed the length of her throat with his hot lips, his moist tongue, and the sharp tips of his teeth. Then he plundered lower to disburse what little rationality she had left by nursing each nipple in turn, ceaselessly, and yet, not

really long enough. At last, he took a morsel of flesh along the column of her throat into his mouth and bit down on it.

The pain was fleeting. Unbelievably, it set off a small climax that shook through her in gentle tremors that only served to increase her want for more. But through the pain and pleasure, concern rose. "Am I a werewolf now?" she asked, her voice little more than a whisper.

He raised his head to search her eyes before dipping down to alleviate some of the sting from the bite before nuzzling his face in the crook of her neck. "No, my mate," he murmured in a raspy voice before showering the tender skin with whisper soft kisses that forced her heart to jump in her chest. "No," he said soothingly, the word sounding almost regretful as he nibbled on her ear lobe. "I wouldn't want this for you."

She opened her mouth to ask him another question, but, before she got the chance to ask him, he stopped her with a kiss, using his hands to position her for his claiming while distracting her with the cadence of his tongue along hers. At his insistence, she eagerly opened herself up to him, bending her legs until she had them where she could plant her feet firmly on the carpet to counter his thrust. He severed the kiss, tightly wrapping his arms about her shoulders as he plunged his engorged length deep inside of her, initially moving along her channel in what was almost a languid caress.

His touch made her throat constrict with a flood of emotions she was unable to recognize. But in the next instant he forced the feelings from her with the arousal of sexual heat that provided absolutely no room for doubts or deliberation. The minor climax she'd just had was only a preamble, a feeble shadow of the conflagration he stoked within her core. Heat saturated her being, making her feverish with the burgeoning need. Her mouth was completely dry from the panting breaths she managed to get between the pleasurable groans he ripped from the far reaches of her soul. She didn't want it to stop, wanted it to continue until the end of time. She fought the rising tide every step of the way until, at last, it held her in its clutches and ripped all control from her. Her orgasm could not be contained as it fractured her, rending her into a million pieces. The rapturous tremors that began along the walls of her sex sent tidal waves of ecstasy out in all directions. She held tight to him, riding it until it peaked and began to melt away even as he was ensnared in the throes of his own climax, shuddering against her with the strength of it.

"I don't believe I could ever get my fill of you, woman."

"If you keep this up, I might just perish, but I guess it wouldn't be the worst way to go," she said a little breathlessly as she panted for air.

Lucius caught Tonya's chin in his hand, forcing her to look him dead in the eyes. "The mating has only just begun," he warned before picking her up off the floor and making his way over to the stairs. "But, I will allow you to rest for a time. It would shame me if you fell asleep when next I claim your body again."

"How gracious of you." But, despite what he'd said, she had the distinct feeling that he could touch her while she was in the middle of a dead sleep and she'd be awake within seconds and ready just as fast no matter how tired she'd been before she'd fallen asleep.

Walking into the bedroom, he set her on the bed and then lay down beside her, pulling her close so that her head rested on his chest.

Tonya felt at ease, satisfied with just being in his strong embrace as she stroked the hard planes of his chest with her fingers. “You continue to say that I’m your mate. What makes you think that I am?”

“I don’t think it. I know it.”

Tonya picked her head up off of his chest and leaned back against her pillows so that she could see his face. “How do you know for sure? You know nothing about me. We’re practically strangers.” She blushed after she said that. Well, she’d never had sex with a stranger before. And she’d definitely never had sex this good in her entire life. Maybe she should let him convince her that they were mated, as he called it. If it was true for them like it was in the rest of the animal kingdom, it might explain the powerful attraction she’d had ever since she’d met him.

“I didn’t need to know you to know that you were fated to be mine. As soon as I caught your scent, I knew that you were mine.”

“Oh, that’s all,” she said a little more sarcastically than she’d intended. But she couldn’t help feeling a little hurt. He was more to her than just his smell. And she’d kinda hoped that she was more than that to him, as well. “All that mattered to you was that my scent was right?”

Lucius laughed. The sound was dark and forbidding with a faint hint of sarcasm. “It sounds to me like you’re questioning my conviction.”

“I have to concede that there’s nothing wrong with your . . . ah . . . the . . .,” she said, beginning to mumble weakly, her voice trailing off as she looked down at his body before reassessing what she’d been about to say, “the sex, but I’ve never really had a lot of luck as far as relationships go.”

Lucius released a low feral growl at the mention of other relationships. “You’re my woman now. Even if another had tried to stand in my way, it would not have stopped me from claiming you and marking you as my mate,” he said possessively.

Tonya couldn’t help but think that Lucius really would’ve done exactly what he said. He’d given her no reason not to believe him. Snuggling as close to him as she could, she closed her eyes. Was it wrong for her to want to be with him? Was it wrong for her to encourage him when she had no idea if a human and a werewolf could make it work? At the moment, she really didn’t want to dwell on the what ifs. For now, she was content to sweep everything under the rug.

She allowed the lethargy that had been weighing her down since her earlier climax take her beyond awareness, luxuriating fleetingly in the appreciative caress of Lucius’ hands before she submitted entirely.

Chapter Six

Waking up the next day to discover her body aching in places that hadn't hurt in a very long time, Tonya reached across the bed only to discover that the space next to her had been vacated.

With a furrow on her brow, she sat up in bed and searched the room. She was completely alone. Did that mean that Lucius had left? Just thinking that he might have already gone had her scrambling out of bed to unearth another robe out of her closet and haphazardly pull it on. She didn't want to stop and analyze how anxious not finding him in her bed made her feel as she raced from her room and lit down the stairs.

She wasn't ready for Lucius to leave. She didn't know if she ever would be. She felt crazy for admitting it to herself, and she didn't know when it had actually happened, but, at some point, she'd allowed him to convince her that she was his mate, that she was the other half of him. For someone who was pessimistic enough to think that they would never find love at all, it was hard to fathom how she'd fallen head over heels for a man she may or may not be able to keep.

As soon as she was downstairs, Tonya felt her heart sink when she didn't find Lucius anywhere in sight. "Lucius?" she whispered, her voice cracking when she felt the sting of tears at the back of her eyes. She despised how desperate her voice sounded, but she couldn't help it. "Lucius, are you still here?" she called, louder than before.

The door to her back porch popped open, and Lucius tore into the house like a thunderbolt. Sensing the distress in her voice, he quickly scanned the room for any signs of danger. "What's wrong? Is everything all right?" he asked, walking over to her and taking her chin in his hand as he intently searched her face for answers.

With a strength she didn't know she possessed, she managed to stop herself from throwing herself on him and instead inhaled a deep calming breath. "Everything's fine. When I got up and saw that you were gone . . . I just thought that you had taken off without telling me goodbye, that's all."

Lucius smiled as he shook his head, relief tantamount as he leaned down to butt the top of her head with his. "You don't have to worry about that. I will never leave you, Tonya," he said as he raked his lips across hers before moving away to stand up straight. "I was merely letting you rest. Since our kind don't require as much sleep, I didn't want to disturb your slumber with . . .," he paused, his voice trailing off as he hungrily swept her figure.

She tried not to smile, but it was really hard when all she really felt like doing was beaming. Oh, she had a very good idea what he meant by disturbing her rest. She thought it best not to tell him that she wouldn't have minded that at all. There was no sense in having him know how eager she was for his attentions. It was then that she noticed that Lucius was now wearing jeans and a shirt. "Where did these clothes come from?"

"I hope you don't mind. I thought it would make you feel more comfortable if I didn't walk around undressed. I found them in a box in the side building."

It must have been a box of clothes that belonged to her gay college buddy, Todd, that he'd left at her old house when he'd stayed with her for a few weeks some years back. Looking up and down Lucius' body, she couldn't help but feel jealous of the way the snug denim clung to his body like a lover's embrace. The shirt he'd put on did little to conceal the massive muscles of his torso and arms.

Putting his hands on her waist, he gave her a searing look in return before pulling her to him and pressing his now hard cock against her. He bent close to her ear, his voice like a growl when he next spoke. "While you lay sleeping in the bed next to me, I thought about everything I could do with that delicious body of yours as soon as you were awake."

His words made her tingle all over. But, at the same time, she couldn't stop the nagging doubts that assailed her. Despite what he said to the contrary now about being mated to her, he would leave just like every other man in her life had. And how was she going to cope with that when it happened? How was she going to gather the strength to let him go? She didn't want to be anywhere but in his arms. But how could she even begin to hope that a relationship between them could even work if he did choose to stay with her? They came from two completely different worlds. He was a werewolf. She was a human. Everything was stacked against them.

Having sensed the change in her mood, he stopped smiling and pulled her roughly against his length. Stroking her hair as she buried her face against his chest, he rested his head on her shoulder before folding her in his arms and holding her close.

"I sense a change in you, Tonya. Why is it that you suddenly seem sad?"

"Oh, it's nothing."

The pointed squeeze he gave her told her that he didn't believe her.

"Really. It's nothing. You've just ruined me for anyone else, that's all."

A loud feral growl tore out of his throat as he stood her away from him and took her face in the palms of his hands. "Understand this, Tonya, and understand it well. There will never be another for you. There is only me now, your mate, the one who has claimed you."

Tonya found it hard to swallow past the knot of emotion that was suddenly constricting her throat as she heard Lucius speak, damning herself for her next words. "But that still doesn't change the fact that I'm human," she said dejectedly.

Cupping the back of Tonya's head, Lucius descended on her. Kissing her leisurely, he nibbled and suckled her lips, forcing a moan of growing hunger from her before pulling back to look at her once more so that when he spoke he could look her in the eyes and she could know the truth of his words. "Fate may have brought you to me, Tonya, but I will keep us together."

Gliding his hand down her neck, he moved it over the slope of one breast to torment the peak that greeted him by circling it with his whisper soft caress.

Instantly heat rose to life inside of her, electricity that whirled agreeably through her.

He looked into her eyes. "If you had an inkling of what you do to me . . .," he warned.

The look in his eyes made her throat tight. "Like what?" she asked a little breathlessly, desperately needing for him to tell her more.

Grabbing her hand, he took it to the front of his jeans, wrapping it around his swollen cock, using her hand to stroke him for several moments.

“*This* is what I do to you?” she asked in feigned innocence, her mouth forming an *o* as she batted her lashes coquettishly.

His expression didn’t waver as he continued to look at her, all seriousness. “Yes, this is what you do to me . . . with your face, your scent, your voice.” He descended on her gradually, capturing her bottom lip between both of his and suckling it softly. Releasing the delicate flesh, he murmured, “This has never happened to me before.” Nipping at her lips, he thought to himself, *and it never would again*.

He was almost teasing as he toyed with her mouth, rotating between grazing his mouth along hers and then pulling at her lips. After a minute, he raised his head a little to look at her.

Sensing his eyes on her, with an effort she opened hers and returned his perusal.

Undoing the top of his jeans, he pulled down the zipper and then carried her hand to his waiting cock.

The coarse hair around his cock was a sharp contrast to the velvety flesh of his shaft, and it excited her. Wrapping her fingers about his hot swollen member, she explored it from top to bottom.

His expression tightened as his eyes slid shut.

Intrigued, she watched as his face contorted with pleasure as she stroked him and then cupped his balls experimentally.

His breath caught in his throat. “Damn it all, woman, don’t tease me,” he warned.

The husky timbre of his voice served to increase the arousal burgeoning to life inside of her, eliciting a wave of goose bumps to heighten her awareness of every spot where their flesh connected.

Placing a knuckle beneath her chin, he forced it up and slanted his lips across hers. His kiss was full of fiery need. Opening his mouth over hers, he drove his tongue beyond the delicate barrier of her lips, taking full possession of the hot cavern of her mouth in one fell swoop.

As he rubbed his tongue along hers, his taste intoxicated her, at the same time igniting an immediate high and debilitating all the muscles in her entire being. Frantic to taste more of him, she suckled his tongue rapaciously, forcing a tremor to course through his entire frame that excited her even more.

He pulled her down onto the floor, never breaking the kiss as he placed her beneath him. Grabbing one thigh and moving it out of his way, he positioned himself over her, settling his narrow hips between her thighs.

The feel of his rough jeans along the sensitive lips of her pussy as he rotated his hips against her only served to add an additional arousing texture to the onslaught of feelings that were battering her senses—from the steely, velvety length of his cock, to the tease of its surrounding hair, to the weight of his naked stomach and chest atop hers.

Exploring the defined ridges of his back with her hands as he continued to kiss her, she enjoyed how smooth the skin that covered his rigid muscles was. The press of his body against hers felt good, felt right on so many levels, but she didn’t want to explore the feeling further. She didn’t want to think about anything but the way he made her feel and the solace and secret thrills she experienced from his proximity. His impatience to touch

her made her feel desired, wanted like she'd never been before, needed even. His large and powerful frame had her feeling all at once womanly and alluring and protected.

Needing every centimeter of connection she could achieve, she wrapped one leg about his narrow waist, rubbing the bottom of her foot along the backs of his long legs through the jeans he was still wearing, silently wishing that he'd already discarded them.

She couldn't be sure if it was the deftness of his touch and skillful kisses or if it was something more integral, like a chemical connection, but there was only one doubt that flitted through her mind and that was whether or not she could stand to wait any longer for the deeper connection that her body yearned for with Lucius. Spreading her thighs open wider as the thought occurred to her, she rubbed her sex along his in encouragement.

He didn't take the bait, severing the connection of their lips instead to explore her body further.

The pull of his lips on a nipple stole the breath from her body, forcing the fever inside of her to become hotter and hotter until at last she was thrashing beneath him restlessly, gasping for breath, too light-headed and frantic to think at all let alone clearly. When he leaned on one elbow to shove his jeans off his hips, it sent anticipation hammering through her. Her hands, eager to assist him, ran down the length of his back to grab a hold of his perfectly rounded ass and squeeze to spur him on.

He guided the tip of his thick cock past the seam of her pussy.

Her attention suddenly focused on the sensation of his shaft piercing her flesh, stretching the walls of her sex in a manner that made her ache pleasantly for more. She arched her hips, eager to accept him, eager for all of him as she braced her feet on the floor to push against his impaling flesh until he'd plunged deep within her core.

He withdrew and then immersed himself in the depths of her pussy again, impaling his cock to the hilt.

She felt as if her heart had lodged itself in her throat and was choking her as she ran her fingers through his hair. "Lucius—it feels so good," she panted.

A quake hammered through him. He pushed himself up so that he could look at her as he sawed his cock shallowly in and out of her pussy, as he tormented her with each caress that barely brushed her g-spot.

Never breaking eye contact, he arched his hips, sinking his cock deeper, at a leisurely pace, until he ground his stomach against hers, until he was pressed up against her womb. Lowering himself until the majority of his weight rested on his elbows, he slipped his arms under her shoulders. "It's so much more than that," he said, his voice husky with need. Descending to graze her lips again, he withdrew from her channel slowly and then set a cadence that he mirrored with the thrust of his tongue.

A conflagration tore through her. Clinging to him tightly, she opened herself to better receive him, to better indulge in the pleasure of his possession that had her aching for fulfillment. And then, in the next moment, she couldn't hold still. The feelings in her body were hastening toward fruition and demanding that she move with him.

Panting for breath when he severed the kiss and buried his face against her shoulder, she countered his frantic thrusts with the same frenzy until, suddenly, a tension arrested her body, forcing her to arch against him, ripping a startled cry from her as hard contractions sent her over the precipice, rending her into a million pieces. Rocking against

him wildly, she was too out of it to keep up any kind of rhythm.

Lifting his head, he gritted his teeth, and then issued a savage growl of pleasure as he came with her to bathe her womb in a heated tide as he surrendered his seed. When he was done, he moved behind her on the carpet to spoon her back, holding her tightly against him.

Tonya closed her eyes. She been unable to get much sleep since she'd let Lucius back into her home. She hadn't slept on the floor but once since she'd been an adult, years ago when she'd been attending college, and she'd had the worst time getting to sleep, but she soon discovered that it was all too easy to relax against Lucius and fall asleep right where she was.

Chapter Seven

Lucius was completely content for his mate to sleep while he admired how perfectly she fit in his embrace, while he thought about how close they were becoming. It was hard for him to imagine how he'd made it for so long without her. There was no appeal for him in life returning to the way it had been before he'd met her. And that meant that he would have to devise a way to keep her and maintain his guardian duties as well.

Tonya woke up in Lucius' arms. She positioned herself so that she was facing him. Noticing he seemed to be deep in thought and that his brow was furrowed, she tried to smooth it with her fingers. "What's got you glowering like that?" she asked. She stopped touching him after a second when it occurred to her what it might be, looking down at her hands. "You're going back to where you came from, aren't you?" she asked in a hushed whisper, her stomach twisting in knots as she spoke the words.

"I have to, but it will only be for a little while, and then I'll come back to you."

"If you don't, I'll have to find you and beat your ass," she threatened weakly, hoping against hope that she didn't sound like a psychotic girlfriend.

"Promises, promises," Lucius teased.

Sucking at her earlobe, he navigated the shell of her ear with his hot tongue. Acute awareness washed over her in the form of stippling skin. She trembled from the onslaught of keen sensation as he ran his palms over her goose flesh. Her nipples became taut, digging into him as he cradled a breast in one hand before he massaged it and then rubbed the pad of his thumb over the swollen bud, issuing electric currents through her nerve endings and to her core. In response, the walls of her sex contracted spasmodically, calling hot blood to inundate her pussy.

"Mine," he mumbled distractedly as he swathed the closest nipple with the end of his tongue. "My mate, my woman."

Even though it was nothing short of Neanderthal talk, it still had the power to rock her to her core as he continued to thoroughly examine the delicate tissue he held. At long last, he used his mouth to smother the peak of her breast, suckling it with fervor before nuzzling his way across the valley of her breasts to the other turgid tip, making her come off the floor as she arched her back to push her breast further into his mouth. She grasped at him, intertwining her fingers in his soft hair before running her hands over the well-defined ridges of his shoulders and arms.

"I want to devour you," he admitted in a husky voice.

Covering her lips with his, he snaked an arm down between their bodies to cup her pussy, caressing the seam before probing the cleft to find her clit.

Sucking in a breath sharply as he rubbed the swollen bud in soft circles, she inhaled his invigorating scent. She felt herself sinking further and further into the morass of feelings as they pulled her into a realm where carnal pleasure reigned supreme.

Shoving her legs apart, he ground his swollen cock against her pussy lips.

"Lucius," she panted, frantic now with need.

Lucius heard the desperation in her voice and claimed her mouth in a deep

penetrating kiss.

She moaned pitifully when he moved away slightly so that he could rake his cock along her cleft. She groaned with pleasure as he sank deep inside her.

Her tight pussy took his shaft slowly, much too slowly for his liking. Sweat broke out all over his body as he strove to push deeper, shallowly sawing in and out a couple times to ease his passage. His heart beat so hard and fast in his chest it made him dizzy. “Know that you are my woman, Tonya.”

His words made her pussy clamp tightly around his shaft even as it trembled. Drawing in a ragged breath, his face contorted as he concentrated on burying himself deeper, pulling out a little before plowing into her depths again.

Her entire body grew tense as he, at long last, sank his cock to the hilt.

He became rigid, as well, gasping for breath as he fought the powerful urge to drive into her relentlessly until he climaxed. Suddenly, the walls of her sex clamped around him with such strength that they started pushing his cock out of her and, with that, snapping the last threads of his control.

Moving a hand under her to tilt her hips up, he started to plunge deeply into her, short thrusts that hammered her g-spot.

She moaned low in her throat and threw her head back, her whole body tensing up.

Gritting his teeth, he fought to maintain the cadence necessary to push her over the edge.

Uttering a sharp cry, she started to quake all over.

The trembling tremors of her pussy all around him pushed him beyond the ability to see anything but his goal. His pace accelerated long with the depth of his penetration until he was jarring her with each thrust. He began to surrender his seed, shuddering and panting between spasms.

Debilitating relief swept through his entire being when he finally stopped convulsing. Still gasping for breath, he let his head fall forward to hang weakly, only managing to hold the upper half of body off of her by locking his elbows now that every fiber in his being had turned to putty.

He was reluctant to move and wasn't entirely certain he would be able to. After a few moments, he bent one elbow, unbalancing his body enough to fall beside her before drifting toward peaceful slumber.

* * * *

It was getting dark outside. A fire roared in the hearth as Tonya and Lucius snuggled on the couch in front of it to ward off the cold.

Tonya had never liked the cold, had forever complained about it, but, with Lucius by her side to keep her warm, it wasn't bad at all.

When her belly complained loudly for sustenance, Tonya sat up and got off the couch. She hadn't had a lot of food before Lucius had arrived, and, together, they'd basically decimated her limited supplies. “I'm going to go get something to eat before it gets any later,” she informed him.

“Do you want me to come with you?” Lucius asked, walking with her to the door.

“No, that's okay. I won't be gone long. There's a minute market right down the road. I'm just going to pick up a few things.” It wasn't that she didn't want to be seen with him, far from it, she'd have been proud for anyone to see them together, she was just

worried about what might happen and there was no sense in running a risk if they didn't have to.

Shopping at the minute market hadn't taken but a few minutes and Tonya was back on the road headed home, basking in thoughts of warming up with Lucius. She'd almost made it to her driveway when a figure appeared suddenly in the middle of the road directly in front of her car. Swerving to miss the person, the icy road had her car plowing into the ditch. Getting out to see if the other person was alright, she found that they were still standing in the road. In the weak illumination of her head lights, she wasn't able to distinguish many features, but eyes that shown a bright red were enough to make her start walking slowly backwards, that and the fact that whoever it was was moving towards her. It must be a rogue wolf like the ones Lucius had told her attacked him. The red eyes were a blatant giveaway that it wasn't human.

"What are you doing?" she asked in a tremulous voice, even though she had a feeling she didn't want to know the answer.

"His scent is all over you," he sneered derisively. "It's obvious he's marked you as his mate," he spat in an almost accusing voice. "My orders were to kill him, but I have a feeling that losing you would do so much more."

When the man began to sprint towards her, Tonya screamed, "Lucius help me!" She turned to run as fast as she could in the opposite direction of her attacker.

Catching up with her easily, the rogue grabbed her by a shoulder and turned her around to face him, pulling a fist back to punch her directly in the face.

Tonya tried to block the blow of his fist with her arm, but it did little to protect her.

Lucius, having heard Tonya's scream, raced out of the house to her rescue, his heart thundering in his ears, afraid of what might happen if he didn't reach her quick enough.

Just before Lucius reached Tonya and the rogue, the rogue lunged for Tonya's throat with his teeth, clamping down on it hard before ripping it out.

Trying to scream, Tonya only managed a bloody garble before she wilted onto the snow at her feet, blood instantly pooling around her. With her blood pumping steadily into the snow, she watched as Lucius shifted into his wolf form to battle the rogue.

With a menacing growl, Lucius leapt onto the other man. It only took a few seconds before the other man fell to the ground on the side of the road, his neck torn out.

Tonya tried in vain to beat back the darkness that had started to obstruct her vision, but she was fighting a losing battle.

Lucius quickly transformed into his human state again before scooping up Tonya and racing back to her house. Placing her on the floor of the kitchen, he used some towels that he found on the counter to try to stop the blood flow.

Tonya knew that it was too late, that there was nothing that could be done. She didn't want him to suffer over it though. "No, Lucius," she struggled to whisper as she held a hand to her throat and tried to push him away with the other.

"You can't give up. I won't let you."

Her body had become so numb that she no longer felt pain anymore, and she knew instinctively that she must be slipping away, that she had very little time left. As the light was fading from her eyes, she whispered, "I love you, Lucius."

Lucius howled his pain, his torment, his frustration as he held Tonya's limp body against him. Never in all his years had he once cried, but now, he was unable to stop. Burying his face against her neck, he cradled her in his embrace.

"She can't be gone!" he cried out in anguish.

But through his sorrow, an idea suddenly came to him. If he changed her But how could he? How could he make her a monster? And, if he did, if he was successful, would she ever forgive him? Or would she hate him forever for what he'd done. He didn't know. The only thing he knew for certain was that he couldn't go on living without her and that he had to do something, the only thing he could do.

Moving the hair away from her neck, he exposed his mark. Throwing his head back, he howled his torment into the night before descending on her neck with razor sharp teeth, drawing blood as he transferred some of his own essence.

When it was all over, he looked down at Tonya, searching her face for a sign, anything. She lay immobile for so long that he thought for sure that he'd tried too little, too late.

Just when he thought that all was lost, she gasped and opened her eyes. Pulling away the towel he'd used to stop the flow of blood, he saw that the wound on her neck was healing. Putting a hand on her chest, he felt her heart beat beneath it.

"Lucius? Am I alive?" Tonya asked doubtfully, her voice weak and raspy.

"Yes, my love, you are."

Taking Tonya into his arms, Lucius claimed her lips in a kiss before taking her across the room and up the stairs to her bedroom.

He would be eternally grateful that Tonya had made it because without her he would've been unable to go on living.

Now that she was back in his arms, he had every intention of letting her know what she meant to him, even if it took him the rest of his life.

THE END